

An Interview with Jhone Ebert

Perspectives from the COVID-19 Pandemic: Leadership and Learning in Nevada

Produced by:

The University of Nevada Las Vegas  
The Lincy Institute  
2024

Principal Researchers:

Magdalena Martinez, Ph.D. and Kelliann Beavers, Ph.D.

The following interview was a part of the “Perspectives from the COVID-19 Pandemic: Leadership and Learning in Nevada” research project. The recorded interview and transcript were made possible through the generosity of The Lincy Institute at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The goal of the project was to understand and document how Nevada organizations and leaders responded to the myriad challenges that the pandemic engendered. The interviewees thank The Lincy Institute and their supporters for the opportunity to reflect on their roles throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers also acknowledge the following individuals who contributed to the conceptualization, data collection, and analysis of the project: Dr. John Hudak, Dr. Makada Henry-Nickie, Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio, Taylor Cummings, Peter Grema, Kristian Thymianos, Saha Salahi, Madison Frazee, and Katie Lim.

Each interviewee had the opportunity to review their transcript. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the interviewee. This interview features Jhone Ebert, Superintendent of Public Instruction for Nevada Department of Education, and was conducted on 11/1/22 by Magdalena Martinez and Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio. This interview covers topics including reflections on leadership, organizational challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.

## **Interview with Jhone Ebert**

**Date: 11-01-2022**

**SPEAKERS: Magdalena Martinez, Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio, Jhone Ebert**

**Magdalena Martinez** [00:04] All right. So we are here, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022, with Jhone Ebert from the Nevada Department of Education. And so, before we get started, I just want to confirm that you're okay with us recording this conversation.

**Jhone Ebert** [00:14]  
Yes, I am.

**Magdalena Martinez** [00:16]  
And that any quotes we include for future writings, that it will be okay to attribute them to you.

**Jhone Ebert** [00:22]  
Yes.

**Magdalena Martinez** [00:22]  
Wonderful. Thank you so much. Carmen?

**Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio** [00:26]  
Great. Thank you today for talking to us. So, as an undergraduate researcher, I'm very excited to get to hear from people like you. If you could just start by letting us know, or describe your role throughout the pandemic, and the role of the State Department of Education as a whole.

**Jhone Ebert** [00:46]  
So [when] I think about the role of the department, and what transpired during the pandemic, there really are two parts to the answer to that question. The first concerns COVID itself. The second has to do with making sure we continued to support the educational welfare and well-being of all of our Nevada students; even as the pandemic played out, were we doing all we could to support the learning environment and make sure that progress was being made on that front.

So, the first part of my job is to support districts in their pursuit of equity and excellence. With respect to the pandemic, things were certainly complicated. During COVID, everything revolved around that and doing what was needed. I recall when news of COVID's impact on K12 education first surfaced. I still remember that Sunday like it was yesterday. Promoting students' safety and health was our number one concern. It still is. Whether we're talking about the pandemic or not, student health and safety, along with staff well-being, is top of the list of important things to attend to.

And then also, making sure that we continued to advance learning with our students. That includes all of required assessments, making sure that we had the resources that we needed for

health and safety, and prioritizing the needs. Optimizing one of our core values in the Department of Education is equity, and so that means prioritizing the needs of those that have the steepest climb. It includes connecting resources – we had state resources, and we had federal resources that we needed to mobilize. It involves generating policy – working and advising the governor on what policy shifts we had to make quickly, to make sure that we were supporting our students. It involves assessing the environment, prioritizing, connecting, identifying where our gaps were, and moving forward in a very fluid environment. That was the overarching intent of the work we did at that moment within the Department of Education.

What I think, as I reflect on this piece, all of that was moving very quickly, but we also needed to continue to move forward with major and strategic pieces of the work within the state. And so, keeping the trains running on time, we looked at and kept moving with, in our state – very important – the funding formula. The funding formula was 54 years old, and we needed to make sure that the Pupil-Centered Funding Formula identified the differentiation of funds for our English Language Learners, our special education, our students at risk, as well as our gifted and talented. So we really had two tracks during COVID that we were working toward, and those are just two of the major pieces that I would provide you with in that area.

**Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio** [04:02]

Thank you, Jhone. I was actually in the gifted and talented program growing up. So I would just like to take this opportunity to say thank you for doing that. Keep doing it. I'm glad that it's at the forefront.

