

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
(*Nevada Revised Statutes 218.5352*)
January 25, 2000
Fallon, Nevada**

The fifth meeting of the Legislative Committee on Education (*Nevada Revised Statutes* [NRS] 218.5352) for the 1999-2000 interim was held on Tuesday, January 25, 2000, at 9:30 a.m. in Room 302 of Stillwater Hall at the Western Nevada Community College's Fallon Campus, 160 Campus Way, Fallon, Nevada, and video conferenced to the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, Room 4401, 555 East Washington Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada. Pages 2 and 3 contain the AMeeting Notice and Agenda.@

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT IN FALLON:

Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams, Chairman
Senator William J. Raggio, Vice Chairman
Senator Bernice Mathews
Senator Raymond D. Rawson
Senator Maurice E. Washington
Assemblywoman Barbara K. Cegavske
Assemblyman Marcia de Braga
Assemblyman Mark A. Manendo

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL BUREAU STAFF PRESENT:

H. Pepper Sturm, Chief Principal Research Analyst
Elana Marton, Senior Research Analyst
Kristin C. Roberts, Senior Deputy Legislative Counsel
Melinda Braun, Education Program Analyst
Lu Chen, Education Statistician
Susan Furlong Reil, Senior Research Secretary

MEETING NOTICE AND AGENDA

Name of Organization: Legislative Committee on Education
 (*Nevada Revised Statutes 218.5352*)

Date and Time of Meeting: Tuesday, January 25, 2000
 9:30 a.m.

Place of Meeting: Western Nevada Community College
 Fallon Campus
 Stillwater Hall, Room 302
 160 Campus Way
 Fallon, Nevada

Note: Some members of the committee may be attending the meeting, and other persons may observe the meeting and provide testimony, through a simultaneous video conference conducted at the following location:

Grant Sawyer State Office Building
Room 4401
555 East Washington Avenue
Las Vegas, Nevada

*If you cannot attend the meeting, you can listen to it live over the Internet. The address for the legislative Web site is <http://www.leg.state.nv.us>. For audio broadcasts, click on the link *AListen to Meetings Live on the Internet.*@*

A G E N D A

I. Opening Remarks

Wendell P. Williams, Chairman

- *II. Presentation and Discussion**
Final Report of the Task Force to Study the High School Proficiency Examination in Mathematics (Section 36 of Senate Bill 466 [Chapter 621, *Statutes of Nevada 1999*])
Representative, Nevada=s Department of Education

- *III. Status Report**
Nevada=s Millennium Scholarship Program
Susan Moore, Director, Millennium Scholarship Program, Office of the State Treasurer

- *IV. Impact of State Remediation Funds on School Improvement Efforts**
Representative, E.C. Best Elementary School

V. Public Comment

VI. Adjournment

***Denotes items on which the committee may take action.**

Note: We are pleased to make reasonable accommodations for members of the public who are disabled and wish to attend the meeting. If special arrangements for the meeting are necessary, please notify the Research Division of the Legislative Counsel Bureau, in writing, at the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada 89701-4747, or call Susan Furlong Reil, at (775) 684-6825, as soon as possible.

Notice of this meeting was posted in the following Carson City, Nevada, locations: Blasdel Building, 209 East Musser Street; Capitol Press Corps, Basement, Capitol Building; City Hall, 201 North Carson Street; Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street; and Nevada State Library, 100 Stewart Street. Notice of this meeting was faxed for posting to the following Las Vegas, Nevada, locations: Clark County Office, 500 South Grand Central Parkway; and Grant Sawyer State Office Building, 555 East Washington Avenue. Notice of this meeting was faxed for posting to the following Fallon, Nevada, location: Western Nevada Community College, Fallon Campus, 160 Campus Way.

