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The Issues of Nevada Public Schools

In recent years, the problems of the American education system have risen to the forefront of the public eye, becoming headlines of news articles and a topic plastered over social media. One problem with analyzing the public school systems of America is the fact that each state has their own different standards, funding, and programs. Ranked low on the list of education in the states is Nevada, sitting at rank 49 of 50 for the past years (Kazmierski). To be able to tackle the education issues in the state, the first step is to understand the underlying problems that are causing such a gap in education to the other states. By discovering the problems within Nevadas programs, these solutions can not only be applied to the state of Nevada but also toward transforming the education of other low ranking states.

One of the biggest contributions to the insufficient education children of Nevada receive is simply the lack of teachers. The number of graduates going into the education field has been continuously dropping for years starting in the 70's, but a massive dip in this amount was found during the pandemic. This effect caused by the pandemic is known as the "pipeline problem" as described by many educators. In short, the "pipeline problem" is the struggle of attracting new people into the field of education (Schaeffer). There is a significant lack of incentives for people to even want to have careers in education, the biggest one that many are probably aware of: funding. In Nevada, the average starting salary for a teacher is only about $41,000 a year which is about 25% less than the estimated starting salary for the 2020 college graduates (Kazmierski). Besides the issues regarding pay, many teachers spend much of their own time having to prepare for the upcoming school year with about 10 weeks of their "break" being devoted to continuing training and creating a curriculum. All of these problems of low wages and

stress have ended up with major drawbacks from college students to even consider entering the field.

Continuing with this idea of lack of teachers brings up the concept of “student to teacher ratio”. As can be assessed by the name, student to teacher ratio is the measurement of the number of students enrolled into a school compared to the full-time equivalent teachers employed (“What Is the Student-Teacher Ratio and Why Is It Important?”). As described by Lydian Academy, analyzing this ratio is a great tool to be able to understand the workload of teachers and how much individual attention students will be receiving in the classroom. Many benefits have been observed in classrooms that have a low student to teacher ratio, including greater academic achievement and students who are facing socio-economic disadvantages performing better. With smaller classrooms, each student will be able to receive a more individualized education as teachers would not have to spread themselves thin in order to help every single student. The average classroom has been with high student to teacher ratios as a result of the amount of vacant teaching jobs. Solely in Nevada, there are an estimated 3,000 vacant teaching jobs (Kazmierski).

Supporting current teachers and fixing the lacking parts of the education field is a beneficial way to remove the issues plaguing the current education systems. Through fixing the problems of funding and limiting burn out, there is a hope that more will become interested in the field of education and those who are already a part of it will continue to do so. Solving these problems will first-handedly improve the quality of work for teachers and result in better learning programs and curriculum for future students. After understanding the biggest issue impeding the education systems, a greater discussion of how race, economics, and school choice affect education can be developed.

As previously mentioned, a group that benefits from lower student to teacher ratios are students that fall under the category of low socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status includes the quality along with the different benefits and privileges a person receives in life, as a

result of income, financial security, and social status (“Education and Socioeconomic Status Factsheet”). Socioeconomic status, or SES, has major impacts on mental and physical health and a direct correlation to academic success. Children from lower SES households and communities have been observed to have a slower cognitive development as compared to peers from a higher SES household. This delay in development impacts many important life skills such as language, memory, and socioemotional processing and leads to financial and health problems in adulthood. Understanding SES is pivotal in solving the problems of education systems, as many of the systems that are inadequate come from communities with lower SES due to being under-resourced and underfunded. These schooling systems often result in high dropout rates and children often perform under level academically.

Access to resources is a major component in academic performance and quality of education. As observed by Linda Darling-Hammond, race has a major impact on the opportunities of non-asian minority groups in the United States. As can be found through standardized testing, minority students are found to score much lower in comparison to their White and Asian peers. This is due to unequal opportunity minority students are victims to, as they have been systematically placed into lower income areas due to historical laws targeting these racial groups. These lower income areas receive less resources such as books and technology. Many schools located in low-income and minority neighborhoods do not even have the resources to provide students with courses needed to attend higher education, setting the students at a greater disadvantage for college and future careers (Meyer). The biggest differences found in low income to high income communities is funding, quality of instructors, curriculum, and class sizes. This concept plays a massive role in understanding Nevada’s public school systems as a large 80% of students enrolled in the Clark County School District are minorities with about 40% of students being Latino/Hispanic (“Nevada Rankings | US News Best States”).

Taken to a historical context, African American, Latino, and Native American students were educated under segregated schools all the way up to the 1960's. Wholly segregated schools for students of color were funded much less to White schools and did not even get the opportunity to attend higher education (Meyer). While segregated schools have been deemed unconstitutional, minority students are still impacted by them to this day as many previously predominantly minority neighborhoods have continued to exist as majority minority. Much of these neighborhoods come from communities in the inner parts of cities and have systemically received less funding in comparison to the outer city, suburban neighborhoods.

A solution many parents have turned to due to poor public school systems is charter schools, also called choice schools. Charter schools have continued to rise in the state of Nevada in the past few years, with more and more parents opting for choice schools over public schools. With this increase in choice school, public school enrollment has substantially dropped. Surprisingly, diversity between public schools and charter schools are extremely similar, but the major difference is found in the economic status of the students. While charter schools have about 51% of their students considered economically disadvantaged, the statewide percentage is 80% (Girnus et al.). Though school choice has gained popularity throughout recent years, many myths have also risen from concerned students and parents. A common myth is the idea that school choice plays a role in actively defunding public schools. The American Federation for Children disproves this by explaining how choice schools are rightfully returning money back to families while public schools serve to defund families ("SCHOOL CHOICE IN AMERICA"). Choice schools are able to give back to the families by providing benefits promised by the school administration, while public schools have no obligation to invest in these programs and resources for students. Charter schools provide students and families for the tools and resources for success while simultaneously offering education options toward lower income families.

Throughout all the major reasons for an inadequate school system ranging from lack of teachers to socioeconomics, the underlying root for the problems lies in underfunding. Funds are the biggest way to make an impact and solve not just the surface level issues. Not only are students impacted by the lack of accessible resources, but graduates are provided with no incentive to pursue a career in public education. By being able to fully dissect and look into these problems, not only will the public maintain a better understanding of these school programs but also be able to search for and implement solutions. With Nevada's public schools systems swimming in the many hidden problems of a low ranked education system, change must be executed efficiently and properly. Carrying out changes to funding will not only serve to benefitting the current students, but also the future workforce of the state.

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