

BILL TOWNSEND

Our New Voice in Congress

P O L I C Y O V E R V I E W

EDUCATION

I have seen firsthand the increasing difficulty in hiring skilled workers because our education system is failing. Nevada ranks next to last in education and America has fallen to 14th worldwide.

This is unsustainable and we are at a crossroads.

Nevada is ranked next to last in education: 49th out of 50 states. We should be ashamed. How can a state that reflects the theme “Battle Born” sit by while our public schools fail our children? There is no longer time for excuses. We must act now to improve our schools and prepare our children to compete in a global economy.

Pretty much everyone in Nevada agrees on the importance of bettering our education system, and yet, consider these numbers: our nation spends over \$810 billion annually on our school systems and still we are in 17th place in reading and 32nd place in math globally. Nevada is ranked even lower. Is this acceptable? No. Can we do better? We must.

We live in a global economy unlike any time in our past, thus, our need for better education outcomes in this country never stops. It is the foundation of what made America great in the past and it is the foundation of what is needed to make America great again. It is the key ingredient for global competition.

Our children are being left behind and the statistics are overwhelming. Recent studies show that Hispanic and African American students are still graduating 10-15 points behind the national average. The number of students who leave eighth grade without the ability to do grade-level math and reading is close to 66 percent. This is a failure on a mass scale that not only affects these kids, but all of us who rely (and hope) for America to become more competitive.

There is hope. Meghan Delaney of the Las Vegas Review-Journal (December 14, 2017) wrote an article that stated that graduation rates at the 56 schools in Clark County generally

improved in the 2016-17 school year, with Laughlin Junior/Senior High School leading the charge by achieving a 100 percent graduation rate, up from 76%. That’s a phenomenal increase!

Other Clark County schools that significantly increased their graduation rate over the previous year included:

- Del Sol High School in Las Vegas: up 28 percent, from 71 percent to 91 percent;
- Mojave High School in Las Vegas: up 27 percent, from 67 percent to 85 percent;
- Sunrise Mountain High School in Las Vegas: up 21 percent, from 76 percent to 92 percent;
- Canyon Springs High School in North Las Vegas: up 21 percent, from 75 percent to 91 percent;
- Cheyenne High School in North Las Vegas: up 18 percent, from 78 percent to 92 percent.

As your voice in Congress, I will pull administrators and teachers from each of these schools together to learn what the commonalities are that made their advancements in graduation rates possible. I’ll ask others to do the same. Then we can deploy these tactics statewide and across the United States.

We’ll also look at under-performing schools such as Burk Horizon Southwest High School, a credit-recovery high school for at-risk students, which saw a 14% drop in its graduation rate, from 49 percent in 2016 to 42 percent in 2017. We’ll try to identify what went wrong and how it can be corrected, and again, we’ll share it with other schools in Nevada. This isn’t difficult; it simply needs to be done.

Each day in Nevada, over 492,000 students are entrusted to our teachers. Nationwide, more than 50,000,000 students are in their care. In most households, our children spend more time with their teachers than they do with their parents. So why don't we want our teachers armed with the best resources to educate our children? We do. Why haven't we? Political will.

Education in America—and especially Nevada—must catch up to meet the demands of the global marketplace. Some districts and states in America have moved toward what other democracies take for granted. Accountability structures and tougher standards, charter schools, and school-choice programs have changed the educational experience of hundreds of thousands of children and their families. These important changes make it possible to contemplate rewriting the rules all the way down. In sociological terms, the plausibility structure has changed; what was inconceivable 30 years ago is now conceivable, because we have begun to see, experience, and study it.

We need to study charter schools to learn why their students earn better grades, in general, than our public schools. We need to understand what it is that helps teachers focus their student's attentions—off of social media and texting—and into books and the blackboard. We need to understand if these schools give their teachers things our public school professionals lack, such as more flexibility. Once we understand this, we can move toward remedying the sad state of educational skill levels in Nevada.

Charter schools offer the opportunity to foster innovative environments that allow teachers and students to interact in ways that prepare them for jobs and skills that will be relevant in the future. Why can't this be replicated across the state and, indeed, across the entire nation? It can.

