

Assembly

MINUTES OF HEARING - EDUCATION COMMITTEE - FEBRUARY 23, 1971

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PRESENT: Swallow, Frazzini, Foote, Hawkins, Wilson, White, Smalley

ABSENT: None

GUESTS: Burnell Larson, State Department of Education
E. L. Newton, Nevada Taxpayer
John Hawkins, Supervisor Carson City Schools
Al Seeliger, Nevada School Trustees Association
Marvin Moss, Washoe County School Dist.
Marvin Roth, Washoe County School District
Dr. James Shields, University of Nevada, Reno
Mrs. Alyce J. Pierce, Fallon, Nevada (Interested Party)
Mrs. Peggy Thompson, Fallon, Nevada, Parent
Mrs. Vivian Freeman, Reno Nevada, parent
Richard O. Freeman, Reno, Nevada, parent
Richard L. Morgan, Nevada State Ed. Association

Chairman Swallow convened the hearing at 10:20 A.M. and asked that speakers stand at the microphone and introduce themselves. He asked that those in favor of AB 21 come forward first and then the opponents.

Mr Richard L. Morgan said he would like to speak generally. He said reduction of class size was of major importance of the educators, particularly in Washoe and Clark County and that they had done a survey in the past three or four months regarding all of the actual class loads and have had very good returns on them. He said that teachers in all of the fifteen small counties did not report excessive class loadage in their school. He said, that both in Clark and Washoe, the problem was so sever as they see it that they placed this as number one topic with the school board. He said that he was aware of the fact that in Clark County District a survey has been done as to what it would cost to reduce the load down to thirty through grades 4 of the school program. I believe, he stated, that all of us have a problem with AB 21 because it is written generally, it would affect the band class, the typing class and others. He said that he believed that there were many school classes in which you could effectively work with over thirty youngsters. We went on that they did have problems of overcrowding and the disability that has occured because of this particularly in the lower grades to a degree that it is possible to reduce the load they are quite in favor of it. He said there was one other factor concerning this bill; that it was his understanding that the State Board of Education had the power to reduce size and he would rather it would come from there rather than through state law. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you Mr. Morgan.

Mr. Richard O. Freeman a parent then came to the front. He said he was very presumptuous, he supposed but he felt that people should express their views. He said he did not know if this was a good bill to pass but he did know that but he felt that they were doing work here that they should have been doing before because his child was in a class of thirty-eight and the children did not feel they could ask a question in the class because this was a luxury that could not be afforded. He said he was ashamed that he was the only parent concerned enough to comedown here and ask that they do something to reduce the teacher student ratio.

Chairman thanked Mr. Freeman and said he was very pleased that he was concerned enough to testify. We wish more people would do this, he added.

Shirlee Wedow spoke next and said she was the coordinator of the State Parents and Teachers' Association. She said that there were already regulations in the Nevada plan that would take care of overloading in the classrooms if applied. However, if they don't find any other way to accomplish this they will have to do it by legislation, she said.

Mr. John Paul, Superintendent of Administration for the school district spoke representing the school board, Clark County. He said this situation was of number one priority. He said that in times past they had tried to deal with the legislature with lists of figures and that type of thing and that this really isn't the issue. He said the issue what and how do we get to a lower class size. Our priorities for the year have already been decided on by the school board that we want to have in our district as a maximum size for kindergarten through the second grade no more than thirty students he explained and to do this we work through the established budget and then took a projected enrollment for each school by school and what we expect for each school to have next year and lowered the ratio to the point where we could insure that there be a maximum class size per person. Now, hopefully the results of this would be to provide better education. One other thing, he said, that we try to do this through legislation at some distant point is not feasible. (Mr. Paul had passed a summary of this plan around when he began to speak.) He went over this with the Committee. He said that one factor that would make this difficult was the large amount of incoming students each year. He mentioned that they were going to do this some way or other and one thing they were going to have more room and that would entail having more portable classrooms.

Assemblyman Smalley then asked how they had arrived at the computation shown on the summary given them.

He said the pupil teacher ratio for the first grade at the present time was 28 but to become up with the set maximum they would have to go to 26 to 1. He said take, for example, Crestwood, which has 80 students; you then divide this 26 into that and you come up with three teachers needed. Where you run into trouble is when you get to school with, say, forty students and then you have two classes of twenty students, he added.

