

INTRODUCTION

Teach Plus's mission is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that advance equity, opportunity, and student success. In pursuing this mission, Teach Plus is guided by its Student Opportunity Mandate: All students should have the opportunity to achieve their potential in an education system defined by its commitment to equity, its responsiveness to individual needs, and its ability to prepare students for postsecondary success. As Teach Plus Nevada Policy Fellows, our cohort of current classroom teachers and teacher leaders in Nevada witness firsthand the significant impact of [inadequate and inequitable funding](#) on our students' education.¹

Nevada has long been a desirable location for individuals seeking the economic and social advantages of a growing job market, expansive and diverse population, and no state income tax. However, the state has experienced a [recent exodus of residents](#).² Education is the number one reason for families choosing to relocate to other states. Despite the state's recent economic growth and the infusion of over [\\$1 billion](#) American Rescue Plan (ARP ESSER) funds following the COVID-19 pandemic, Nevada's education funding level remains one of the lowest in the country.³ Furthermore, the current funding formula is [regressive](#), with high-poverty districts receiving significantly less funding per pupil than low-poverty districts.⁴ To overcome these obstacles, Nevada must take decisive steps to increase funding levels, clarify the definition of at-risk students, and enable students who meet multiple criteria of weights to receive funding for each of them. Ensuring sufficient and fair funding for education is paramount to providing every student with an equal chance to excel academically and reach their full potential. Without optimal and equitable funding, how can our scholars be prepared to compete on a global scale?

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

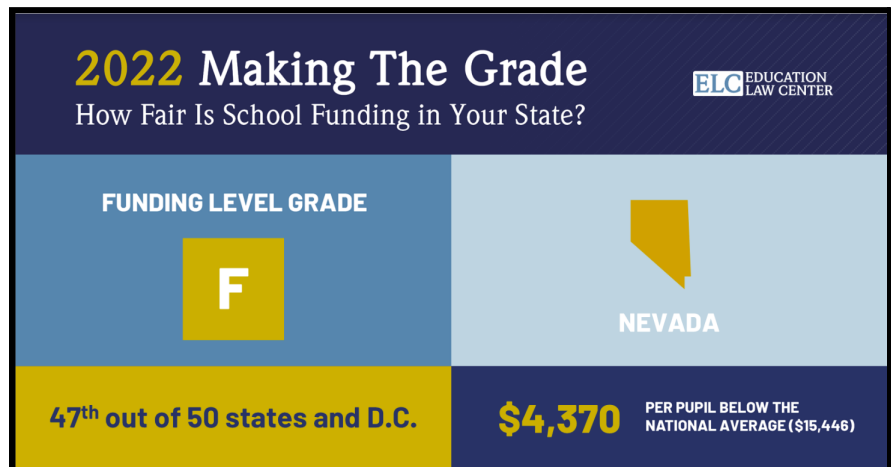
Since 1967, the [Nevada Plan](#) has dictated funding for each of its [17 school districts](#).^{5,6} The Nevada Plan relied upon per-pupil support and used a sliding scale consisting of local and state revenue. Each district in Nevada was given money based on [county characteristics](#) such as local wealth, transportation costs, building maintenance, number of licensed teachers, salaries, and benefits.⁵ As our state population and student enrollment grew, the Nevada Plan resulted in inequities in Nevada school funding.

In 2019, funding for Nevada schools changed to [The Pupil-Centered Funding Plan \(PCFP\)](#).⁷ Based on the new funding model, each school district received [funding](#) at a base rate of \$11,076 per student, while the national average is \$15,446, leaving Nevada students behind.⁴ At the time, 11

of 17 school districts were considered “[hold harmless](#),” meaning the school districts would not receive less money under the PCFP than it did under the Nevada Plan in 2020.⁸ The PCFP is based on a per-pupil funding model, where each student is assigned a specific dollar amount based on [various factors](#) such as At-Risk (funded at an additional .08%), English Learners (funded at an additional .48%), or Gifted and Talented (funded at an additional .29%).⁷ This year, 2023, is the first year the weighted funding will follow the student down to the individual school level using the current formula. Even though the funding formula is designed to ensure all students have access to equal educational opportunities, regardless of their geographic location or socioeconomic status, students only receive additional monies based on their highest qualifying weight—leaving schools underfunded and students without the critical resources they need.

In recent years, there have been calls for reform of the funding formula to address issues such as inequities in funding between urban and rural schools and the impact of demographic changes on student populations. Nevada's funding level for education is a significant concern, as the state consistently ranks

among the lowest in the nation in terms of per-pupil funding. According to [Making the Grade 2022](#), Nevada ranked 47 out of 50 states and the District of Columbia in per-pupil spending for the 2019-2020 school year—contributing to disparities in educational outcomes between Nevada



students and their peers in other states.⁴ Nevada has recognized the importance of increasing education funding and has taken steps in recent years to address the issue, including increasing teacher salaries and providing additional funding for education programs. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure that all students in Nevada have access to the high-quality education they deserve.

REFLECTIONS

Nevada must enact "[a fair, equitable, and adequate school financing formula](#)" in order to provide our students with the education they need and deserve.⁴ In Spring 2023, Teach Plus

Nevada Policy Fellows hosted a series of informal interviews with Nevada stakeholders from state education leadership, non-partisan policy leadership, association (union) leadership, and community leadership to explore recommendations regarding the state’s funding challenges. We inquired about how best to provide equitable and optimal school funding to ensure an excellent education for each of our students.