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OPENING REMARKS

Chairman Williams invited Ronald B. Flores, Superintendent, Churchill County School District, Fallon, to address the Committee. Mr. Flores welcomed the Committee members and thanked Mrs. de Braga for persuading the Committee to meet in Fallon. He noted that many students and members of the local education community would be observing the Committee=s meeting.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION **FINAL REPORT OF** **THE TASK FORCE TO STUDY THE HIGH SCHOOL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION IN** **MATHEMATICS**

Mary L. Peterson

Mary L. Peterson, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Nevada=s Department of Education (NDE), Carson City, provided the Committee members with copies of the Nevada Mathematics Advisory Task Force=s Report on the Nevada High School Proficiency Examination (HSPE) in Mathematics (Exhibit A). Mrs. Peterson presented an executive summary of the report, covering the following points:

§ The Nevada Mathematics Advisory Task Force (Task Force) was created pursuant to Senate Bill 466 (Chapter 621, *Statutes of Nevada 1999*), which ARevises provisions governing education.@ The Task Force was established in response to issues raised during the 1999 Legislative Session, including the following:

1. Does the curriculum adequately prepare students to pass the mathematics portion of the HSPE?
2. Are individual student reports to parents confusing and not provided in a timely manner?
3. Does the curriculum of Nevada=s public schools reflect all HSPE test questions?
4. Are the HSPE test questions and curriculum more difficult than business and real-world requirements?
5. Is there a difference in the difficulty level of some forms of the HSPE?

§ Each member of the Task Force was directed to compare the content of the HSPE in Mathematics with the 1994 State Course of Study in Mathematics, which has been the basis for mathematics instruction in Nevada=s school districts, and to determine whether the current course of study adequately prepares students for the test. In addition, Task Force members were asked to share their opinions as to the appropriateness of the test questions. A description of the process used by the Task Force is contained on page 9 of Exhibit A.

§ In addition, Task Force members were directed to review the current procedure for reporting results of the HSPE to school districts and parents and to determine whether alternative methods might improve the reporting process.

§ The Task Force held meetings on September 14, 1999, October 11, 1999, and November 10, 1999, and conducted a telephone conference meeting on November 18, 1999.

§ Reports from four large Nevada school districts (Clark, Douglas, Elko, and Washoe) regarding the current course of mathematics education and how they prepare students to pass the HSPE, were considered by the Task Force. The Task Force also reviewed mathematics curriculum information collected from the remaining 13 school districts in relation to the HSPE. Each district responded affirmatively to the Task Force=s question: AIf a student had taken the minimum mathematics courses required for graduation, would that student have been prepared with the skills and knowledge needed to pass the HSPE?@

§ The Task Force made the following findings:

1. The content of the HSPE in Mathematics and the 1994 State Course of Study in Mathematics are closely aligned.
2. Improvement is needed in the reporting process. Specifically, more information that could form the basis for diagnosis of student performance, remediation, and instructional improvement should be provided. In addition, reporting to the districts needs to be more accurate, timely, and thorough. Detailed item analyses also would be useful.

§ In addition, the Task Force found that there is a great deal of public misunderstanding about the importance, goals, and procedures of the HSPE. The NDE is currently exploring the possibility of creating a new public information officer position to address this issue.

§ A number of recommendations were made by the Task Force with regard to the test contents and new directions. It also recommended that:

1. Accurate and complete reports be delivered to school districts in a timely manner;
2. Item analyses and detailed student information be provided to school districts so that they can improve the instructional process and provide more effective remediation to students;

3. In consultation with the school districts, the NDE design and provide reports to parents that can be easily read and interpreted;
 4. The NDE investigate the feasibility of including constructed response questions such as essays and questions for which students generate rather than select answers; and
 5. A pilot study be initiated to develop sets of test questions and appropriate reporting mechanisms that distinguish between understanding of concepts and understanding of terminology.
- § The Task Force also recommended that the NDE develop and implement a public awareness strategy to facilitate better understanding of the goals of the testing program and to ensure accurate reporting of testing information. In furtherance of this goal, the Task Force suggested that NDE ensure that the contracting vendor implement the necessary changes in the equating procedures to produce tests of comparable difficulty.
- § Further, the Task Force suggested that an action plan and budget proposal be prepared by the NDE for submission to the Legislature=s Interim Finance Committee and the 2001 Session of the Legislature to address the recommendations of the Task Force.
- § The Task Force also recommended that school districts:
1. Apply for remediation funding already appropriated under Senate Bill 555 (Chapter 559, *Statutes of Nevada 1999*), which Amakes appropriation to state distributive school account,@ and other sources as necessary;
 2. Ensure that parents, students, and teachers are aware that the HSPE is a Ahigh-stakes test@ and that students must obtain a passing score on the HSPE in order to obtain a high school diploma; and
 3. Continue to ensure that the local curriculum and instructional programs will adequately prepare students for the HSPE in Mathematics, and revise them to meet the 1998-1999 content and performance standards in mathematics.