Mrs. White asked if they were having double sessions in kindergarten but not in first grade. He answered her, no, not in first grade. She asked Mr. Paul if they could manage this somehow but putting the brighter ones with a teacher etc. He answered here that they wanted to do this as much as possible from the third grade up, working in the first and second grades according to the present plan and then try to establish these other ways. He said, that as you know, we are under a court order that no matter what we do it must be done so as not to bring about half day sessions.

Chairman asked if there was anyone else who would like to speak on this bill or suggest possible amendments.

Marvin Roth from the Washoe County School District came to the front to speak. He said that he would like to go on record in favor of the local autonomy of

school boards and also the idea of having the problem of teacher pupil ratio be the top priority item and he could assure the Committee that this has been the case in the Washoe County School District and will be. Our school board is very concerned about the teacher pupil ratio, he said, and the law as it is presently constituted would have the effect of adding more teachers but it doesn't provide for the paying of these additional teachers. In our case it would cost around \$500,000 in additional salaries and then we would have no place to house them, therefore the construction of housing would constitute a couple of million dollars would be what it would cost to reduce the figure by one. He thought it would reduce the quality of education as it would reduce the use of aids which if our classes go too high we normally add aids. He elaborated on this by saying sometimes they added three teachers and some aids rather than add 13 teachers. He summed it up by saying that he felt this must remain with the school board to make the decisions as they have considerably more information.

Miss Hawkins said that aids did not assure the best quality of education for the children indicating that if the classroom size was logically reduced there would be no need for aids.

Marvin Roth said, of course, the best way to do this was to add more teachers but sometimes this was an effective compromise measure. The aids do a wide variety of activities which includes everything but the introduction of concepts, that the actual instructional part was done by the teacher.

Chairman asked if this was a statewide concept and he was told by Mr. Roth that only applied to Washoe County, these figures, that is.

Mr. Smalley asked about of one half million dollars how much would go for administration.

Mr. Paul said he was not prepared to answer that, but that the percentage figure going now would still prevail.

Mrs. White asked why they couldn't add portable housing. She said she introduced this bill was that every child had the right to learn to read and they were not learning to read and if the classes were reduced in size this might help solve the problem.

Chairman said that they might teach the teachers to teach to read better.

Mr. Wilson asked if he could tell the approximate class size now of elementary classes in Washoe County. He was told that averages are really quite deceiving. Some were required to go much higher than the average and some much lower. When they get to 38 in a class they normally add aids, he said.

Mr. John Hawkins, Superintendent of Carson City Schools spoke next on the agenda. He said he was speaking for one of the smaller school districts and he would try not to duplicate on the comments made earlier although he felt the same way but he would like to repeat that they too considered this of top priority. They have had a lot of students moving into this community and he felt the Board should be complimented on the vast job accomplished. On February the eighth the school trustees passed a resolution to reduce class sizes from the 1st grade to the third grade to 25 students, from the fourth grade to 28 and to no more than thirty for the

rest of the grades through high school. He said that to do this financially the board figured it would cost \$100,000 which they did not have at the present time. He explained how this would be broken down. He said that they had many more students at the beginning of the school year and the overlap would have to be divided between the schools and it would be hard to explain to the parents why they were bussing their children. Basically, in a good sound school district we naturally try to keep the class sizes at that level so we can perform the functions of teaching children and said he felt that it should be kept at the local level.

Burnell Larson spoke next as Superintendent of Public Instruction. He said that he did agree with the comments made with reference to local autonomy and he thought should be preserved. He said the basic problem was what do you tell a parent who calls and says my child is in a class of 38 or 40 and I don't think a good learning situation is going on and this does happen. He said as far as pupil teacher ratio is concerned Nevada probably leads the nation in low pupil teacher ratio, our total ratio is about 1 to 24. However, this does not apply to specific classes. He said one of the basic problem is dollars and we are proposing where personnel be placed at the two larger school district so that additional dollars can be placed in large urban areas. He said was their responsibility and they were trying to meet it in this way, through the urban areas. He said they had an evaluation document on assessment. He stated that when you effect a maximum class size you effect a minimum as well and that if its true that certain classes on the high school level can operate with sixteen students to advantage where there are only sixteen takers for a particular subject, calculus, physics, whatever. If we were to say that a maximum class size is thirty then we would levi it on the high schools as well and it would rule out the possibility of having some class as well. He thought no magic number was going to legislate quality and he didn't think you could legislate it. He thought they could work for better relationships and ratios and they could take up some of the slack if the money committees decide they can allocate the money in that fashion.

