

## **SYNTHESIS OF MEETING 1 ON OPTIMAL FUNDING: NEVADA COMMISSION ON SCHOOL FUNDING**

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### Introductory Note

This synthesis is constructed entirely from the Nevada Commission on School Funding’s initial conversation on defining the term ***optimal funding*** during its September 25, 2020, meeting. It is NOT a draft definition. It IS an organization of the Commissioner’s comments into three distinct categories.

- **Item 1** includes comments that related to characteristics of the definition that the Commission will collectively develop by November. This comprehensive list can be viewed as suggested qualities that the Commission wants its eventual definition to embody. Some qualities are likely more important than others to the Commission, but all of these arose once or more in the initial conversation. These qualities can help the Commission during its proceedings to clarify what is important about their definition but are not likely to be explicitly included in the definition.
- **Item 2** reflects the tension between *adequate* and *optimal* funding that was pointed out by several Commissioners during the September 25, 2020, conversation. There appeared to be general consensus that the Commission viewed the terms as two levels of funding—with funding that is *optimal* being higher than funding that is [merely] *adequate*. If it is confirmed by the Commission in its October 16, 2020, meeting, Item 2 may be viewed as background or an assumption that is fundamental to how the Commission eventually defines the term *optimal funding*. This concept may or may not become an explicit component of the definition.
- **Item 3** contains raw material or possible explicit components of the eventual definition of optimal funding. It begins with the assertion that funding is strategic to some goal or intent and that *optimal funding* reaches for desired states beyond what is possible with adequate funding. A significant question for the Commission is how it will select and express the intended goals or desired state that *optimal funding* will enable. Their collective answers will form the core of the definition they are developing.

## Synthesis of Commissioners' Initial Comments on Optimal Funding

1. The Commission's definition of **optimal** funding should be ...
  - a. Transparent and easy for the public to understand.
  - b. Capable of being tracked over time for accountability.
  - c. Honest with the public and legislature about the inadequacy of the current level of funding.
  - d. Clear in its strategic intent, not just adding money.
  - e. More comprehensive than the inflation or Cost of Living index.
  - f. Anchored with the current level of funding with a plan for progress toward attainable goals or targets.
  - g. Considerate of the hold harmless level.
  - h. Inclusive of the needs of adults in the system: adult learners, professional development of staff, and the operating capacity of the Nevada Department of Education.
2. **Optimal** funding exceeds adequate funding.
  - a. *Adequate* funding has been the basis of the Nevada funding studies.
  - b. *Adequate* implies sufficiency or a floor sufficient to support all students' meeting the standards established by the State Board of Education.
  - c. *Adequate* funding has been the basis of legal findings in several states.
3. **Optimal** funding is aspirational or goal oriented.
  - a. *Optimal* funding is strategic or instrumental in leading to the attainment of education system goals. Goals for optimal funding may be expressed in several ways, some of which are ends (outputs and outcomes) and some of which are means or inputs:
    - i. In terms of desired student outcomes. (May involve the State Board of Education to set goals such as reading achievement.)
    - ii. In terms of desired school or learning environments. (Examples include class size, access to and availability of technology and other learning resources, etc.)
    - iii. In terms of the ability of Nevada to attract educators in the national market.
    - iv. In terms of comparability to the per-pupil funding of other states. (The example of setting a target of meeting or exceeding the median nationally was mentioned more than once.)
  - b. Beginning with the goal or end, it should be possible to plan backward to a funding level required to accomplish it.