

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

**Eightieth Session
March 7, 2019**

The Committee on Education was called to order by Chairman Tyrone Thompson at 1:32 p.m. on Thursday, March 7, 2019, in Room 3138 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. The meeting was videoconferenced to Room 4401 of the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, 555 East Washington Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada. Copies of the minutes, including the Agenda ([Exhibit A](#)), the Attendance Roster ([Exhibit B](#)), and other substantive exhibits, are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau and on the Nevada Legislature's website at www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/80th2019.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Assemblyman Tyrone Thompson, Chairman
Assemblyman Edgar Flores, Vice Chairman
Assemblywoman Bea Duran
Assemblywoman Michelle Gorelow
Assemblywoman Alexis Hansen
Assemblywoman Melissa Hardy
Assemblywoman Lisa Krasner
Assemblywoman Brittney Miller
Assemblywoman Connie Munk
Assemblywoman Sarah Peters
Assemblywoman Jill Tolles
Assemblywoman Selena Torres

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:

Assemblyman John Ellison, Assembly District No. 33

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Kelly Richard, Committee Policy Analyst
Victoria Gonzalez, Committee Counsel
Sharon McCallen, Committee Secretary
Trinity Thom, Committee Assistant



OTHERS PRESENT:

Teri White, Superintendent, Douglas County School District; and President, Nevada Association for School Superintendents
Adam Young, Superintendent, White Pine County School District
David Jensen, Superintendent, Humboldt County School District
Wayne Workman, Superintendent, Lyon County School District
Colleen Piacitelli, Private Citizen, Elko, Nevada
Lynette Vega, Private Citizen, Elko, Nevada
Robin V. Reedy, Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Nevada
Joelle Gutman, Government Affairs Liaison, Washoe County Health District
Steven Conger, representing Power2Parent
Christy McGill, Director, Office for a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment, Department of Education
Misty Vaughan Allen, M.A., Coordinator of the Statewide Program for Suicide Prevention, Division of Public and Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Human Services
Mary Pierczynski, representing Nevada Association of School Superintendents

Chairman Thompson:

[Roll was called. Committee rules and protocol were explained.] Today we have a presentation from the Nevada Association of School Superintendents and one bill hearing for Assembly Bill 114. At this time, I would like to open the hearing for public comment. Is there anyone here for public comment? [There was no one.] I will open the presentation.

Teri White, Superintendent, Douglas County School District; and President, Nevada Association for School Superintendents:

Today I am here with my colleagues to present to you the tenets of the iNVEST document ([Exhibit C](#)). Each session since 2003, the superintendents of our state have worked together to produce a document which encapsulates our collective vision for the vibrant future of over 473,000 Nevada students. This session, the iNVEST document addresses our position on five precepts which we see as critical to that work. The document speaks to the model Nevada classroom, which is led by a highly effective teacher who designs personalized learning opportunities in innovative spaces with a variety of student supports through leadership and partnership with engaged families and communities where students reach their academic and social potential.

To be able to accomplish the model Nevada classroom, we seek to reset per-pupil funding to current costs of education; to increase the local control so that districts are able to make the best decisions for the students they serve; to protect fund balances so that districts are better able to plan ahead without fear of losing the balance to decisions made around collective

bargaining and arbitration; and to create structures which cause partnership between the districts and the state in budget development. Adequate funding is the key to ensuring that every student in Nevada is well prepared to compete with their counterparts within a global environment.

We are here today as partners committed to giving you graduates who are able to compete in any market through any platform, and we are eager to work with you to find solutions that will put Nevada at the forefront of student success across our country.

I am joined today by three of my colleagues: Mr. Adam Young from White Pine County, Dr. David Jensen from Humboldt County, and Mr. Wayne Workman, our vice president and superintendent from Lyon County. Mr. Workman will share specific information about each section of the iNVEST document with you. Additionally, in your audience are the superintendents for the other 13 school districts and the charter authority. [Written testimony was also submitted ([Exhibit D](#)).]

Adam Young, Superintendent, White Pine County School District:

Education in Nevada is in my blood. My father was a White Pine graduate in 1954, and my mom was—and still is—a teacher in the district. I am a White Pine graduate and obtained my postsecondary degrees from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. My sons attended and currently attend White Pine High School. We have all benefited from an excellent education in little old Ely, Nevada. My oldest graduated as the valedictorian with a composite ACT score of 34. My middle son graduated having earned more than 30 college credits.

I am the superintendent of White Pine County School District, after serving as a teacher and a principal. I became the principal of White Pine High School at the tender age of 28. At that time there were a number of staff at the school who had taught me—including my mom. They continued to teach me, and we learned and grew our way to becoming a high-achieving school, a four-star school, a national model school, and other designations including a Governor's STEM [science, technology, engineering, and mathematics] School.

Through that time, I taught choir and English, and advised and published the school newspaper. I still teach choir every day. On Monday, I transported my all-state choir students to Elko for our regional rehearsal, arriving home that evening after 11 p.m.

I share this for context. There is nobody who cares more about the students in my district than I do—their academic achievement, their social and emotional well-being, and their college and career readiness. Part of the context, too, is for you to understand that what I share with you today, I share through the lens of life in the trenches.

Our vision in White Pine is to create a world-class learning environment. When I say this, I'm not referring to buildings and infrastructure, although it would be nice to replace our 1913 middle school. I'm referring to instruction: outstanding—not just adequate—Tier 1 instruction within every classroom; state of the art—not just passable—intervention systems

and personnel to assist students who struggle; first rate—not haphazard—college- and career-ready opportunities for students who excel; and diverse, in-demand career and technical programs to assist students in future decision-making. I think we can all agree that each and every Nevada student, regardless of geography, deserves access to these types of experiences.