Assemblyman Manendo asked what steps are being taken by the NDE to provide information regarding the HSPE to the public. Responding, Mrs. Peterson noted that information is sent home with students at the beginning of the school year, and that same material is available in school offices. In addition, the NDE sends press releases to all newspapers in the state notifying parents of upcoming testing opportunities.

Chairman Williams questioned whether the NDE has taken steps to ensure that its new contract with CBT/McGraw Hill incorporates the Task Force=s recommendation for improved detail reporting to the schools on testing. Mrs. Peterson explained that funds were appropriated to NDE by the Legislature for the specific purpose of hiring a vendor to develop the reporting mechanism for the program, and the requirement for increased detail in reporting is included in the NDE=s contract with CBT/McGraw Hill.

Continuing, Chairman Williams inquired if school districts are applying for the remediation funds that were authorized pursuant to S.B. 555. Mrs. Peterson reported that schools are making application for remediation funds. Detailed information including the school names, application dates, the date each school district was notified that it would receive funding for remediation programs, and funding dates, has been provided to the Legislative Counsel Bureau=s Fiscal Analysis Division.

Chairman Williams also questioned whether the NDE is exploring the possibility of employing the services of a public information officer, and if so, if that employee would be responsible for the dissemination of all NDE information as opposed to that relating solely to the HSPE. Mrs. Peterson indicated that if such a position is created, that officer will be responsible for all of NDE=s public information needs.

Assemblywoman Cegavske noted that Mrs. Peterson=s summary of the Task Force=s report did not include a comparison of Nevada=s standing to that of other states. Mrs. Peterson explained that the Task Force was required to

issue its report by December 1, 1999, and because of the time constraint, it did not directly address this issue. However, the test results demonstrate that once Nevada instituted more rigorous standards, its ranking is comparable to that of other states in the nation.

Continuing, Assemblywoman Cegavske reported that parents and students have expressed concern that in some instances, pupils may be required to take a test on a subject (e.g., mathematics) before they have an opportunity to complete the course that is designed to prepare them for that examination. Mrs. Peterson acknowledged that in some instances, a student may be initially tested in his or her junior year of high school but not complete the course covering the material contained in the test until the following year.

Assemblywoman Cegavske also questioned whether the Task Force sought input from student body presidents regarding the HSPE in Mathematics. Mrs. Peterson reported that the opinions of students were not sought by the Task Force. She pointed out, however, that students have provided testimony to the State Board of Education and stated that she is of the opinion that the concerns of students were fairly represented to the Task Force.

Senator Raggio thanked Mrs. Peterson for her report on the Task Force=s findings and conclusions, and stated that he is surprised about the public misconceptions regarding the activities of the Legislature in raising standards for learning and teaching. He reported that students in the United States still rank last in the world in achievement in mathematics and science. Further, Nevada is one of the last states in the country to raise its standards for learning and to prepare its teachers to instruct students to this heightened level. He pointed out that one of the Legislature=s primary goals in raising achievement standards in the state is to ensure that Nevada=s youth are prepared to compete with their peers on a global basis.

Continuing, Senator Raggio reported that in order to receive a high school diploma, each student must correctly answer 61 percent of the questions on the HSPE in Mathematics. However, almost half of all students who took the examination failed to receive a passing score. Each school district in the state claimed that any student who had successfully completed a minimum amount of mathematics education should have been able to pass the HSPE. In response to concerns regarding the large number of students who failed to pass the high school proficiency test in mathematics, the Legislature directed that a task force be formed to conduct a study on this issue to determine if the test is flawed.

Senator Raggio acknowledged that some critics claim that the increased achievement standards caused many students to fail the HSPE in Mathematics. A number of Clark County School District=s high school principals also claim that the higher academic achievement standards caused students to fail the examination, despite the fact that these new standards are not effective until the year 2001. Senator Raggio is of the opinion that this view is not valid in that the HSPE in question was based on the 1994 standards which all school districts were required to teach, not the new higher standards. He noted that approximately 96 percent of students taking the examination eventually received a passing grade.