Teachers are an incredible group of professionals, and for teachers, school never really ends. According to an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development study primary school teachers work as many hours as the average full-time employee across other sectors. Given that many of them are hired as 10-month employees, this means that their days are incredibly long and teachers are consistently going above and beyond expectations over weekends and summer months. Nearly every teacher I have spoken with over the past 30 years has told me that they are preparing a month to two before school starts, so they really do have year-round jobs.

Teachers deserve quality professional development and coaching to support them in their efforts. Teaching may be one of the only professions where you are hired as a 22

year old and 25 years later you may not have had a single continuing education course. Meanwhile, doctors, accountants, lawyers, etc., all have the opportunity to continually learn and grow their knowledge base. They do so because the world changes and they need to adapt. We must offer the same for our teachers. As your voice in Congress, I will seek funding to begin pilot programs in professional development, technology skills, and threat assessment so that our teachers are up to speed with what is happening in the world—which, by the way, directly relates to what our children learn.

Innovative learning experiences and opportunities for educators will lead to better outcomes for students and it will also build an engaged, talented, and supported workforce. We need to value our educators by supporting them as dynamic professionals invested in improving their practice.

We can seek out and implement accountability structures that reward teachers for jobs well done. Standardized testing which leads to "teaching to the test" can't do this. We have accountability structures in corporate America and it can work wonders for education. Highly influential teachers who expand students' minds and increase grades and scores should be eligible for bonuses. Under-performing teachers should be eligible for retraining and, in the worst cases, termination.

We can identify why school-choice works for some students and how to apply those learnings to all Nevada schools so the idea that a parent has to send their child to another school for a better education doesn't even have to be a consideration. I attended small elementary, middle, and high schools in Western Pennsylvania. We had the standard math, English, Latin, science, biology, art, and music classes. We had after school clubs like drama, band, and audio/visual. We had sports. The thing I remember most from my schooling wasn't the facilities (they were average), wasn't the books (many were outdated), wasn't the food (it was actually pretty good); it was the teachers. It was the typing teacher that taught me how to type 120 words a minute. It was the English teacher that taught me the joy of reading. It was the math teacher who taught me not only how to memorize my multiplication tables, but also taught me how to apply math in everyday life.

The school district where I attended school had eleven people in administration. Today's schools and colleges are often overly burdened with administrative officials. In Clark County, over 5,600 employees, the vast majority of them in administrative roles, earn over \$100,000 a year total compensation. The district, one of the largest in America, has technical support, campus security, coordinators, and direc-

tors earning more than teachers, and in many cases earning 3 times the median household income and 7 to 10 times the average per capita income of residents. (Clark County's median household income is just \$55,552 and per capita income is \$26,040.) You have to go through 20 pages on the school district's transparency in compensation website (<http://transparentnevada.com/salaries/clark-county-school-district/>)

before you begin seeing teachers listed amongst administration roles. You have to go to page 113 of their website to find the first employee who earns total compensation of less than \$100,000 a year. This means in one school district there are 5,634 people earning salary and benefits of \$100,000 or more. This is not a knock against administrators who negotiated for their compensation packages just like everyone else, but one has to wonder why a school district needs 1,000+ such administrative positions when technology has helped companies reduce administrative roles and cut costs so that more money can be directed to producing products. In the case of education, the product is our children.

In my opinion, teachers should earn almost as much as administrators, yet across America, administrators often make two, three, even 10 times as much as the people who are most directly influencing our children. In Clark County, teachers typically earn \$40,000 to \$85,000 in total compensation. Part-time and teacher's assistants start at about \$19 an hour. Teachers are the ones influencing our children day in and day out. Teachers are where we make advancements in student learning.

The future of education in Nevada.

Four years ago, Pearson conducted a study called "Learning Curve" to determine what made schools effective. This education assessment service gathered the information of The Economist Intelligence Unit, did extensive desk research, and interviewed the world's education leaders to report each nation's ability to prepare students for the modern workforce.

What they found could serve as a blueprint to improving education:

- Significant financial investment in a country's educational system does not necessarily produce academic returns.
- The countries with the best rankings make basic skill development (like math, science and literacy) a high priority, starting in elementary school.
- Non-cognitive skills are equally important. Countries

who excelled in the report also valued communication, leadership, teamwork, global citizenship, problem solving, emotional intelligence, and entrepreneurship.