I began my career as a social studies teacher in 1999 at White Pine Middle School. We had 300 students, 3 social studies teachers, 3 math teachers, 3 English teachers, 3 science teachers, 1 Spanish teacher, 2 physical education (PE) teachers, an art teacher, a band teacher, a choir teacher, 3 special education teachers, a counselor, a principal, and an assistant principal. There were robust athletic programs, including intramural activities for all kids, all year long. There were multiple academic clubs including, math, social studies, and science. Each core teacher taught an elective or two as well. My assignment was two recreational reading classes, in which I got to conduct read-alouds with fiction and facilitate independent reading outside of students' regular English courses. I was proud to be a teacher at that school, and it was a school I wanted to send my own kids to.

It is now 20 years later. There are zero social studies teachers. There are still three math, science, and English teachers. There is no Spanish teacher. There are no PE teachers. There is no art teacher. There is a band teacher, but she is split with the high school and two elementary schools. There is a choir teacher who is split with the elementary schools. There are now only two special education teachers. There is no counselor. There is still a principal, and there is an instructional coach paid for through a grant. If you were keeping track, that is a difference of eight instructional staff. Again, there is no counselor and the second administrator/instructional coach is grant-funded, the funding for which ends in June. Ten certificated positions. What else has changed? Because there are ten fewer bodies, there are fewer extracurricular activities. Intramural sports are done by the community. Despite their great efforts, these programs are disjointed and lack cohesiveness. There are almost no academic clubs. There are almost no electives like the reading class I described earlier. There are simply not enough people to run the school. Is this world-class?

Despite these challenges, and through absolutely Herculean efforts from the staff and principal, White Pine Middle is still a very high-achieving school. However, the burnout, fatigue, and emotional grit of the individuals making it happen is a very, very real issue, and we wonder why people do not want to go into education.

The population of the community is the same, the student enrollment is comparable, and the makeup of the district as a whole has seen similar cuts, so it not like resources are being diverted away from this school toward other projects. There are fewer district office staff and administrators now than then, so it cannot be blamed on administrative overhead either.

The first priority of iNVest is to reset per-pupil spending to current market costs and eliminate structural funding deficits. The current proposed budget is the perfect illustration. The teacher and staff rollups, cost of living increases, and benefits changes outlined within it simply do not cover what the actual costs of these items will actually be. Based on the

calculations of district personnel in the proposed per-pupil allocation, even with the increase currently under consideration, there is still a \$185 per-student deficit when it comes to putting students in schools where they do not lose. In other words, how can White Pine Middle School progress towards being world-class when the figure being considered is still far short of breaking even?

Investing in essential classroom elements and teachers has yielded results for Nevada. These results are illustrated in the iNVEST document we have shared with you ([Exhibit C](#)). These results have all occurred while schools across the state have experienced struggles similar to the ones I described in White Pine. Imagine what we could do if each classroom and each school had the resources to not just be adequate, but to be world-class. Imagine if PE, music, art, and foreign language teachers were not viewed as "extras" but as critical components to world-class learning.

I know I speak for my colleagues when I say that we are thankful for you, for the time away from your families, for your willingness to tackle these difficult issues, and for our audience with you today. We all look forward to creating world-class learning with your support. [Written testimony was also submitted ([Exhibit E](#)).]

David Jensen, Superintendent, Humboldt County School District:

It is my privilege to be with you today to talk about per-pupil allocation and ending fund balance. Simply put, per-pupil allocation is frequently referred to as "base funding." Base funding is best described as those funds that are directed toward the essential necessities necessary to operate a school. Those include personnel, curricular material, and other operational functions. In the absence of base funding, impacts such as increased class size, aging bus fleets, and outdated curricular materials become the norm.

For Humboldt County School District, when general fund and special education funds are combined, 86.7 percent is directed toward salaries and benefits. This leaves 13.3 percent for basic operations and support of our schools. As we now prepare for the 2019-2020 school year, budgets are being developed based upon unknown factors and unknown impacts of revenues and expenditures. These potential impacts include decisions on base funding, decisions on categorical funding, weighted funds, Public Employees' Retirement System, insurance rates, health insurance costs, negotiations, and step and column movement for staff.

We appreciate the fact that the Legislature and the Governor have supported an annual 2 percent increase in education funding. However, as my colleague has identified, this 2 percent fails to meet the annual increased expenses, impacting the ability of individual districts to meet critical needs. As we collectively engage in discussions regarding weighted funding for our state's most at-risk students, we would ask our legislators to consider the

importance of base funding as you balance those two components. Simply stated, adequate base funding through a per-pupil allocation is the key to placing highly qualified teachers in every classroom while providing the necessary curricular support to ensure the next generation of Nevada students are college- and career-ready.

In terms of ending fund balance, I am sure you can recall the morning of April 3, 2018, when the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* reported that the Clark County School District had lost an arbitration hearing regarding compensation disagreements with their bargaining units. This decision had an immediate and overall fiscal impact of approximately \$68 million, resulting in an ending fund balance of 0.78 percent for the Clark County School District.

I believe this is significant, as districts are expected to maintain a minimum 4 percent ending fund balance of prior year expenditures as defined in *Nevada Administrative Code* (NAC) 354.650, subsection 1, and is further contradictory to NAC 354.660, subsection 2, which is intended to protect up to 8.3 percent of an ending fund balance from both negotiations and arbitration.

In visiting with Jesus Jara, Superintendent of Clark County School District, in preparation for today's comments, I asked him what a difference that \$68 million could have potentially had for his district, especially in light of his first year as a superintendent. He shared with me that recent surveys of his teachers—and consistent across all the districts in the state—identified two primary areas of concern. The first was class sizes and the second was curricular materials and support. This loss of critical funds further eroding the ending fund balance for Clark County School District certainly limited this opportunity.

As Mr. Jara, Clark County, and other districts work toward ensuring fiscal stability and responsiveness, protecting the ending fund balance is essential. With the full support of the National Association of School Superintendents, the Clark County School District has submitted Senate Bill 26, which would seek to amend *Nevada Revised Statutes* 354.6241, mirroring the language in NAC 354.660, subsection 2, protecting up to 8.3 percent for negotiations and arbitration. To put 8.3 percent in context, that represents sufficient funds to operate a school district for approximately one month.