And so, talking about that, would you mind talking about how your leadership style had to adjust or shift during the pandemic – or at different points throughout, right? Because if you think about it as a timeline-

**Jhone Ebert** [04:29]

Yes. I guess I would back up in that respect. From 1989 to 2015 I spent 26 years as a teacher and administrator in Clark County School District. From 2015 to 2019 I spent four years in New York State as Senior Deputy Commissioner of Education for that state. Since 2019, I have been State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Nevada. When I first started in this position (April 2, 2019), it was the middle of the legislative session. So, that was the immediate focus. I worked through that, of course. But even during the legislative session I was keenly aware how important it was for me to build relationships with everyone across the state.

As soon as the legislative session ended, I planned and then conducted a listening tour. It took me from about September of 2019 through January, 2020. My last school district on the listening tour was Pershing County, and that was in January of 2020. And it was a listening tour; it wasn't just going in, and camera and all of those things, and saying, "Hey, the state superintendent is here." But I really wanted to understand the context of our entire state and build relationships. So, on each day of the tour, I started at 7:00 am with the local district superintendent. Then I would meet with the cabinet members of the local school district. Following that, I would make site visits with schools. Then in the evening, I would meet with community members. In those meetings, I listened and heard what they had to offer.

I share that first and foremost because I think a lot of people missed that part of leadership, of building relationships and making sure that you know who you're serving. That helped immensely. Six weeks after the announcement of a pandemic (March 11, 2020), when the determination was made to move from face-to-face learning to online learning. Local school board members knew who I was because I had met with them all during my statewide tour. They knew I had their best interest at heart. Much of the challenge and difficulty at that time was because we weren't receiving clear direction from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and from the U.S. Department of Education (USDoE). As it turns out, we didn't have clear guidance because they (CDC and USDoE) didn't always know themselves what was exactly transpiring with COVID itself. But because those relationships were in place (between me and the local school district leaders), we were able to have conversations, be agile, and keep students, student learning, and staff welfare at the forefront of all of our decisions.

So, in those moments, we worked on building and sustaining relationships and making sure that everyone had a voice. We have a very diverse state, as you know, and we're listening to all of our voices, but keeping our children first and foremost in the work that we do, during the pandemic, helped us to get to where we are today.

**Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio** [07:06]

That's really great to hear, Jhone. Thank you. You did break up your response to reference a few moments as a timeline. Would you mind identifying a few pivotal moments that you think shaped that response in leadership? So, maybe, something that you heard through the listening tours or certain incidents and things like that – good or bad, right?

**Jhone Ebert** [07:29]

Oh, absolutely. Do you need to have the video if I'm breaking up? Sometimes when I turn the video off, then the audio comes through better.

**Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio** [07:41]

It's okay. And we can hear you fine.

**Jhone Ebert** [07:42]

Oh, okay. I'm sorry. I thought you said I was breaking up. So, you're interested in some key moments in time. One has to be Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020. Literally, Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>. A lot of conversation took place that day; the first students in Clark County had been identified with COVID. The conversations were minute-by-minute, not just once a day, but minute-by-minute through that entire following weekend. And shortly after, the determination was made by the governor to, for the health and safety of our students, move the PK-12 system to an online learning environment.

As the state superintendent of public instruction, I have the authority to turn certain days into professional development days. We have half a million children across our state. As a state, up to that point, we had been doing distance education but it was in pockets. At that point in time, it was not that case that 100% of our teachers, students, or families had connectivity. Most teachers had little understanding when it comes to teaching at a distance. And most parents – that that had

means – had one computer in their home or maybe two computers in their home for four children.

So that March date was huge. We thought that maybe, in a few weeks, we would go back to learning face-to-face in school. That changed, again, rather quickly. We pushed out the message that everyone would stay at a distance through the rest of the school year. During that time, we learned about masks, we learned about social distancing. Because when this first started, masks were not widely available at stores; people were sewing masks. You couldn't even buy them, personal protective equipment (PPE).

So, we had a lot of learning going on at that time. And then, we began looking plans for the opening of school, for the 2020-2021 school year. We do have local control in the State of Nevada. That was very important because we have different contexts in each school district. In our rural schools, they could social distance, six feet apart, and still have a full classroom. And so they opened – we actually had 15 of the 17 school districts opened with social distancing. Some of them – actually, I think all of them offered the option of online learning for families that did not feel comfortable going face-to-face. They had an option of online learning.