Chairman asked if anyone would like to ask Mr. Larson any questions.

Mrs. White asked if they didn't include in this ratio if the total number of students wasn't being divided by the total number of personnel teachers, administrators, nurses, every type of teacher. What would you suggest as a possible minimum.

Mr. Larson said that what he thought was that he didn't think that legislation could really do the job.

Mrs. White answered that the job didn't get done unless someone threatened---

Mr. Larson said that he didn't think they should want to threaten school districts.

Mrs. White said no, not really, she was doing it because someone had to take action.

He went on to expound on this subject because of factors such as teaching reading, you work by persuasion and the amount of money available to you.

Mrs. White said well maybe what we need to do is to add more money.

Mr. Larson said there was no question about that.

Mrs. White said this was her bill and she proposed it because the teachers were complaining they had too large classes and she asked why this was and she said in order to provide music and some of the others they had to have larger classes. But you should have extra money for things you really need but you don't need small classes in music, typing etc.

Mr. Larson said no. He said you shouldn't have a minimum or a maximum. Their problem seemed to be they didn't have enough money to set out what they wanted to accomplish. It boils down to one factor, alone, and that is providing sufficient dollars for total education and that is what we never really have. He said the law gave the State Board of Education the authority to regulate class sizes. They have never said, however, he maintained that unless you reduce class sizes your money will be withheld. He again repeated 24.2 was a state wide average.

Mr. Larson and Miss Hawkins had a conversation back and forth about whether this figure included all kinds of personnel. Mr. Larson said teacher to student, teacher to student. Miss Hawkins said but this included all kinds of teacher and he said granted.

Miss Hawkins asked for a copy of how their computations were arrived at and he said he didn't think it would give the information she wanted. This would have to be discussed but she could have one, he said.

Chairman said that one thing they had to do was figure the over all balance.

Mr. Larson said even more money or more and better deployment of people.

Miss Hawkins said people just want it so Mary and Johnny can read. They add programs and never seem to get at the basic problem. This is what Juanita has behind her bill.

Mr. Larson said that he was sure that he had done it too. I think she has called major attention to one of the problems in our school district.

Chairman said they really appreciated Mr. Larson's help today and are there any others who care to speak.

Mrs. Peggy Thompson, a parent spoke next from Fallon. She said she felt that there should be more than thirty in a class especially in the lower grades because here they the formation of the thinking of the child and the way things are going they spend a lot of money rehabilitating them after they get out of high school and she felt all of our rehabilitation program could be cut down a little and use this money in the lower grades so that the child could have a good education in reading and writing etc. and

grades 1 to 6 are very important in a child's life and they should definitely have smaller rooms and spend more money on children so that each child will have a foundation of education.

Chairman are there are any questions? Anyone who wished to stay could do so, he said.

Guest were excused at this point and Chairman said the Committee would discuss AB 308, AB 326 and AB 340.

AB 308 would permit school district to enforce its discipline code against nonresident school district pupil.

A brief discussion on the bill followed.

Miss Hawkins made the motion to "do pass" on AB 308.

Motion seconded.

Motion carried.

AB 326 would remove certain conflicting limitations on expenditures of public school funds. It was mentioned that this was primarily a cleanup bill to resolve certain conflicting items.

Motion was made do pass on AB 326.

Motion seconded.

Motion carried.

Next discussion followed on AB 340. Would remove age restrictions for admission of physically handicapped, mentally retarded minors to special schools, classes.

Discussion followed.

Miss Foote made the motion to indefinitely postpone AB 340 as it was inadequately worded.

Motion seconded.

Motion carried.

Chairman said that AB 3 had been amended and was now ready to take action.

Discussion followed and it was decided to have further time on this bill and to hold a meeting at earliest possible convenience.

Meeting adjourned.