We believe in being open and transparent through the collective bargaining process while also recognizing the importance of being fiscally responsible to the taxpayers who are providing those funds to support K-12 education. [Written testimony was also submitted ([Exhibit F](#)).]

Wayne Workman, Superintendent, Lyon County School District:

I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you about protecting the State Distributive School Account (DSA), creating a rainy day fund, and categorical or specialized funding.

District schools, and unfortunately students, are still feeling the effects of the vast cuts that were made during the Great Recession. Many educational jobs were lost, maintenance was deferred, and long-term school supplies were not purchased. This snowball effect continues into today.

Unfortunately, funds that were created to help solve educational funding deficits, such as the Initiative Petition 1 of the 77th Session tax and the recreational marijuana tax, have not actually increased the DSA but were instead used to supplant intended funding. That, coupled with decreased state general funding for education and continued property tax abatements or caps, means we are still funding education at a lower level in Nevada than we were before the Great Recession.

Therefore, as a solution, we are requesting that all funding sources intended for the education of our children be secured in the DSA, and when excess revenue is generated from educational funding sources, that it be used to create a rainy day fund so that the impact during less prosperous times is mitigated for our students.

District schools and students appreciate all the efforts made in previous legislative sessions which were intended to address many of the educational funding shortfalls. This was primarily done through specialized or categorical funding initiatives, such as Read by Grade 3, Social Workers in Schools, Nevada Ready! Pre-K, Zoom and Victory Schools, among others. Unfortunately, there are unintended negative consequences of specialized or categorical funding. Instead of it being a dedicated, ongoing funding source, these funds must be reauthorized every biennium. This means that our more qualified and expert people will not risk applying for these positions because they are seen as temporary positions and not stable for employment.

For example, many districts have been required to revert some of their funding back because interventionists, social workers, teachers, and other specialists would not apply for the newly created positions. Additionally, specialized or categorical funding comes in the form of grants, which must undergo an onerous application process, thus delaying the dissemination of the funds. This means that even if there is a social worker, interventionist, teacher, or other specialist who is willing to take the position, they are not able to be hired until well after the school year has started, resulting in a loss of educational services to our students.

Therefore, as a solution, we are requesting specialized and categorical funds be dedicated to ongoing funding sources and that they be distributed to all students requiring specialized instruction and not through the grant process. This will create more stability for the students we serve while still holding districts and schools accountable for educating all students. [Written testimony was also submitted ([Exhibit G](#)).]

Teri White:

Thank you again for making time in your busy schedules to hear our stories, our passion, and our commitment to the students of our great state. We know you understand our plight, and we appreciate each of you as you consider the positions of everyone who comes before you with an ask. We trust your authority to legislate and know you join us in a commitment to realize the vision for graduating every student ready to pursue their college and career dreams with the knowledge and skills they will need to adapt and succeed for a very unknown tomorrow.

Chairman Thompson:

Thank you for your presentation. I would like to ask all the other superintendents in the audience to raise your hands. We want to make sure we acknowledge you, and we appreciate all the work you do. We do have some questions.

Assemblywoman Tolles:

I am overwhelmed as I look at the audience today and your dedication to our students and our schools. Your passion is so evident.

Assemblywoman Miller:

I do not have a question, but I do have a comment based on a remark Superintendent White made. The remark was that you know we understand your plight. I would say that is not correct. In order for everyone to understand the desperate need that our schools are in in Nevada, you need to continue—all of the superintendents—to express that plight, express that reality, come with what the day-to-day looks like and how every decision here impacts what happens in the classrooms in Nevada. I apologize for disagreeing with you, but keep going.

Chairman Thompson:

Seeing no further questions, I will close the presentation. I would like to call Assemblyman Ellison to the table. I will open the hearing for Assembly Bill 114.

**Assembly Bill 114: Revises provisions governing the prevention of suicide by pupils.
(BDR 34-647)**

Assemblyman John Ellison, Assembly District No. 33:

I would first like to say that presentation is a hard act to follow regarding the teachers and some of the issues they are facing right now. We have been working with our school districts to discuss some of the changes they are looking at right now. It could actually affect some of the rural schools even more. Elko County is looking at anywhere from a \$6 million to \$13 million decrease in their ending fund balance. Teachers in White Pine County are being devastated by some of these cuts.

I am here today to talk about Assembly Bill 114. I have two guests with me. One is a school teacher and the other is a dispatcher. Both of these mothers have lost children to suicide. I would like to point out a few things before we start, which is actually part of the law. The Legislative Counsel's Digest in the bill states, "Existing law requires the State Board of Education to adopt regulations establishing certain courses of study, including a course of study in the prevention of suicide, and the grade levels for which the courses of study apply." I am not asking to put debt on anyone. What I am asking is to follow the existing laws. These laws pertain to a course regarding suicide prevention. These two ladies will be able to talk about it more than I can.

I would like to give you some background. According to the Department of Health and Human Services' Statewide Program for Suicide Prevention (Office of Suicide Prevention), Nevada had the eleventh highest rate in the nation for suicide and the twenty-second highest for Nevada youths from ages 15 to 24 in 2015. We will be giving you some more statistics to show you how bad this issue is.

Kids and teens between the ages of 10 and 17 face increased pressure from school, parents, responsibilities, and of course peers. This peer abuse comes in many forms, such as teasing, shunning, name-calling, physical harm, and sexual gestures. I would like to turn it over to Colleen Piacitelli.

Colleen Piacitelli, Private Citizen, Elko, Nevada:

I am an emergency dispatcher, a student at Great Basin College studying social work, I volunteer as a secretary for Zero Suicides Elko County, and most importantly, I am a mom and an aunt.

Suicide has become an epidemic for our young people, not just across the nation, but at home. I have taken calls from children as young as six years old threatening suicide. In seeing the ever-increasing numbers, I have asked myself why our children and young adults are turning to suicide. There is no one answer. One person's breaking point is going to be different from another's. While there are many factors involved, the one I hear and see most is that of coping with everyday life. Whether it is school, family, or friends, our young people are missing a key ingredient to surviving their current moment and thriving into adulthood. I would like to tell you about one of those moments. Please note, the name has been changed to protect the privacy of the individual.