Concluding his remarks, Senator Raggio pointed out that the Task Force has determined that Nevada=s HSPE has been an appropriate examination and opined that every student in Nevada should be able to pass this test if the school districts are doing their job. The NDE, the state, and teachers are committed to raising standards, and the Legislature intends to ensure that the examinations are carried out as intended. Senator Raggio emphasized that Nevada will award high school diplomas only to those students who can achieve passing scores on the HSPE.

Referencing the Task Force=s recommendation that parents be fully informed of the importance of their children passing the HSPE, Assemblyman Manendo commented that some constituents report not receiving adequate information on this topic. Mrs. Peterson indicated that it is her understanding that at the beginning of the school year, school districts send testing information home with children. She noted that Clark and Washoe Counties have successfully developed effective communication programs to advise parents of the importance of the testing process. Continuing, Mrs. Peterson reported that the NDE is working with the Clark County School District to develop a series of informational brochures describing the new achievement standards and explaining the educational community=s expectations and testing requirements. She explained that the Clark County School District was chosen to work on this project because it has resources not available at other school districts. However, once the brochures are finalized, they will be used in all school districts throughout the state.

STATUS REPORTCNEVADA=S MILLENNIUM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Brian K. Krolicki and Susan K. Moore, Ed.D.

Brian K. Krolicki, State Treasurer, Carson City, provided the Committee with background information on Nevada=s Millennium Scholarship Program (MSP). During the 1999 Session, the Legislature enacted Governor Kenny C. Guinn=s proposal that 40 percent of all funds received by the State of Nevada pursuant to (1) any settlement entered into by Nevada and a manufacturer of tobacco products; or (2) recovery from a judgment in a civil action against a manufacturer of tobacco product, be used to establish the MSP. In addition, the Legislature directed that the Millennium Scholarship Trust Fund be administered by the State Treasurer. The graduating high school class of 2000 is the first group of students eligible for scholarship funds.

Continuing, the State Treasurer acknowledged the efforts of Mary L. Peterson, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Nevada=s Department of Education, and Jane Nichols, Acting Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University and Community College System of Nevada (UCCSN), in assisting with the development and organization of the MSP.

Mr. Krolicki introduced Susan K. Moore, Ed.D., Director, MSP. Dr. Moore formerly managed an outreach program for the UCCSN=s Desert Research Institute, and in the course of her career has served as an administrator, educator, and counselor.

Dr. Moore provided the Committee with a report on the MSP (Exhibit B), including a general time line of planned activities through July 2000 and a list containing the contact names for each county school district superintendent=s office. Dr. Moore gave a brief overview of the program=s progress, making the following remarks:

- \$ For the past two months, the Office of the State Treasurer has been working with members of Nevada=s education communityCincluding home school families, the NDE, 16 parishes, 37 private schools, and the superintendents of 17 school districtsCto coordinate the cooperative effort required to make the MSP a reality.
- \$ The MSP=s first priority is to meet the needs of high school students graduating in the year 2000. With the cooperation of county school district superintendents, the Office of the State Treasurer will send a letter and fact sheet to all high school seniors and their parents in late February 2000. In conjunction with this mailing, packets containing the same letter and fact sheet will be provided to 37 private school principals for distribution to their students, and to the offices of the county school district superintendents for dispersion to each home school family.
- \$ A fact sheet that will be sent to parents and students includes contact information for higher education institutions. The logos of both the NDE and the University and Community College System of Nevada (UCCSN) at the bottom of the fact sheet reflect the cooperative intent and spirit of the MSP=s efforts. Please see Exhibit B.
- \$ Each school district will submit a list of students eligible for the MSP to the Office of the State Treasurer. The State Treasurer will create a data base to store this information for each college-bound student or continuing college student whose education is being funded through the MSP. A group of Nevada=s experts in the field of educational technology is being formed to advise the State Treasurer and Dr. Moore on the development of the data base.
- \$ The last page of Exhibit B illustrates the basic information gathered to date by the Office of the Treasurer and outlines the application process for students graduating from public and private high schools and the procedure for those students who have not graduated from high school (e.g., home school students and individuals who have earned a General Education Diploma [GED]).
- \$ Eligibility information will be submitted by numerous parties as soon as possible after high school graduation. This year, diskettes will be supplied to public and private school principals for the transfer of data regarding

eligible students. The Office of the Treasurer will be responsible for administration of the eligibility function for non-high school graduates, and information regarding that process will be available to the public. This eligibility data will also be available to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV); the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR); Great Basin College; Southern Nevada Community College; Truckee Meadows Community College; and Western Nevada Community College.