- Effort is more valuable than inherited intelligence.
- Clear, measurable goals and outcomes are essential.

The leading countries relied on the accountability and involvement of a well-utilized network of people to educate their students.

The study concludes East Asian nations are best in education, whose proof lay in the fact that American universities are loaded (some say overloaded) with highly intelligent and driven Asian students because of their success in elementary and high school. The study named South Korea on top, followed by Japan (2nd) and Singapore (3rd), and all these countries have clear learning outcomes and a strong culture of accountability and engagement among a broad community. As for the leader, the education system of South Korea has transformed the country over the last 50 years, leading to an expanding economy.

What makes South Korea's educational system successful? Two things stand out:

All 12 years of elementary and high school education is about the need to prepare for the Suneung, known as the College Scholastic Ability Test, the equivalent of our SAT or ACT. These tests don't reward memorization, they reward thinking skills. The result is the admission to the country's top universities. Today, nearly 65% of young adults (ages 25-34) have a university degree, compared to 21% of America's young adults.

Students attend classes from 9am to 5pm, closely corresponding with work hours of their parents which results in families coming home around the same time. This leads to better family cohesion and more interaction between family members. The expanded classroom hours also give teachers more time to delve into subject matter. Research suggests this can have a positive impact on learning curves.

What can we learn from other countries about improving education?

- We must start early. Programs like Head Start are highly effective and should be expanded.
- We must develop more respect for teachers. As I stated earlier, these are the people we trust our children with. Let's find ways to increase pay, especially performance-based bonuses, and provide additional teaching tools, to make classes more dynamic and engaging. Virtually every education leader I've spoken to affirmed the

urgent importance of elevating and strengthening the teaching profession in a knowledge economy. Around the world, education is now recognized as the new game-changer that drives economic growth and social change. And it is great teachers who help build the higher-order skills that students need to succeed in the 21st century.

- We should better manage schools and provide funding necessary to create teacher to student classroom sizes of about 16:1 in order to allow teachers time with each student. Teachers need and deserve more autonomy—and they must become real participants and partners in reform if outcomes for children are to dramatically improve: mandating smaller classrooms will help this occur.
- We must give teachers extra time for training and curriculum development. Part of this professional development that teachers in most all areas of the country also need is in the area of teaching students whose first language is not English. Studies of teachers show that the majority do not feel they have the skill set in order to meet the demands of second language learners in their classrooms.
- Raise the standards for becoming an educator. Require more stringent training for teachers in their actual subject (for example, the low standards for degrees in math education have not kept pace with the current requirements in the global economy).
- Hold teachers accountable for the results of their teaching: Reward the most effective and weed out ineffective educators
- Provide annual seminars/workshops/classes for teachers. This can be accomplished online at very low cost. In order to stay competitive with the world, our teachers, the backbone of the education system, need to be continuously growing and learning new skills and ways to effectively teach. Those who take advantage of such programs would see their pay increase. Professional development for teachers in the US is fragmented. We spend at least \$4 billion every year in federal funds on professional development—and don't have good results to show for it. We must change these programs to provide measurable results that lead to better education outcomes.
- Update and improve teaching curricula yearly. Utilize a forum setting among teachers that teach the same subjects across several school districts. Allow teachers to learn from each other. This may include

summer retreats to learn from and network with each other or a universal teaching platform where teachers can share lesson plans and activities that engage students. No single teacher following a set strict level of rules from a book will ever become the best teacher. You need multiple teachers coming together iteratively to achieve the best level of teaching and improving upon it each year.