Jack was a thriving teenager. He was an amazing debater, on the school debate team, had close friends, was one of those students whom everyone seemed to enjoy, and was looking forward to an upcoming dance. The night of the dance, the young lady he had gone out with left him for another young man at the dance. That night, Jack went home and shot himself. Jack died from suicide. We received the call that night from Jack's mom. My partner stayed on the phone with her until the deputies and medical personnel had arrived, listening to her inconsolable cries and pleas of why this happened. That evening, I was told there were five classmates of Jack's who had also entered into a crisis mode.

Suicide does not just affect the family. It affects the entire community, from the first responder who takes the call to those who arrive on scene and are with the family and the body of the person who committed suicide. It affects the school and the church the family attends and the place the family works. Suicide affects everyone.

The World Health Organization has estimated that each year one million people die from suicide. To put that in perspective, that is equivalent to one death by suicide every 40 seconds. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention estimated that in 2017 there were 1.4 million suicide attempts. In Elko alone, except for Wendover, the calls for service that we have seen and received are alarming.

Each Committee member should have two spread sheets ([Exhibit H](#)), one for 2018 [page 7] and one for 2019 [page 6]. These represent the calls for service that our dispatch center has received. In 2018, we had 21 calls for service where people died from suicide [row 4, page 7]. This does not include those who were transported to the hospital and later died. They are the calls of death by suicide. We had 225 calls where people threatened suicide and 128 calls for service where the person attempted suicide. Already for the first two months of 2019 [page 6], we have received 47 calls for suicide threats, 9 suicide attempts, and 4 deaths by suicide. With an estimated population of 52,649, including Wendover, these numbers are disturbing.

Sadly, in almost 12 years of dispatching, these types of calls are rising. We are failing our young people. We are supposed to be giving them life skills to succeed in college and beyond, but we are not. Textbook education is not going to solve this epidemic. There is an ancient proverb that it takes a village to raise a child that stems back to African and Native-American tribes. This still holds true today. We are the village and we need to help these young people.

Throughout the United States, there are many programs in place where students in grades 5-12 and in college have volunteered with peer programs and opened the lines of communication between trusted adults and those who need help. There are several different programs out there. What we are asking is that you take the existing law and require licensed educational personnel to receive training to implement these programs that last the year and not just the ten-minute talk and posters they are giving through health class.

Think of your children, your nieces, your nephews, your grandchildren. No one ever thinks suicide can happen to them until it does. Together, I ask that you help us reach these young people to help them reach their potential.

Lynette Vega, Private Citizen, Elko, Nevada:

On January 19, 2008, around 9 a.m., my cell phone rang while I was between Jackpot and Wells. It was my son crying uncontrollably. He said, "Rochelle killed herself." I asked him what he was talking about, and he said it again. "Rochelle killed herself." My father was

trying to call me, so I told my son I would answer and see what he could tell me so I could figure this out. We both hung up and I answered the call from my father. He said I needed to get home because the Air Force was looking for me. "Rochelle killed herself."

My daughter, my firstborn, Rochelle Marie Sloan, died by suicide at the age of 23 in South Carolina while serving in the Air Force. Since that horrific day, my life has taken a different direction. I am a strong advocate in my community in Elko County for suicide prevention and mental health. I am a mother of four children and a grandmother of nine. I have taught in the Elko County School District for 18 years. Last year, I transferred to the Elko Institute for Academic Achievement where I teach life skills for K-12 and reading and writing in the afternoon to seventh and eighth grades.

For the past ten years, I have facilitated the group Survivors of Suicide Loss of Northeastern Nevada. It is for those who have lost someone to suicide. Since 2014 I have been a board member with the Nevada Coalition for Suicide Prevention, and I am the rural representative for northern Nevada. I have worked alongside the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in western Nevada since 2016 in our community. In February 2018 I started an organization called Zero Suicides Elko County. I am here to advocate for our youth.

Rochelle was raised in Elko and graduated from Elko High School in 2002. She then went into the Air Force to fulfill her dreams. While Rochelle was in high school, she had friends die by suicide. That is when I should have acted on being an advocate, not after my daughter died. As a mother and an educator, I did not know how to talk to my daughter about her friends who died by suicide. Sadly, for most of us, we do not advocate until it happens to one of our loved ones or to someone close to us before we do anything. I carry guilt with me that I did not learn about suicide prevention until after Rochelle's death. She did not want to die. She only wanted her pain to end but she did not know how to stop her pain. Most people who die by suicide do not want to die; they only want the pain to end.

When I talk with my students, I tell them there are two things that are permanent in life: death and suicide. Life is always changing. Today is March 7, 2019. You will never have another March 7, 2019—never. That one minute you just had is gone, the last five minutes are gone, last week is gone, a month ago is gone, and a year ago is gone. You will never get that back. Life is always changing. Hang in there for another day.

Do you know how to talk to someone about suicide? Do you know the warning signs of suicide? Do you know what to do if someone has the warning signs of suicide? If you look at the 2017 Suicide in Nevada Fact Sheet [page 1, ([Exhibit H](#))] from the Office of Suicide Prevention, on the yellow bar it states, "More Nevadans die by suicide than by homicide, HIV/AIDS, or automobile accidents." The next page [page 2] shows the suicide death rates in the United States for 2017 along with the ages. The following page shows Nevada was eleventh out of 50 states [page 3]. The next page [page 4] shows Nevada youth risk behavior from 2015. The next page [page 5] shows Nevada seniors in crisis. Nevada ranks highest in the nation for senior suicides.

I would like to shift gears and talk about the bill. Section 1, subsection 2, states, "The State Board shall adopt regulations establishing courses of study in the prevention of suicide for pupils in grades 5 to 12, inclusive." As Ms. Piacitelli stated, children as young as six years old have attempted.