Dr. Moore thanked the Committee for its continued support of the MSP and acknowledged the efforts of the education community in bringing the program to fruition.

Assemblyman Manendo complimented Dr. Moore for including in the fact sheet information on the lifetime limitations of the program and the process for maintaining scholarship funding throughout a student's course of study. He commented that he has received a number of inquiries from parents regarding the MSP, and requested that, once the final fact sheet is available, it be sent to all of Nevada's legislators. He related the concerns of a student who was told by a counselor that because of the limited number of available classes at UNLV, it now takes an average of five years to graduate, and further, that with the influx of students that the UCCSN anticipates will be generated through the MSP, it could take an additional six to twelve months to complete a degree program.

Referencing the time line contained in Exhibit B, Senator Raggio expressed concern that high school students will not receive final notification regarding their eligibility for the MSP until July 2000 and asked if the process can be expedited. He pointed out that oftentimes high school students begin sending out college entrance applications at the beginning of their senior year; many of these students will receive offers to attend other colleges before they graduate from high school and will need to make a commitment on whether or not they intend to accept the offer. He questioned whether it is necessary to obtain students' final grades before eligibility notices are generated. Continuing, Senator Raggio noted that one reason that legislators supported the MSP is to encourage students and parents to appreciate the importance of maintaining good grades throughout high school. Also of concern is the fact that Nevada loses students to universities in other states.

Dr. Moore indicated that a great deal of discussion has taken place regarding the time line for sending out the eligibility notices and stated that the notices can be provided to students earlier than July 2000. She reported that in this first year of operation, the Office of the Treasurer is particularly concerned that students receive accurate information, and it is relying on high school counselors to inform students of the likelihood that they will be eligible for the scholarship upon graduation. Continuing, she stated that the universities have advised her that they routinely accept students for admission based on the assumption that these individuals will continue to perform at the same standard. The UCCSN will assist the Office of the Treasurer in developing an early notice that will be designed to motivate students to maintain their performance levels throughout their high school years. Mr. Krolicki acknowledged that the MSP still faces a number of challenges, e.g., the grade point average is calculated in different ways throughout the state, and a more uniform process needs to be instituted for eligibility purposes. He reiterated that in its first year of operation, the MSP's primary focus is to meet the needs of high school students graduating in 2000. However, an outreach program that will educate students, as early as junior high school, on the benefits and requirements of the MSP is planned in the future.

Responding to questions from Senator Raggio, Dr. Moore explained that the minimum grade point average of 3.0 required for MSP eligibility is calculated not on core subjects alone, but rather on all courses taken by the student in high school. In addition, submission of scores from the American College of Testing Program (ACT) and the College Entrance Examination Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) to the Office of the Treasurer is required only for non-high school students who apply for the scholarship.

Mary L. Peterson

Senator Raggio asked how the grade point average of home school students is determined. Mrs. Peterson, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Nevada's Department of Education, explained that home school students do not receive Nevada high school diplomas; however, some are enrolled in correspondence courses that assign a grade based on the student's level of achievement. Determining a home school student's baseline grade point average is often impossible. For this reason, the Millennium Scholarship Committee of the UCCSN concluded that while passage of the HSPE is not normally required for home school students, all non-high school students making

application for a scholarship must pass the HSPE in order to demonstrate their ability to perform at the required level.

Susan K. Moore, Ed.D.

Senator Mathews questioned how home school students are able to gain admission to colleges if they do not receive a diploma. She suggested that the MSP might be able to utilize the same admission criteria currently utilized by Nevada=s colleges for these students. Responding, Dr. Moore explained that institutions of higher education generally require that home school students pass all areas of Nevada=s HSPE and also achieve a certain level on the ACT or the SAT examination in order to gain admittance to the college.

Assemblywoman Cegavske indicated that high school counselors at the school in her district report that they have been kept well informed regarding the MSP and that the students are excited about the opportunities available to them.