Washoe County School District, I will tell you, I still think was a model for other school districts during this entire time. They had – and stop me if you already know this – but all K-5 children in Washoe County School District were offered face-to-face instruction. That included their youngest learners, all of them, 100%, were offered face-to-face. Families were also offered the opportunity to, for K-5, learn at a distance if they so wished.

And at the secondary level of schooling, because of the number of students in grades 6-12 in Washoe County School District, the six feet of social distancing was hard to get to with the number of students that are typically found in our classrooms in Nevada. When you look across the country, Nevada has one of the highest ratio of students per classroom. The six feet of social distancing was physically something that could not transpire in both of our urban school districts in Clark and in Washoe. Washoe County School District made the decision to have all students attend school every other day. One day, a Washoe County student would attend school face-to-face; the next day, that same Washoe County student would attend school via distance learning.

In that though, and this is the equity piece. Again, I hold Washoe County School District up as an example and highlight them every chance I get. Every student attended school in person – that included English language learners, students with disabilities, gifted and talented students, and students at risk. Even though a student happened to be in grades 6-12, that student had the opportunity to go to school every other day. Students actually [were] offered the opportunity to go to school not every other day but every single day. This became a possibility for some because some students needed that support and those resources. It was a possibility when students --- especially students with physical disabilities – needed to be with those educators that could help the student move forward. So, 100% of those students, 6-12, were offered 100% face-to-face during that time.

And it was very interesting to watch the entire state. Schools in rural area school districts mainly went face-to-face, 100%, that school year. Washoe was about a third, a third, and a third. Twenty-thousand students, 100% face-to-face. Twenty-thousand students were every other day and 20,000 students opted for distance learning 100%.

Our job was to gather that data and then monitor the fluidity and pace of how things moved forward. Some parents kept their students at home. But then, as parents saw how the learning environment moved forward, they brought their children back in. And then, as you know, Clark County School District waited until March of 2021 to go back face-to-face. Beginning in March, 2021, that (face-to-face learning) became an option for children in Clark County School District.

During that time period, another critical point was when a vaccine became available (December, 2020). I'm so very proud of our governor because I had a conversation with him in regard to having educators be in Tier 1 ("Tier 1" means those people would be among the first to be eligible to receive the vaccine). We know we wanted children to be in classrooms. We wanted them to be safe. We wanted the adults to be safe as well. We wanted to, as a state, make sure that our economy could get going. People needed to get back to work. And we didn't take the view that learning is childcare. Our view was that school is a critically important part of Nevada society. Our governor was one of the few governors across the United States that put everyone that was in education in Tier 1. So, I'm very proud of that decision, that conversation, that policy, that we made.

And I'm going to backtrack one piece. There was another moment in time. At that point in time, Elaine Wynn was the State Board of Education President. She and I had a lot of conversations during that moment in time. And I just remember one conversation, where we were talking about devices and hotspots. And I still remember President Wynn saying, "Jhone, you have a rolodex." I said, "Yes, I do." She said, "Use it." Because at one point in my career I had been the Chief Technology Officer in the Clark County School District, I knew a lot of people in technology. I started calling them very quickly and saying, "Hey, we need to make sure that these purchases orders that our school districts in Nevada are asking for, that they're prioritized. That we make sure that the students here have those devices."

And so, a lot of phone calls and conversations took place following my discussions with President Wynn. President Wynn was instrumental in working with the Governor's COVID-19 Taskforce, in putting together the "Connecting Kids NV" Initiative. And on our end, everything we did was – public – 100% public. The statewide website for "Connecting Kids NV" is still there. We put it up and made it transparent. I'm a transparent person. If it's good news, great. We'll celebrate it. If it's not good news, we'll say, "Okay, this is where we're at, and this is what we need to do to move forward."

So, for half a million children, we found that we had about 120,000 students who did not have a device and did not have connectivity. That's not acceptable. It just wasn't acceptable in any way, shape, or form. That was that summer of 2020 when the public-private partnership came together. The "Connecting Kids NV" initiative put the funding in to create a dashboard – on the website – that showed the status of the campaign to equip every student with a device and a hotspot. The dashboard showed the progress over time of every single school district. Every

week, we were religious in reporting how many devices each school district had given children, and how many were still left. It was hard at first for superintendents to share because some school districts were farther ahead of others. They had been teaching at a distance and used instructional technology on a daily basis while others had not. But when they realized that everyone was there to support them, it wasn't shaming – it wasn't about shaming. It was about truly understanding what our environment was in Nevada, and what we needed to do to make it right.