How do we increase coping skills among our youth? How do we increase protective factors among our youth? How does someone with a suicidal thought get through the day and get through that? How does someone get through abuse? How does someone with suicidal thoughts continue on? My goal, and I hope it is your goal as well, is to educate our youth at a young age about suicide prevention, teaching coping skills and protective factors more than one day a year.

Education is knowledge. When we do not talk about suicide prevention and mental health in our schools, it shows ignorance on our part. I hear kids talking about how difficult their lives are and how no one cares. They have not developed the coping skills to get past those bad moments. There needs to be no special certificate for a teacher to oversee their school. All there needs to be is a caring adult who would step forward to start a healthy lifestyle in their school with a range of students to help facilitate. Their voices need to be heard. Right now, suicide is crisis-driven. We need to get to our youth before the crisis.

In section 2, subsection 1, paragraph (b) and in section 2, subsection 2, the bill discusses training for licensed educational personnel employed by the school. I had a vice principal take the safeTALK training with me. The next day he approached me and told me he was glad he took the training because he had a fifth grader come to his office with his father telling him he wanted to die by suicide. He said up until that training, he had no idea what to say or what to talk about. He said the safeTALK training was very helpful for him.

This suicide alertness training, called safeTALK, is for everyone and originally came from LivingWorks Education. The Nevada Coalition for Suicide Prevention has trained people in Nevada to train others. I know there is an issue about communities, and I know you have done a lot for our communities and you want to give back. You have done so much already. Assembly Bill 114 would be one such bill to give back to our communities. One suicide affects 165 people or more. For every one suicide, there are 25 people who attempt. There are several high school kids who tried to die by suicide the night before, but who wake up and come to class because it did not happen.

If this bill is passed, you will save hundreds of lives in Nevada that I dearly love. Laws are put into place to protect us and to let us know someone cares. We need to shift the crisis-driven model to a protective-factor model. There needs to be student engagement while connecting with trusted adults. We need to spread social change and strength. It is okay to ask for help. Do not wait until your son, or your daughter, or your grandchild die by suicide to do something about suicide prevention and mental health education in our schools. I know there is a pushback for this bill because of funding. Every school district and every school could oversee how they would implement this.

Owyhee, Nevada got their Sources of Strength grant from their local hospital. Sources of Strength is a positive mental health program with students in charge. The money would not come from the state. There are also other programs, including Ending the Silence which is run by NAMI; and Life Skills 25 from Pace Learning Systems, and they are willing to help. It could also be part of an advisory team in the high schools. All it needs to have is a trusted, caring teacher who sees and feels the need for the program to be at the school.

Ninety percent of those who die by suicide had a mental health condition—diagnosed or undiagnosed. Our mental health is just as important as our physical health. When I have a child who has a sore throat, I take him to the doctor. If you have a child with a mental health condition, he needs to be taken to see someone as well. We need to change that norm of not taking our kids to mental health clinics. It is difficult for children to be successful when they are in physical pain, let alone in mental pain. They need our help and I need your help. I really hope we can all work together on this and stop making this a norm to die by suicide when things become difficult. I hope you find it in your hearts to sponsor this bill to save the lives of our loved ones and our children's dear friends. Suicide is preventable with proper training. This bill is not a new bill; it is a revised bill. It is just making it mandatory for our schools to teach these skills to our kids.

Assemblyman Ellison:

If you look at the bill, we are not asking to put any school district in trouble. There are currently programs that actually teach the teachers. The program staff would go to the different schools to help teach. As far as funding goes and the curriculum in the school, I believe it could be implemented very easily. Some schools are already doing this. We are just trying to get to those schools that are not.

For a while, I thought I was "John's Suicide Hotline." For hours and hours in the middle of the night, I was trying to help keep people from committing suicide. One of the things I learned was to stay on the phone with them as long as possible.

I ask you to look at this bill and please consider it. I know the difficulties the school districts are having and we are not trying to put any pressure on them; we are just trying to figure a way around this.

Chairman Thompson:

I want to thank you all for sharing. I can only imagine how tough it is, but I also can appreciate your advocacy to come forth and be that voice. We do have some questions from the Committee.

Assemblyman Flores:

I will echo Chairman Thompson's comments. I know it is difficult to share some of these stories through unimaginable pain. In this building, we meet a lot of people who devote their life work to make sure no one else feels that. I commend you for that and thank you for that work.

I am trying to understand what is happening now in our schools. I know you talked a little bit about what is happening, but could you give me an understanding of what is happening every day in our schools, or does it happen in some schools but not others, in terms of how early we are talking about suicide? What does it look like? When there is a suicide, how do the schools react? I will confess, I personally had a close friend of mine commit suicide when I was in high school. I had no clue that person was going through anything. I remember all of our friends sitting in a huge circle trying to figure out how we did not know. I think that is typically the answer. Could you tell me what is happening? What is happening before and what is happening after?

Assemblyman Ellison:

The teachers are the first to respond. They see it on a day-to-day basis and see children suffering, or they see the issues they might have. The kids usually go to the teachers before they go to anyone. Watching some of the situations I have seen and some of the parents I have talked to, these people cried out for help but no one understood what they were crying for and it was not taken seriously enough to realize there was a situation going on until it was too late.

Colleen Piacitelli:

What we usually see with the implementation of the SafeVoice program is we are getting several tips, if you will, about children who are cutting themselves or threatening suicide. They have told their friends they are going home. They are messaging their friends and the friends are taking snapshots of those photos and sending them through SafeVoice to show these people are going to end their lives. We are getting texts from children in middle school.

The six- and eight-year-olds that I have had calls on are from parents who are calling in distraught and honestly just do not know what to do because their six-year-old has come up to them and said he wants to kill himself.

These kids are learning about it through technology, other students, or possibly from a family member who has died by suicide, thinking it is the only way for them to cope with what is going on in their lives. What we are seeing is these kids and the reasons why they want to do this is because they do not know how to cope. They do not know what to do when a girl decides to go out with another guy, or they get an F on a test, or their parents say no. It is about coping skills, and we are trying to get them to open up. In order for them to open up, we have seen that they talk more to peers than they will to adults. These peer groups are helping them find that trusted adult they would feel comfortable talking to.