- Providing personalized learning opportunities for students. Moving away from standardization and uniformity of learning focused on a one-size-fits-all system that is excessively focused on bachelor degrees for all as a measure of success and achievement is needed. In its place, the system should develop and promote career and technical education at grades 6-12, offering greater career choices.
- Focus on STEM: science, technology, engineering, and math, along with literacy, composition, and writing as the basics for every student. Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) needs to be emphasized as well.
- Return the arts in schools. The correlations between music education and higher order thinking skills is proven.
- Students in the US are often not pushed to learn, nor do they have widely based motivation to engage. Parents too often want good grades without the hard work required. Some parents tell teachers too much homework interferes with their kid's extracurricular activities, which are often undertaken because colleges look favorably on extracurricular involvement. Let's work with colleges and universities to change this thinking. Many kids in the US dream about playing football or creating an app they can sell for millions of dollars. We need to reduce the distorting role of sports in school life, which engenders misplaced priorities for too many people. Kids in Germany want to solve problems (for example) and kids in Taiwan want to achieve exceptional academic skills to be able to attend a leading university. The culture plays an important role here: it is said Asian students have six parents: Mom and Dad, two Grandpas and two Grandmas. It's largely true as many nations, especially highly ranked Asian nations, focus on their children's education in ways that involve the entire family. In some countries parents are ashamed if their children don't perform better than they did.
- Classrooms should be used for discussion of lectures

that are on video. Khan Academy video lectures are an example of lectures that could supplement classroom lectures. The classroom is best used for discussion of material previously seen on video because today's youth learn more readily via video than reading.

- America has many high-performing schools. We also have thousands of low-performing schools. If we can move toward a better funding system, along with the other items I have outlined here, we will build a nation where education is equitable, and the achievement gap which currently runs across socioeconomic lines will be replaced with one that lowers the achievement gap as to result in little disparity in performance.
- It is clear that most high-performing nations establish a number of common principles and cornerstones to build a strong education system and high-quality teaching profession. Every nation, of course, has unique characteristics of its teaching profession, culture, and education system, which may not work in the US. To the extent that we can copy or adapt successful practices from other nations, we should do so. The familiar sentiment is that America's education system can only be as good as the quality of its teachers. I would change that thought to: ***“the quality of a country's teachers can only be as good as the system that recruits, prepares, provides professional development, and compensates teachers while engaging parents in pedagogical support.”***
- We must engage unions to build this system. In Finland, strong teacher unions contribute to building a top-notch teaching profession by serving as professional organizations that train and develop teachers. They have evolved beyond the traditional adversarial focus on pay and benefits to build trusting but tough-minded partnerships with school districts and elected officials. They have even taken responsibility for quality and professional accountability to one another.
- Restructure a school finance system that's based on local property taxes. It's deeply regressive and, again, out of touch with the rest of the world. In many countries with successful education outcomes, funding responsibilities are divided between the federal and local governments with the federal government assuming about 60 percent of the financial burden of schools and municipal authorities assuming the remaining 40 percent. The amount of federal money given to each municipality is determined not by the wealth of the people that live in a district, but by the number of students and an annually calculated unit cost per

student. This spreads financial resources to everyone. Here's the best part: it doesn't have to cost us more. Total US spending averages \$15,171 per student, more than Switzerland's \$14,922 per year, and more than Finland's \$13,865. The money is there, but it is not spent in the optimal benefit for our children.

- Promote more critical thinking/analysis and less memorizing. Innovation and creativity are based on understanding things, not on one's ability to memorize. Critical thinking skills help position children for advanced subjects, help position teenagers for college and trade school educational programs, and help adults throughout their lives.
- Introduce practical skills programs in addition to an academic program. Too many teenagers graduate high school and cannot complete simple tasks such as balancing a checkbook, buying a car, or understanding how to register to vote. Many never had the opportunity to learn how to cook or sew a button on a shirt because Home Economics classes are not offered at their schools. Many children no longer learn cursive writing! Here's a quote from Emily Ma, a senior who was never taught cursive in school and had to learn it on her own, who attends New York City's academically rigorous Stuyvesant High School: *“It's definitely not necessary but I think it's, like, cool to have it.”* Cool to have it? It's a necessity in life. You must at least know cursive in order to sign your name. It's the faster means, when compared to printing, to take notes. Our children need these basic skills.
- We will remove the emphasis on standardized testing as a measure of rigor and accountability, and replace that with support for a child's whole education, including social and emotional needs. This may lead to fewer teens being prescribed anti-psychotic medications, potentially earlier detection of mental issues or behavioral concerns, more parent-to-teacher involvement, and, if my hypothesis is correct, greater outcomes in the long run. Included in this is devoting funding and resources to providing social supports to students and families in terms of nutrition, health care, child care, counseling, supervision, mental health, college preparation, and more. Once we begin building a child's life through the entire cycle of their environment we will be on the cusp of an educational system that would be, with our nation's wealth backing it, unrivaled.
- We'll make scholarships for service to the country more lucrative. If 18-24 year olds commit 4 to 8