So, philanthropy across the entire state also spun up. A helpdesk was opened for families to call. If they had a hard time reaching their principal for a device, they could call the helpdesk. If they couldn't sign in, they could call the helpdesk. That was all the result of this public-private partnership. School district employees played a part too. For instance, within the Clark County School District, I remember meeting a school bus driver. The school district wasn't running buses at that time, so this bus driver went to the helpdesk to work. There she was able to help families get connected with devices and hotspots.

Those were some major and significant moments. They involved first shifting from face-to-face learning. Then there was the emergence of the "Connecting Kids NV" public-private partnership. Everyone was working hard to make sure (and I still will bet my career on it) that Nevada is the only state that can say it was a place where when 100% of students had to learn at a distance, all 100% had a device and had the connectivity they needed to be online. It took us six months to get there, but no other state can say that they did that work. So, the special moment in time was the emergence of public-private partnership, and moment the vaccine became available, then too also the governor prioritizing the work of educators as well.

**Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio** [18:40]

Thank you, Jhone. You know, working on this project, I've really had the chance to see really good, smart, compassionate people at work, in state government, local government, and philanthropy. And so, you had just acknowledged Governor Sisolak's brave work.

But keeping all of that in mind, and looking at not just the health consequences, but also the economic impact of COVID, is there anything that you wish government, at any level, had done differently, or could possibly do differently now, from those lessons learned, that you talked about?

**Jhone Ebert** [19:17]

If anything, it might be that we could or should have recognized sooner how vital good communication is during a crisis. I think communicating upfront – (pauses) we were very intentional about communicating, supporting, and sharing the information that we had. I think what we would like to see added for the future is this: it is crucial to communicate clearly with the public what is known and what is not known about a health emergency like this. Every day we needed to emphasize how important it was to be flexible, as we move forward. Looking back, we needed to communicate even more clearly with staff and the public. I still remember the day that we made the determination to push out and make hotspots available to every student. Looking back, I realize now how important it was to be clear in our communication about athletics and some policy shifts. What was so frustrating was as a country, policy makers and



decision-makers at the state level would hear one thing from experts at the federal level and then within 24 hours, the CDC would come out with different guidance.

**Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio** [20:23]

Mm-hmm.

**Jhone Ebert** [20:24]

And so, the important ideas here is that it is vital to be flexible. We must understand that we didn't know what we didn't know. And the important ideas here is to lead with grace, I think would be – if I had anything to do over. I think it was very difficult for everyone. There's a quote that I use often, from Dr. Fauci when he was talking to folks. It was very hard because people, as we're trying to save lives and understand how this was moving forward, his quote, something to the effect of – that people weren't believing the science. And then also, trusting authority. And when people are not thinking about the science that was involved, in fact, and truth, it was hard for *all* of us to lead during that time and to try to listen to what people are saying. But then also, provide them with the science that we knew at the time.

**Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio** [21:43]

Thank you, Jhone, for that honest answer. I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to Dr. Martinez. I appreciate your responses.

**Jhone Ebert** [21:50]

Thank you.

**Magdalena Martinez** [21:51]

Yes. And along the lines of state/federal interventions, were there any specific policies that you really think made a difference from where you stand? Or any particular interventions – this could be anything from CARES, to ARPA, to any of the numbers of resources that were disseminated throughout the country.

**Jhone Ebert** [22:20]

Yes. Because the Nevada economy is so dependent on tourism and entertainment and hospitality, it was vital for us to shut down the spread of the virus as quickly as we could. Hawaii was hit just as hard as Nevada. And again, it was hard for me, to work with colleagues across the United States in other instances where state revenue was not a problem, as it is in Nevada where the per pupil revenues are substantially less than in nearly every other state.

**Magdalena Martinez** [22:44]

Yeah.

**Jhone Ebert** [22:46]

So, one of the areas that I'm really proud of our team was how the Nevada Department of Education made social-emotional support available for our entire PK-12 ecosystem. For students and their families, we helped make sure that they had the support they needed. This was especially so around the time of the death of George Floyd. The pandemic was in full swing

then; at the same time the George Floyd outpouring was transpiring. Given the social-emotional-mental health of our children during that time, the state system was in crisis.

**Magdalena Martinez** [23:32]

Mm-hmm.