Assemblyman Flores:

Many of us on this Committee work with youth groups over the summer. For me to be involved in that, I had to go through a suicide prevention training and other kinds of training in order to be able to help and work with the youth. My understanding is every teacher has gone through some form of suicide training. Is that incorrect? Could someone perhaps educate me on that matter?

Lynette Vega:

No, that is not correct. Not all teachers have this training. What I am trying to do in Elko County is to make it mandatory that anyone who works with kids must take the safeTALK training because they do not know what to say and they do not know what to do. There are not always warning signs that someone is going to die by suicide. Sometimes there are and sometimes there are not. The kids do talk to their peers a lot more than they talk to adults. The peer groups available for suicide prevention help one another and they watch out for each other. At the same time, they also know the trusted adults they can go to.

Chairman Thompson:

In section 2, subsection 1, you are specifying "licensed educational personnel." I hope you understand that is not everyone in the school. There are schools that have long-term substitute teachers who are not licensed. Assemblyman Ellison, I do not know if that is your intent in the bill. That might be an area in which you might have to do an amendment if I am hearing correctly. I am hearing you say everyone working at the school, but the way the bill is written, you are saying only "licensed educational personnel." We also need to look at charter schools because charter schools only have to have a certain percentage of licensed teachers. Could we get clarification from legal regarding that issue?

Victoria Gonzalez, Committee Counsel:

Yes, Chairman Thompson, that is correct. This would only apply to licensed personnel and would not include paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, or other certifications not dependent on a license.

Assemblyman Ellison:

I totally agree that should be corrected by an amendment. Many of the substitute teachers who come in are just as good of a teacher and are one-on-one with these students. As many times as I have read this bill, I never caught that, so thank you.

Chairman Thompson:

I just wanted clarification.

Assemblywoman Miller:

Thank you for your concern over such a serious issue that we know is very serious these days among our youth. I have two brief questions. The first would be in section 1, subsection 2, where it states "in grades 5 to 12." I am a teacher, and I taught four years in fifth grade and four years in sixth grade. The interesting thing about that age group is the kids' maturity levels, emotionally and physically, can be miles apart in the same classroom. There are

students who still believe in Santa Claus. It is traumatic when those conversations come up. These kids are in a classroom with other kids who may be six feet tall, may have a mustache, and may be talking about their boyfriend or girlfriend, but they are still playing with dolls and believe in Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy. That being considered and knowing that I should always be aware of what I am saying and how I am saying it so that it is enough for the youngest but not too much, would this be something you would envision parents being required to sign permission slips for? Sometimes we have the same argument when it comes to sexual education in schools. Is this something children should automatically receive, or is this a decision parents would have the ability to make?

Lynette Vega:

I have also taught school from third grade through eighth grade. Even in my eighth grade class, I have some students who still play with trucks and cars and things. There will always be that wide range of students. However, for the younger students, it would be more life skills or coping skills and protective factors that they need to learn and know. As I said, I teach life skills to K-8 at a charter school. The fifth graders definitely need help; the fourth graders need help; they all need help. Some of them need more coping skills than others. In all the grades, we would be more focused on the positive and keeping ourselves alive.

Assemblywoman Miller:

Is this something you would envision would need parental permission?

Lynette Vega:

No. There would be no permission required because it would be regular curriculum in the classroom.

Assemblywoman Miller:

Why is it we are looking at teachers? To be honest, schools are actually the institution in which a lot of the prevention happens. As you acknowledged before, students are reporting what they hear and their concerns are for other students. Students are coming forward themselves. Teachers and other staff often recognize there is a problem and are approaching kids. We know there are astronomical numbers of suicide prevention protocols happening in the schools. Once we know a student is thinking about suicide, the team at the school institutes the protocol. It sounds like this is something you envision teachers doing rather than social workers or counselors. When you talk about putting it in the curriculum, I am trying to envision the carve-out of where that would fit with the minutes, funding, and resources that are already available. Would it be more appropriate for counselors and social workers—for whom that is their primary licensing and professional focus—to come in and deliver those trainings?

Lynette Vega:

It would not be so much a lecture, it would be more of an advisory group. It would be a group of students who would take over, but there would be an adult who would oversee it.

Assemblywoman Miller:

The bill makes it sound like it is curriculum. The bill makes it sound like teachers coming in to instruct students. What you are saying is you envision it as more of a peer mediation or peer advisory teams developed in the school. Is that correct?

Lynette Vega:

Yes, that is correct, and for the school to be held accountable that it is being taught at their school. I have taught at several different schools and it is not all being taught.

Assemblywoman Miller:

The way the bill is currently written, it does sound like instruction coming directly from a teacher or staff member. If we are now talking about advisory peer groups, and again, many schools have those, we need to be clear. To hold a school accountable to make sure it happens—we would definitely want to encourage schools to do it and make it available. There are many things now that are challenging because a peer program would only be effective if the peers came forward and wanted to participate. I just want to be clear that that is what you are envisioning. We are not talking about instruction happening in the classroom being embedded into certain classes or courses.

Assemblyman Ellison:

I agree. I think the teachers could have short study times strictly on this area. What I envision is the one-on-one. The people who see the children every day see the problems these children are going through with broken families, et cetera. They are seeing what these children are doing. I think that is important because the teachers are the ones who see these children every day. If the teachers learn how to do this and teach it, even if it is a short course, I think that would have the effect. You already blew me out of the water by saying there is no Santa Claus. When it comes down to the best ones who know the students, it is the teachers. If you try to bring someone in just to teach different classes once in a while, I do not think it would have the same effect it would have as a teacher being able to say this is what we are going to learn for a short period of time and let it move forward.

As far as the age group goes, I think that should still be up to the school to make that decision. One school might want to plant the seed when they are young, but another might want it to be seventh or eighth grade. I think it should be an issue with the schools.