years of giving back (e.g., in the Armed Forces or AmeriCorps or non-governmental programs such as Teach For America) to communities in the US, and in exchange can have all or most of their college tuition reimbursed, they will more likely be able to afford college and possibly be in much better position emotionally and mentally to make the most of their educational opportunity. (AmeriCorps offers a full-time, residential, team-based program for young adults, age 18-24. Members develop leadership skills and strengthen communities by completing 10-month service projects and gaining life experience. Upon the completion of the program, members are eligible to receive the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award equal to the maximum Pell Grant amount: \$5920. Teach For America places qualified individuals in classrooms across America to help under-served schools and their students, committing two years or more to expanding education). We will also look into creating a national service corps of high school and college graduates who could work in economically disadvantaged communities while enrolled in online courses, giving them the opportunity to receive tuition assistance through their work efforts.

Acknowledging that we have a problem is the “easy” part. Addressing it is where things get tough. Beyond what I outlined above, here are five broad stroke ways we can work to improve our education system:

1. Stay the course on accountability.

It’s not always popular, but accountability is crucial to closing the achievement gap. If there are no consequences for under-performing schools, the status quo will prevail and broad swaths of students—most of them minority or low income—will continue to slip through the cracks. This is unacceptable for a nation founded on the promise of opportunity, and it’s a recipe for economic decline. We will reverse the Obama-era guidance aimed at ensuring school districts aren’t discriminating against students while disciplining them. That directive, issued in 2014, sought to confront a systemic problem: that low-income students, minority students and students with disabilities are disciplined, suspended out-of-school and expelled more often than their white, more affluent peers. Instead of hiding the problem as the directive did, we address these issues head-on, just as we would with any other person who is breaking rules or has the possibility of committing an act of violence.

2. Focus on the basics.

When schools focus on basic skill development like math,

science and literacy they turn out young adults who can think for themselves. We will supplement these areas of study with technology and engineering to round out STEM studies. This leads to better scores in college and better job opportunities for those not attending college. The ability to analyze problems, question assumptions, create hypotheses, and test statistical variables to come to a conclusion is an important part of almost any higher paying job, yet our schools rarely focus on these skills.

3. Demand higher standards and implement them.

We’ve seen a nationwide movement to raise standards so that our students are better prepared for college or career and can contend with international competitors. This signals progress, but implementation of initiatives, like the Common Core State Standards, lag as opponents or advocates for the status quo spread misinformation. We cannot base decisions on our students’ curricula through misinformation. We must use data to determine what is happening in our schools and raise the levels from what that data tells us. Facts will help drive the debate forward. For example, let’s look at Common Core, which many people hate—largely because they don’t understand what it is intended to teach.

What did I learn from taking the time to study Common Core? The old way of teaching formulas and procedures is only a portion of the picture. Students understand the use of these formulas and procedures (and remember them) when they can derive the formulas themselves in interesting activities done with manipulatives and visuals to make mathematics real and real life. Then, students need to utilize these traditional formulas and procedures solving real life problems and have whole class discussions about their findings. This makes mathematics a field of problem solving, which it truly is, rather than just a field of disparate numbers that are memorized. The legacy will be a generation of adults who can utilize mathematics seamlessly to solve real life problems, instead of generations of adults who state, “I never really understood math,” as we have now.

Is Common Core the answer? Maybe. Maybe not. After taking the time to study Common Core math, it made a lot of sense. It made calculating math problems in my head much easier than the way I was taught over 30 years ago. Before we throw the baby out with the bath water, let’s ask what works in Common Core and keep that, and then replace what doesn’t work.