**Jhone Ebert** [23:36]

To continue with that topic, the funding that was made available is worth mentioning. For instance, NDE committed 7.5 million dollars of funding from the dollars that were made available to the state for additional mental health support for our school districts. That funded about a hundred more staff across our state. We also were flexible because we put out those computer devices, making sure that families stayed connected virtually – so it wasn't just a device for the child during the school day. We amplified that by supplying a device in the homes of students, where if they needed to work with DETR. If they needed telehealth supports during that time, that they could use that device for those supports as well. I'll add, too, working so closely -- like I never thought I would -- with the state epidemiologist. Now we're friends because of the crisis that we all went through.

We at NDE now share staff with the Department of Health and Human Services. Staff are in place due to braided funding for mental health support. We have broken down a lot of the infrastructure barriers and silos with the state government environment. A lot of the silos were broken down because of the pandemic; I am very proud of that work.

Within PK-12 education itself, we tried to remove, right away, any barriers that existed, that impeded our progress at that moment in time. These got in the way of our educators doing their work. So, one of the pieces that we're required to do is our annual testing in grades 3 through 8. We were able to secure a waiver of this. Education Secretary DeVos said, "We're going to waive that requirement for this school year if you would like to take advantage of it." So we had to submit to have that work waived at that moment in time. We did that.

Removing these barriers made it possible to be sure we focused on what really needed to be focused on. That is the academics that our children had access to and to their health and safety. We're still one of the only states where the governor funded universal meals for our children. The federal funding went away last summer, 2022, but the Nevada State government moved that forward for this school year. Again, he's one of only a handful of governors that have done that. And he is very good at collaborating and listening to what we hear from the field, which needs to happen so that our children can be educated.

**Magdalena Martinez** [26:50]

So, all public school students have access to universal meals?

**Jhone Ebert** [26:53]

100%. Breakfast and lunch in our state.

**Magdalena Martinez** [26:59]

Okay. And along the same lines, you said that a lot of silos were broken. And earlier you talked

about the role that Board President, Elaine Wynn played in "Connecting Kids." Can you talk to us a little bit more about the innovative ways that your organization and others worked together to overcome some of these challenges?

**Jhone Ebert** [27:27]

So, a couple of things come to mind. We also set aside \$8,000,000 within available funds to directly support Nevada PK-12 educators because they're the ones working directly with children. We implemented a project called "Donors Choose". Every educator across the state of Nevada had the opportunity to put in a request for classroom resources. We launched a website (I can send you if you would like, follow-up data there). We predicted that about 10,000 teachers in Nevada would initially respond to the offer. Not all teachers asked for it. Those who responded, on average, received what amounted to \$800 worth of instructional materials. I have videos that the teachers sent me that said thank you. One recipient set up a STEM; they were growing carrots, celery, etc. with their students. I visited Bridger Middle School, and the theater teacher there asked for makeup for the theater class. I saw flexible seating. Teachers ordered reading materials. Some asked for and received social-emotional support for their students.

That was a different approach because some states went really high-level and directed educators by saying, "You will order this one textbook for all your kindergarteners." We took a different approach. Trust our teachers. Knowing our teachers, they know what they need most during this crisis. We said, "You determine what you need in your classroom because you're the one that's there with your children." Five other states that followed our lead. I'm very proud of that work. We also did a partnership because we had the devices with "x." But as I mentioned earlier, not all of the adults knew how to use it – so that's, again, families and our educators themselves.

We spun up digital ambassadors because we had phenomenal teachers in our state that know how to teach at a distance. We've been doing it for a very long time. And they raised their hands and said, "I will help my colleagues." I had a group of about 100 teachers that became digital ambassadors. They were from every part of our state, and they helped all the other teachers in our state. They were the ones that teachers could call upon and say, "Hey, how do I do "x?." They also created podcasts for teachers and families. They had sessions in Canvas (a Learning Management System that we use statewide). AS you know, Canvas is also used in higher education. We purchased that statewide so that everyone had access to learning materials.

We offered professional development. Supporting an online learning environment is like a 3-legged stool. The computer devices and hotspots are one leg of the toolkit. The second leg is professional development for adults. And the third leg is content for this learning system. It's great to have a device, but if you don't have quality material. So, a Nevada-based company ("Nevada Goldmines") stepped up and worked with us. We also have a two-year contract with Discovery Education that calls for them to provide content for this online system that is aligned to our Nevada standards – English Language Arts (ELA), math, and social studies. Discovery Education also had social-emotional support materials, as well as social justice content, and materials in multiple languages. That is why we went with Discovery Education.