Stakeholders shared their personal and professional perspectives on how to secure and increase school funding, as well as how to ensure per-pupil weighted funding supports the students who require additional resources. Several common themes emerged from our stakeholders reflections, prioritizing the following needs:

- Our current educational system requires a significant investment to create meaningful change, with an authentic commitment to implementing the existing funding formula to improve the quality of education in Nevada in support of our most vulnerable students.
- Legislators must propose legislation that generates additional revenue that supplements rather than [supplants](#) existing education funding.⁹
- Nevada must commit to an appropriate, transparent definition and communication of at-risk.

Stakeholders expressed/acknowledged challenges Nevada must overcome to have the quality education system that our students deserve:

- The investment needed is much higher than the one that is currently offered.
- Securing additional revenue through taxation is a significant challenge.
- Providing equitable funding for students who qualify for multiple weights and funding early education, which would require additional investment in licensed educators, support staff, and infrastructure.

These challenges are significant, but they are not insurmountable. With careful planning and collaboration, Nevada can overcome these challenges and build the quality education system that our students deserve.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

1. Increase the funding level without supplanting.

Nevada's economic growth presents an opportunity to increase funding for education and meet the needs of all students. The state's funding efforts are determined by comparing the size of the economy (Gross Domestic Product) to PK-12 education revenue. The 2023 legislative session is the first session since the COVID-19 pandemic that the state has seen economic growth—as

of April 2022, Nevada's economy ranked as the [first in the nation](#).¹⁰ As such, we have a unique opportunity to increase the state's general fund contributions to education and refrain from supplanting the education budget in line with the intent of the new funding formula. It is critical to implement a cost-driven funding formula that truly meets the needs of all students. We must *not* leave [vulnerable children](#) behind.¹¹ We have an ethical and moral obligation to implement “...[school finance that fully funds](#) the instructional [and social] needs of children who [identify as] special education, Gifted and Talented, and at-risk and English Language Learner students” to ensure that every child has access to high-quality education.¹² If we are to prepare our children to engage in a globalized society “ that involves [interconnected changes](#) in the economic, cultural, social, and political spheres of society” we *must* prioritize education funding.¹³

2. Make the new ‘at-risk’ definition transparent and appropriate.

“Senate Bill 543 (2019) created [a] 11-member Commission on School Funding to guide the work of the Department of Education to [revamp Nevada’s K-12 education funding formula](#) for the first time in over a half-century”.¹⁴ In April 2021, the Nevada School Commission on Funding recommended that the Nevada State Board of Education [update the definition](#) of ‘at-risk’ students to include a broader set of social and academic factors, beyond Free or Reduced-price Lunch (FRL) eligibility, that hamper student progress toward graduation.¹⁵ While the previous criteria of FRL qualification has been useful in identifying students who are ‘at-risk’, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) diligently worked to develop a more relevant and comprehensive definition. However, according to Educate Nevada Now, the number of students eligible for additional [funding has dropped significantly](#) from 271,618 to only 66,674, a 75% cut in students who would be eligible for the at-risk weighted funding.¹⁶ During the March 18, 2022 Commission on [School Funding Meeting](#), NDE noted that the restructured ‘at-risk’ definition was created in consultation with a third-party company, using a proprietary formula to identify the specific factors and the interplay of the factors to determine which students qualify for ‘at-risk’ funding.¹⁷ It is *essential* that the legislature understand and use the ‘at-risk’ definition and formula to ensure equity for each student in Nevada. We recommended that the Nevada State Board of Education require that the new definition of ‘at-risk’ appropriately identify vulnerable students and be made transparent to all stakeholders, including the legislature, ensuring that all students have an equitable opportunity to succeed.

3. Students who qualify for more than one weight within the funding formula should be funded with all weights for which they are eligible.

According to [Making the Grade](#), Nevada's funding formula has proven to be regressive, with high-poverty districts receiving significantly less per pupil funding than low-poverty districts.⁴ It

is imperative that Nevada ensures students who qualify for more than one weight within the funding formula receive funding for all weights for which they are eligible. This distinction will guarantee that every student, regardless of their socioeconomic background, receives the appropriate resources and multi-faceted support needed to be successful throughout their academic career.

At present, students are funded with a maximum of one per-pupil funding weight, even if they qualify for multiple weight categories. Each student's educational needs are unique and require different and various funding resources in support of students' academic success. For example, some students qualify for services under the categories of 'at-risk', English Language Learner, and Gifted and Talented Education, however, the students will only receive funding at the highest of the three categories. States, such as [New Jersey](#), fully fund their students using weights for multiple categories.¹⁸ In its commitment to excellent and equitable education, it is imperative that Nevada fully funds students for the weight categories for which they qualify.

CONCLUSION

Nevada must take action to increase education funding, make the 'at-risk' definition appropriate and transparent, and ensure that students who qualify for more than one weight within the funding formula categories be funded at all eligible weights. Nevada's education funding must be cost-driven and designed to meet the unique needs of each student. The state must prioritize its responsibility to work towards eliminating disparities that currently exist in how we fund our education system. With the implementation of these recommendations, Nevada will take a significant step towards building a more equitable and just education system that our students deserve by having access to the resources they need to reach their full potential inside the classroom and beyond.

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