I had a school police officer call me the other day. He was talking about pictures on a cell phone that went viral. Because of the pictures on the cell phone, the little girls were going to kill themselves. Thank God he had enough training in what to do. He went through these training programs. Once he saw the pictures, he started reading all the messages and that is when he found out about the girls getting ready to kill themselves over it. It is not just groups, it is the school that sees a lot of this stuff and addresses it. I have had friends who have killed themselves, and it is a tragedy. I often wonder if I could have done something better. I was there for them, but if we teach it at an earlier age, we could plant the seed. Death is forever.

Assemblywoman Hansen:

I appreciate the intent and what you are trying to accomplish. I do have a couple of questions. Where are the materials? You mentioned safeTALK. Who is safeTALK? What is the genesis behind their materials?

Lynette Vega:

It originally started from LivingWorks Education. The Nevada Coalition for Suicide Prevention does the training. They come to our area and do the training. They do the training in Carson City and Reno. They do it all over in Nevada.

Chairman Thompson:

We also have a representative from the Department of Education who can explain it when she comes up.

Assemblywoman Hansen:

Is it safeTALK or SafeVoice?

Chairman Thompson:

There are actually two models. We will differentiate when the Department of Education representative speaks.

Assemblywoman Hansen:

My daughter is working on her master's in psychology. She has brought to my attention some studies she has gone over in her course of work. I also pulled up statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, saying from 2010 to 2015 teen suicides had risen after two decades of falling. There was a study done between the correlation and causation, even though they will not say exactly, with social media. In my opinion, the advent of social media and the exposure of our young people to social media has brought this with it, and this is inferred from the study, that there are certainly a lot of other factors that we might be seeing with teen suicides. As we address the issue of teen suicide, and while prevention is so important, I think there could be a major component here that is societal and is insidiously affecting our youth.

Unfortunately, I think the numbers are proving that to a younger and younger degree these children are getting smart phones, having access to things, seeing things, being victims of cyberbullying, and having tremendous peer pressure, and with that there is that phenomenon of contagiousness. I know there is a fear sometimes when we talk about suicide, especially with youth, and when there is a suicide among youth, that there can sometimes be a strange phenomenon of a rash of suicides. My one big concern would be the age at which we deal with these children on this subject. How can we have some comfort? It is a double-edged sword. By talking about it, what comes first, the chicken or the egg? We bring it up and we talk about it and their little minds get working. They are exposed to things on the Internet.

Certainly there are people who are far smarter than I am who have studied this. I would want some comfort to know that the curriculum, if this were to go forward, really treads carefully in making sure we have been looking into these studies and we do not see some other unintended consequences or trigger some sort of other response than what we are looking for.

Our deepest condolences, and we appreciate your intent. We are all touched by this horrific tragedy that touches so many of our lives.

Assemblywoman Krasner:

Thank you for bringing this very important bill. Thank you to the both of you for sharing your stories with us. I know it must be so difficult for both of you, but what you are doing is very important. We are listening to you.

Assemblywoman Torres:

As educators, we definitely see how suicide affects our school community and outside of our school community as well. As an educator, I did receive suicide training and crisis intervention. In fact, we take those trainings every year and they are great refresher courses for us so we can think about how we do respond to that intervention. My concern is when a student does go to an educator about something like that, we would be requiring the educator to intervene. Ultimately, as an educator, when a student comes to me about something like that, my immediate response is to find a school counselor or a social worker. I do not want to take on the role as the advocate for the student, and I do not know if that should be the expectation. That may not be the intent of this bill, but that is my concern. I do not think we want teachers to take on that role because we do not have the training our school counselors and social workers have.

Assemblyman Ellison:

I totally agree with you. We do not want the teachers to be the judge and executioner. What we want is for teachers to recognize if there is a problem and get ahold of counselors or families. It is not for the teacher to take this on as a burden for themselves, but they may be the ones who see the problems and could forward concerns to the right people to help. The father of a friend I grew up with committed suicide. Those kids never got over it. They are adults now and to this day, they still cannot cope with it. I think if those kids had had someone to go to, it would have helped them a lot. We do not want to put our teachers in that line, but if the teachers see there is a problem, they know how to get these children help. It could be the child's parents or someone else. The teacher is the one who sees these children every day and that is why I think it is so important. Some schools are teaching this. We do not want them to change their course. We are just asking the schools that are not teaching it to have something that will help. That is all we are asking.

Chairman Thompson:

Seeing no further questions, I will open the hearing for testimony in support. As a reminder, according to Assembly Standing Rule No. 54, support is the approval of the measure as written or with proposed amendments that are approved by the sponsor. I will then open the hearing for those in opposition, which is defined as not supporting the measure as written or

opposing the bill as revised by an amendment not approved by the sponsor. I will then ask for neutral testimony, which means offering a particular insight on a measure, but no position is expressed. I will be limiting testimony to two minutes each.

Robin V. Reedy, Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Nevada:

I have been the executive director of this organization for a little over a year, but I was a volunteer for eight years prior. We have successfully been able to go into the schools to talk about mental health. In fact, on Monday our organization was invited to give the Ending the Silence presentation to health groups at McQueen High School. We gave five presentations, each about 45 minutes long. It was the first time I was actually able to go in and watch the presentations in person. I was fascinated at how all the students paid attention. In fact, while there is nothing very significant in the details of suicide, we certainly talked about suicide. We talked about people having changes in their behavior. We talked about the fact that if students are afraid someone is considering suicide, they need to ask. It will not make someone commit or complete suicide by asking; it will show them that you care. In those five classes, there were three or four people who left the room. I do not know all the details as to why, but we were prepared for people leaving the room to go to their counselors.

The way I read this bill is exactly that. Schools should have some kind of presentation and teachers should be aware of suicide. We are in support of this bill.

Joelle Gutman, Government Affairs Liaison, Washoe County Health District:

The Washoe County Health District is in support of this bill. Currently in Washoe County, with the Health District and The Children's Cabinet, Inc., in partnership, seventh graders in our community are receiving education about suicide awareness. There is also an optional parental opt-in suicide screening assessment. It is a great program, but unfortunately, it is a one-time money allocation. We will see if we can continue it and expand on it.