Content that was made available to our teachers was enormously helpful to students and teachers. Nevada Goldmines provided \$2,000,000 to make sure that every single family in our

state (and teachers) had access to those materials. I cannot believe it has been two years, but it was two years ago when Nevada Goldmines partnered with the Nevada Department of Education. They just re-upped and provided another two million this last summer. It is for another two years, so that every single teacher, every single child, and family will continue to have access to those materials.

So, I'm very proud of the work that we did in online learning. And then again, too, we led the way. A lot of other states picked up and purchased – we went with Canvas because higher ed uses that tool, and Clark County School District was already using it. So we just kind of filled the gaps there. But other states followed our lead in providing devices, content, and professional development in online distance learning.

**Magdalena Martinez** [32:22]

Now, you mentioned, "Donors Choose." But this is something that predated the pandemic, correct?

**Jhone Ebert** [32:28]

No. The \$8,000,000 came from the first set of either ESSER I or the CARES dollars. So, yes. "Donors Choose" has been out there for a very long time. People could fund.

**Magdalena Martinez** [32:40]

Mm-hmm.

**Jhone Ebert** [32:43]

The state-funded – we went to the legislature – funded \$8,000,000 specifically for the pandemic work.

**Magdalena Martinez** [32:50]

Okay. Very helpful, thank you.

**Jhone Ebert** [32:53]

You're welcome.

**Magdalena Martinez** [32:55]

And in terms of lessons learned, could you talk a little bit more about key lessons learned, from your perspective, and how we might be able to apply this, moving forward, for future crises?

**Jhone Ebert** [33:11]

I think of my son, who is an Eagle Scout. So, "Be Prepared."

**Magdalena Martinez** [33:17]

Mm-hmm.

**Jhone Ebert** [33:19]

All of the things – looking back and saying what worked well, and what didn't work so well. Making sure that we move forward – and if you're prepared, building out – I still go back to

conversations, having relationships, and understanding who you serve and what their context is. We have a very, beautifully, diverse state, and to be able to have conversations with people, staying focused, number one, on our students because there can be a lot of noise that comes out of a crisis. But when you stay focused on your core, on your mission, it is a lot easier to work through. So that, along with adaptive, you know. You have to be adaptive at this point in time and during the pandemic. And when you have a listening ear, and take in the scientific data, along with context – that the schools and the school districts and our communities are dealing with – shaping those policies and support, you'll be much better off down the road as you move forward.

And also, too, I think what was very important is not to be afraid to fail, right? That you can fail forward. That someone has your back. I will say there were times when – I have a teacher's advisory cabinet, as well as a principal's advisory cabinet now. But they were the first ones that told me that school districts were issuing just one laptop for a family of four, and I said, "That can't be." And so, I had the conversations with the superintendent. But that continued iteration of conversation – but at one point in time, some of the teachers, I could tell, were "Well, I'm afraid to do this within an online classroom. I don't know how." And it's like I had to convince them "Yes, I understand. You have not done this before. But you've got this. You are an educator. You're just educating in a different way. And your children and community will help you, when you just say, 'Hey, we're doing something new. So let's all have a little bit of grace.'"

I think in education, we're very much, you know, have our lesson plan prepared in advance. Making sure that everything, as best we can – we had to not be – because I did see some states do this too. They were deer in the headlights. And just didn't – they were waiting for something to happen, and I wasn't sure what they were waiting for. But they were deer in the headlights. And I'm very proud that in Nevada, we were not. And not everything was perfect, but we continued to support our children as everything moved forward.

**Magdalena Martinez [36:44]**

Now, you talked about building relationships and conversations. And although you didn't say this word, I think that has to do with trust, right? And so, how do you build trust, from a leadership perspective, at a time when there's so much divisiveness, *and* at a time when education is at the forefront of a lot of these political battles, quite frankly?

**Jhone Ebert [37:13]**

Yes. Building trust, first with – you need to, number one, make sure that you have a mirror up and looking inward. And that you have an understanding of the core of who you are, how you move forward your strengths, and your weaknesses. And in order to build trust with others, you need to feel comfortable, as a human, with all of those pieces.