4. Teach students to be competitive and employable.

High-growth sectors like information technology require a workforce with advanced skills. We must increase access to

STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education, encourage students to pursue STEM studies earlier and with greater focus, and better train STEM educators. We must really focus on bringing girls into the STEM studies as they are sorely lacking in these skills. When a firm such as McKinsey & Company projects that upwards of 30% to 50% of the jobs currently in America will disappear in the next 30 years because of automation, robotics, and technology, it should be a warning that we must begin to adapt our children's learning to meet future needs. STEM programs will provide the backgrounds our children will need in the future. It is also important to identify students early-on that may not be cut out for college, but who may excel in a trade. These teens must be given the encouragement to pursue studies in the trades—honorable professions that often pay more than many white collar jobs. Years ago, kids who got shipped over to “Vo-Tech” (vocational training schools) were seen as the ones who weren't quite smart enough to get into college. This was wrong. We should encourage those who wish to pursue careers in auto repair, heating and plumbing, electrical, and other trades.

5. Encourage innovation.

Though there are exceptions, the American classroom has been virtually untouched by the technology revolution that has swept the rest of society. The smart deployment of technology could empower teachers, engage students, customize learning, and make schools and districts more efficient. Data should also be used to improve students' performance, enabling educators to predict successes and intervene when risks emerge. Technology can also greatly expand our children's mental capacity. See the Resek Plan below.

In sociological terms, the plausibility structure has changed; what was inconceivable 30 years ago is now conceivable, because we have begun to see, experience, and study it. Our nation operates each school district as a separate entity, each school campus as a separate facility that has to be staffed. We need teachers in the classroom, but we can empower our teachers to raise the pedagogical standards much higher if we think differently about how children today interact with the world around them.

Most children, as young as 5 years old, are familiar with using a computer or tablet. They know how to search for information. They know how to click on links and interact with web pages. How do we take this relatively new skill set and make it an important part of Nevada's curriculum?

This leads to something I will use my role in Congress to push forward. I call it the **Resek Plan**, named after the elementary school teacher who had the most impact on my

early development. The Resek Plan is something I began developing in 1999, along with a couple college educators. At the time, the technology necessary to make it happen wasn't available, but today it is and it can be a boon to improving the minds of our youth.

Imagine if we could record and distribute lectures from the best teachers in Nevada. What if every K-5 student could have lessons from Mark Leamy of Doral Academy, high school math lessons from Katherine Kareck of Edward Reed High School, or lessons from Rachel Leach of Silver Stage Middle School in Lyon County or Aaron Grossman at Roy Gomm Elementary School or Nevada Teacher of the Year, Pilar Biller. Imagine if we asked Pam Ertel, John Tierney, Ian Salzman, Jeffrey Hinton, Adam Whatley, Deanna LeBlanc, Cheryl Macy, Kathleen Schaeffer, Steve Johnson, LeAnn Morris, and Melanie J. Teemant, all former *Nevada Teachers of the Year*, to develop a 12 hour lecture series, delivered via the Internet into classrooms and available to students and parents at home? The results would be an unprecedented impressive expansion of minds.

Our plan takes it a step farther and create a national knowledge sharing program that puts in place requirements that any college or university receiving Federal funding select their 2 best professors and have each create a 12-hour lecture series on their specialty, which would be made available to every middle and high school student in America. If we pursue this initiative, over the course of 2-3 years, over 11,000 lecture series, representing 134,000 hours of subject matter from the brightest minds in academia would be available for every child in America to access.

Do you want to learn about agriculture? Log in and take a course from the top professors at UC Davis College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences or Perdue University.

Want to learn about veterinary medicine? Log in and take a course from the top professors at Ohio State University or Pennsylvania State University.

Computer programming? Learn from the great minds at MIT or Stanford.

Artificial intelligence? Access thought leaders from Carnegie Mellon University or Berkeley.

Nursing? Learn from the best minds at Drexel or University of Maryland, Baltimore.

Medicine? Baylor College of Medicine or Johns Hopkins University.

Hospitality? Cornell University, School of Hotel Administration or University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

The list goes on and on. The professors I've spoken to generally love the idea of being able to share their knowledge with millions of kids. Most said they wouldn't expect to be paid for such a course because of the honor of being selected as one of the two best professors at their campus.