On a personal note, at my former job I advocated for mental health in seven rural counties. I had the opportunity to work with Ms. Vega and Ms. Piacitelli and the Zero Suicides group. I want to thank them for being so passionate. As an example, this is a multifaceted approach to open the conversation and dialogue to mental health. It is not just for mental health providers. This is a paradigm shift. We are training our first responders in crisis intervention team training. We are training our dispatchers. We are training stakeholders to recognize signs and symptoms so we can get people to the right help. I thank Assemblyman Ellison for bringing this to our attention.

Steven Conger, representing Power2Parent:

For the record, I do believe in Santa Claus. We appreciate Assemblyman Ellison for bringing this issue. There is a moral issue we are trying to solve and sometimes the actual nuts and bolts get messy, but we appreciate this bill and what he is doing to try to give teachers tools in order to recognize issues that may be going on. We are in support.

Chairman Thompson:

Is there anyone else who would like to testify in support of the bill? [There was no one.]
Is there anyone present who would like to testify in opposition to the bill? [There was no one.]
Is there anyone present who would like to testify as neutral to the bill?

**Christy McGill, Director, Office for a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment,
Nevada Department of Education:**

I would like to provide some clarification as to what is currently going on in our schools and districts.

Chairman Thompson:

Before you begin, Ms. McGill, could you please clarify safeTALK and SafeVoice? We will not time you on that, but we do want to be concise.

Christy McGill:

I will talk about SafeVoice first, and then Ms. Allen will speak to safeTALK. SafeVoice is the 24/7 application tip line that students can call if they are worried about one of their peers. From that call, the Department of Public Safety will prioritize the call. If it is an immediate endangerment to a student, law enforcement is involved as well as the school team. Even if it is just general concern, the school team is always notified. In that school team, *Nevada Revised Statutes* states that if the school has a school counselor or school social worker, they should be part of the team, as should an administrator and a teacher or law enforcement.

Those tips go to the school team who will put into place a safety plan, some other kind of therapeutic intervention, or just a check-in. Each district has different protocols and each of the districts has post-intervention protocols as well focusing on the concerns we heard today about contagion.

Misty Vaughan Allen, M.A., Coordinator of the Statewide Program for Suicide Prevention, Division of Public and Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Human Services:

The Office of Suicide Prevention, partnering with the Nevada Coalition for Suicide Prevention, offers an array of trainings, from one-hour to two-day Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) in suicide first aid. We have many of our behavioral health care providers mandated for two hours of suicide prevention education or awareness training, so we try to keep that menu up-to-date, evidence-based, and current so people are not seeing the same videos year after year. We want to make sure this is fresh for people.

As for safeTALK, it is one of those trainings for suicide alertness. It is a three-hour training and excellent for any skill level. We believe suicide prevention is everyone's business. We have found this to be great for school educators and administrators because of the time frame. In those three hours, we see quite a significant paradigm shift and how someone looks at their ability to help someone with thoughts of suicide. That is offered, but it does have a fee associated with it, unfortunately. We have some trainings that are one hour and do

not have a fee except for personnel time. That is the challenge with suicide prevention. Our two-day ASIST has a significant fee for materials, so safeTALK would as well.

Christy McGill:

For further clarification, there is our school safety omnibus bill that does talk about this a little bit and may be a place that we can reinforce prevention in that each one of our districts would have a school safety plan that included managing suicide crises or any other kind of emergency inclusive of prevention, postvention, and assessment tools. That might be another spot where we can increase the prevention part of the suicide protocols.

Mary Pierczynski, representing Nevada Association of School Superintendents:

We would like to thank Assemblyman Ellison for bringing this important information forward. We are in the neutral position because I think we need some more clarification and maybe a little more work on the bill. We understand the importance of suicide prevention and identification of kids we think may possibly be prone to committing suicide. We need some further clarification on what the vision is for the teachers. One thing this bill does really point out is the importance of our counselors and social workers in our schools. We know there is additional funding that needs to happen in order to have those counselors and social workers in our schools. We hope the Legislature will take that seriously when you look at funding education.

Chairman Thompson:

Are there any final comments, Assemblyman Ellison?

Assemblyman Ellison:

I want to thank this Committee for hearing this bill because I think it is so important. As you heard from the testimony, everyone agrees something needs to be done to help. I was happy to hear about some of the other programs that we can gather. I think we can make this work, and any amendments that we need to add, I would be more than happy to look at. I think we need to add substitute teachers and I will put that amendment forward. Thank you again. Our children's lives and their families' lives depend on it.

Chairman Thompson:

I will close the hearing on Assembly Bill 114. Is there anyone here in Carson City or in Las Vegas who would like to speak in public comment? [There was no one.]

This meeting is adjourned [at 2:55 p.m.].

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Sharon McCallen
Recording Secretary

Lori McCleary
Transcribing Secretary

APPROVED BY:

Assemblyman Tyrone Thompson, Chairman

DATE: _____

EXHIBITS

[Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda.

[Exhibit B](#) is the Attendance Roster.

[Exhibit C](#) is a document titled "Nevada's Classrooms: An Opportunity to Succeed: 2019," submitted by Adam Young, Superintendent, White Pine County School District.

[Exhibit D](#) is written testimony presented by Teri White, Superintendent, Douglas County School District; and President, Nevada Association for School Superintendents.

[Exhibit E](#) is written testimony presented by Adam Young, Superintendent, White Pine County School District.

[Exhibit F](#) is written testimony presented by David Jensen, Superintendent, Humboldt County School District.

[Exhibit G](#) is written testimony presented by Wayne Workman, Superintendent, Lyon County School District.

[Exhibit H](#) is a document titled "Suicide in Nevada Fact Sheet: 2017," submitted by Assemblyman John Ellison, Assembly District No. 33, regarding [Assembly Bill 114](#).