Also, too, the give-and-take components in understanding – again, I would think of some of the conversations with the superintendents. Had I not been on the ground, in their school districts –they knew a face, not just from a face online, but I'm a real person. I live in 3D, not just in 2D on a video. But it's having those conversations before the crisis happens. When you're in that situation, no one had the answer. But when you have the conversations, when you're listening, and building out – again, our rural communities, they could social distance at six feet. When the

CDC changed, that we could remove masks, we had to build a system so that in the schools, where they could social distance without a mask, they could entrust their, right, that they were keeping everyone healthy and safe. And in other areas of our state, they could not remove the masks because they were less than six feet apart. I don't know how that – bringing that back around for trust – but it is a listening piece.

I would say, too, because I just had a conversation with one of my staff members in the hallway. And at this point in education, being able to stand up when people are not speaking the truth is – I know that you're building trust when you are factual and using the materials that are at hand. We are under attack, as you know, in education constantly. Not – some of my colleagues across the rest of the United States have dealt with this more than we have in Nevada. But people saying we're teaching critical race theory; 100% I've told people, "No, we are not. It is not in our curriculum." And then they come back with "Yes, it is," and it's like "Okay. Show me. Please, show me. Because I'm more than happy to address it. If I've missed something," you know. Being humble, too. "And if I've missed something, then I will own it." But I've yet to have anyone in our state come and say, "Yes, State Superintendent Ebert, this is where it is in your curriculum and standards, are you are teaching it, and you're expecting the educators across our state to teach it, and we are not."

**Magdalena Martinez** [41:04]

My last question for you is, given everything we've survived over the last couple of years, and where we are right now, are you hopeful, and if so, what are you hopeful for?

**Jhone Ebert** [41:15]

I am very optimistic. I've always been a "glass half-full" type of person. Just my own background, growing up, I, myself was a free-and-reduced-lunch student. I am the State Superintendent of Education because teachers saw me as an asset. They didn't see Jhone as coming to school disheveled, so she didn't have anything to offer. They enrolled me in Algebra II. They enrolled me in Physics. They made sure that I had all the resources that I needed.

So this team at the Department of Education comes to work every single day to support our children – our diverse children – as you know. We're the third most diverse state in the United States. And having that as an asset; we are primed, as a state, to have the rest of the nation follow our lead. Where I will tell you that we all come together is in funding education. We absolutely are 49<sup>th</sup>, or if you look at some statistics, we're 50<sup>th</sup> in funding education. We're at the bottom of funding education. My hope is that during this legislative session, the legislators that are elected will see that. And when I say about funding education, I say, "PK-20," right? Funding education in our state so that we can do the work. We have some of the smartest people in the United States in Nevada. That's why I came home. There's talent in our state. There are just not enough adults in the system to support all of the children that we have, meet them each, and build out – I would love to have – every child has to be multilingual when they graduate. Wouldn't that be awesome? I mean some of our children are already there. Like why can't 100% of our children be there?

It takes resources to make that shift. So I'm hopeful that we will move forward in that way, and demonstrate that we value education, by looking at the state budget and saying, "Yes, we're not 49<sup>th</sup> anymore." We are – I'd be happy if were 30<sup>th</sup> in the United States. I would like to be number

one – and that's the thing, too. I spent almost four years in New York. New York is number one in funding K-12 education. Number one. Their class sizes are – I walk into a high school classroom – 22 kids, 21 kids. Our high school is 35-40. Our children are going to have to compete with children that have different resources in a global economy. All of the schools had school psychologists and social workers. All the resources that they needed.

But what was very interesting, too was that I had teachers come up to me. "We need more resources." And I would be like "Go work in Nevada, and then come back and let's talk about this." So it's having worked in New York, very talented educators there as well. But our educators here are just as talented. They need more resources to support our kids.

**Magdalena Martinez** [45:10]

Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with us today. I really appreciate the work that you do, and the time that you've taken to talk to us today. We will forward you a transcript, likely, in about a month or more. We are conducting about 100 interviews. Hopefully, by the end of this month, we'll have about 100. In different areas, like I said, K-16, as well as elected officials, social organizations, municipalities, our counties, and business and industry. So, I really appreciate everything you've shared with us today. Thank you.

**Jhone Ebert** [45:45]

Thank you. Can I ask you – so you'll have – and I know, it's holidays and all – and I'm really not worried about my – I am really interested in those other transcripts. Is this a dissertation, and so, it's going to be two years or –

**Magdalena Martinez** [46:04]

No. Let me stop the video right now.

**Jhone Ebert** [46:05]

Okay.

**End of audio: 46:06**