



April 5, 2017

Assemblyman Tyrone Thompson
Chair, Assembly Committee on Education
Nevada Legislature, 79th Session

Re: Assembly Bill 447

Dear Assemblyman Thompson and Committee Members,

AB 447 proposes to continue the Victory Schools program, an initiative that targets state funds to evidence-based improvements in schools with high concentrations of low-income (FRL) students. A third-party evaluation has shown success in Victory Schools, demonstrating a positive return on investment (ROI). Parents, educators, and the community stand behind the program, because it provides essential resources to our most vulnerable children.

ENN strongly supports the continuation of the Victory Schools program, including the Governor's proposed \$30 million expansion over the biennium, as the most efficient and effective way of improving student achievement for vulnerable students, and as a responsible first step towards adequate funding for all FRL students.

The Nevada Constitution requires the Legislature to provide for a "uniform system of common schools" supported by appropriations in an amount the "Legislature deems to be sufficient,... for the operation of the public schools" for all students enrolled over the biennium. Nev. Const. Art. 11, § 2,6. This means that the Legislature has an affirmative obligation to appropriate sufficient funding to afford all students a meaningful opportunity to achieve State standards and assessments, the core elements of the State's mandates for the operation of public schools across the state.

It is well recognized that current appropriations levels fall short of this mandate for funding sufficiency. Just this session, the Legislature has taken steps to move towards a new and comprehensive weighted funding formula, based on actual cost, to replace the outmoded Nevada Plan. In the interim, however, the Legislature has begun to meet the needs of FRL and English language learners (ELL) through the Victory Schools and ZOOM Schools categorical programs, which direct funds to schools with high concentrations of ELL/FRL students performing at low levels (one and two stars).

ENN, as a bridge to a new weighted funding formula, supports continuation and expansion of the Victory and ZOOM programs. Allocating the proposed – and limited – increase in state aid to these programs is an investment proven effective in improving outcomes for our high need schools. Furthermore, Nevada's recently proposed ESSA plan identifies ZOOM and Victory Schools as an essential component of our commitment to the federal government to dramatically improving outcomes for low-income and ELL students.

CCSD, for example, has over 150 schools with FRL close to, or over, 90%, that are heavily racially segregated, and with at least twice the national average of ELLs. Improving these schools is a serious challenge, one that the Zoom and Victory Schools programs are designed to address. Continued investment in these schools is essential to maintain the momentum for reform. A recent Washington Post article summarizes important education research that concludes that ed reform investments with the highest ROI are targeted, highly-focused, research-based interventions with high accountability.¹

In addition, the NDE's recent third party assessment of the Victory and ZOOM programs has shown significant ROI. *See ACS/UNLV/MYS, Nevada External Outcomes Evaluations (2017).* This session offers the opportunity for the Legislature to continue to improve these categorical programs so that ROI can be even higher (e.g. providing incentives so that experienced teachers will remain at these crises schools, and focusing on introducing proper pedagogy and curriculum).

Continuation and expansion of the ZOOM and Victory programs is fiscally and educationally sound, particularly in Clark County. Recent proposals to utilize any additional funding for these programs for a flat, per-pupil allocation to all ELL and FRL students would dramatically dilute these funds to the point where they would no real impact in classrooms and schools. According to NDE, Victory serves about 22,000 students, about 10% of the total FRL population, with \$1,137 additional dollars per pupil.² This ensures Victory Schools can provide ROI with methods proven to help our kids succeed, such as providing:

- Pre-Kindergarten programs free of charge;
- Full-day kindergarten classes;
- Free summer academy or other instruction for pupils;
- Free additional instruction or other learning opportunities;
- Professional development for teachers and staff;
- Reading Skills Centers,
- Evidence-based social, psychological or health care services to pupils and their families, such as wrap around services; Programs and services designed to engage parents and families;
- Programs to improve school climate and culture;
- Evidence-based programs and services specifically designed to meet the needs of students.

If the new investments, \$10 million the first year and \$20 million the second, were spread out throughout the entire state's FRL population, including to students in high ranking schools that may already have additional supports, the meager per-pupil increase would be inconsequential – like spitting on a forest fire. And not only would this not be enough to implement the proven programs of Victory schools, but the funds would not be required to be spent in evidenced-based ways that help our kids. These funds should be dedicated to expanding Victory Schools - where the Legislature exercises oversight, directs monies to the

¹ "Radical Change for Struggling Schools? It's reliably doable," Washington Post (March 7, 2017).

² Dr. Steve Canavero, "Report of Per-Pupil Expenditures and Recommendations for Legislation," 11-12 (Oct. 2016).



right kind of interventions, and can trace ROI - until there are funds and accountability measures in place to make a true impact on all students.

Let's not abandon programs that work – let's expand them. As the 2017 Legislature begins the process reforming and sufficiently funding the State's K-12 funding formula, and putting measures in place to ensure accountability, let's continue to support those most in need. ENN supports the expansion of targeted interventions, such as ZOOM and Victory School Programs.

Respectfully submitted,



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