Let's suppose you are a 16 year old in Ely, Nevada and you don't know what you want to be when you grow up. Having access to these types of lectures could set you on the path to your future career. It's possible to do this if we get Congress to take the lead. (For those who question how we can get things done in Congress, we need only remember that it takes 218 votes to pass a bill in the US House of Representatives and send it to the Senate. I firmly believe there are 217 other people in the House's 435 who believe education is important to our nation.)

It would not cost very much money to bring this knowledge to children across the United States. Let's suppose each professor earns \$5,000, and coordination, recording, and editing a 12-hour lecture series, then uploading to a website, has hard costs of less than \$1,000. This means we could take two professors from each of the 5,600 colleges and universities in America and for about \$68 million, create over 134,000 hours of educational materials for every boy and girl in our public schools. **With 50+ million students in America, that is only \$1.33 per student.** We can't afford not to do this.

The current budget for the US Department of Education is \$68 billion, so finding \$68 million, just 1% of their budget, to accomplish this task is possible if the will of the people are behind it.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of improving education will not be with the teachers, administrators, or unions, but with parents. Making these changes will challenge parents' assumptions of their involvement in their children's learning. It will push parents to learn their kids' subject matter. It will require more effort from parents to stay on top of the changes in curricula and force them to increase their involvement in their children's education. Quite frankly, this is needed and programs like those I propose may be the only way for parents to wake up to the fact that schooling today is nothing like it was 30 or 50 years ago. It's more competitive, more worldly, broader, and with instant access to information, the experience past generations had accidentally being exposed to information, such as what happens when flipping through the pages of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* to learn one subject but being exposed to others. With Internet search engines, Siri, Alexa, and Google, this no longer happens. Spontaneous learning has been relegated to the trash bin of history. Unfortunately, this isn't a benefit as

the serendipity of learning is removed, but it can be brought back with positive results for students.

6. Fix the Windfall Elimination Provision.

An issue I have with our public employees that I feel should be changed is with regard to retirement. This is an issue that while it sounds good on paper, it can financially punish teaching professionals who worked outside of the government before becoming teachers. I have met many teachers who, before teaching, worked in private industry and paid into Social Security and this issue is a thorn in their sides.

You could work in private industry for 10 years, paying into Social Security each paycheck, but if you then move to work for the government (teacher, fire fighter, governor's office, etc.) your retirement plan becomes available through the Public Employees' Retirement System of Nevada.

The Windfall Elimination Provision can affect how retirement or disability benefits are calculated. If you work for an employer who doesn't collect Social Security taxes from your salary, such as a government agency or an employer in another country, any retirement or disability pension you get from that work can reduce your Social Security benefits.

If you pay into Social Security for any number of years, then work for the government, you can be financially punished if you then retire from your government job, because you essentially lose the accumulated Social Security benefits from when you were in private employ. Well, you don't lose them but they count against your teacher retirement income. This is not right. If you had worked for two private companies, each with a retirement plan, but you paid into Social Security through both companies, you'd receive your pension from the company you retire from, plus Social Security. To have to give up your earned Social Security for the pleasure of working for the state is unfair.

I'm a realist. Some of these changes will be difficult to implement and will be met with resistance from teachers unions, school districts, politicians, and others, but we cannot back down. Can we afford the alternative, which is to do nothing at all? No. Our students deserve better, and our economy and competitiveness demand more.

By now you have seen that I thrive on thinking differently and focusing on big ideas that can have lasting effects. I look at the whole picture: for instance, education is not just affected by teachers and money; it is influenced by parental involvement, access to technology, higher standards which most children and teens can, and will, rise to achieve, parental involvement, college and university commitment to the K-12 learning years, and the role of Congress. It is impacted

by the economy and jobs, availability of early child learning programs and child care, and more. Many big ideas don't require huge expenditures, they simply require an idea that is thought through and implemented. It is time we stopped thinking about how something interrupts the status quo and started discussing things that will radically change our education system for the better.

There can be no more excuses: the time to act is now. Our children and our nation's competitiveness depend on a world-class educational system.



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What else can we do to improve education? Email me at
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To learn more about Bill Townsend's policies and our
"12 Big Ideas for Nevada, please visit
www.TownsendForNevada.com