Referencing the draft fact sheet contained in Exhibit B, Assemblyman de Braga asked Dr. Moore to explain the purpose of the section that encourages students who: (1) are seeking a career in health or education; (2) are from a family with insufficient financial resources; or (3) participated in antidrug or antialcohol programs in high school, to speak to their high school counselor. Dr. Moore explained that Millennium Scholarship Committee of the UCCSN attempted to include in the fact sheet any information that the Legislature considered important. This particular section was added to the fact sheet because the legislation which created the MSP includes references to increasing outreach efforts to students who meet the criteria in these three categories. These students are especially encouraged to pursue their goals, however, they are not given special consideration. Dr. Moore pointed out, however, that the UCCSN has programs to encourage students to enter the fields of health care and teaching.

Assemblyman de Braga questioned whether other scholarships may impact a student=s eligibility to receive funds from the MSP. Dr. Moore explained that other forms of financial aid, including scholarships, are used before MSP funds. Mr. Krolicki pointed out that there may be some students who are eligible for the Millennium Scholarship but do not use it. Responding to a question from Chairman Williams, Mr. Krolicki indicated that there is no possibility that an eligible student who needs financial assistance will lose aid from the MSP.

Senator Rawson expressed a desire to see more institutions of higher learning listed on the fact sheet.

IMPACT OF STATE REMEDIATION FUNDS ON SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

Scott Meihack

Scott Meihack, Principal, E.C. Best Elementary School, Fallon, reported on the impact of state remediation funds on school improvement efforts at E.C. Best Elementary School. He provided the Committee with a report on the results of E.C. Best Elementary School=s improvement efforts (Exhibit C) and covered the following points:

- \$ E.C. Best Elementary School has the highest proportion of multicultural students within the Churchill County School District, with minorities comprising approximately 32.1 percent of its students.
- \$ The Reading Renaissance Program was initiated in November 1998, using \$171,112.89 in education remediation funds. With these funds, the school purchased books, hired a person to oversee the program, and provided three full days of training for its staff.
- \$ Student enrollment at the end of the 1998-1999 school year was 541, of which 110 were kindergarten students. A total of 459 of these students were taking part in the Reading Renaissance Program, reflecting substantial kindergarten participation.

- \$ During the 1998-1999 school year, students took approximately 13,379 tests. A comparison of the test results between November 1998 and May 1999 reveals that the average correct score increased from 80.2 percent to 81.3 percent.
- \$ The school=s overall reading level during school year 1998-1999, including the kindergarten students, was 3.1 (Grade 3, first month).
- \$ Between November 28, 1998, and the first week of May 1999, approximately 24,522 books were checked out of the school=s library.
- \$ Current student enrollment is about 561 students, with 110 of these pupils in the kindergarten program. This year=s student participation in the Reading Renaissance Program is approximately 490 children.
- \$ The mid-year average book level for all grades at E.C. Best Elementary School is currently 3.2 (Grade 3, second month), compared to a level of 3.1 (Grade 3, first month) at the end of the 1998-1999 school year. Approximately 28 percent of the school=s students are designated as at-risk children.
- \$ The third page of Exhibit C shows the *TerraNova* test results for E.C. Best Elementary over the last three years. Table 14 tracks, for a period of three years, the progress of the 1997-1998 fourth grade class at E.C. Best Elementary School which caused the school to be classified as needing improvement. A comparison of this class=s scores for the 1997-1998 school year to its performance for the current 1999-2000 school year demonstrates improvement in all subject areas ranging from 14.0 to 19.4 points.
- \$ Table 8 of Exhibit C provides the *TerraNova* test scores of the fourth grade classes for each of the school years 1996-1997, 1997-1998, 1998-1999, and 1999-2000. A comparison of the fourth grade scores for school year 1998-1999 to those for school year 1999-2000 shows that the student achievement level is improving in all areas with the exception of language mechanics.

Responding to a number of questions from Assemblywoman Cegavske, Mr. Meihack covered the following points:

- \$ Last year, staff conducted a survey and learned that four or five different types of phonetic programs were being used by teachers in Grades Kindergarten through 2. Staff members gave lesson plan presentations based on the phonetic programs they used in their respective classrooms, and these were reviewed by their peers. Staff members then met as a group and selected one phonetic program to be used throughout the school.
- \$ The NDE provided the school with a number of remediation programs from which to choose, and a group of six staff members observed one of theseCthe Reading Renaissance ProgramCin operation at a school in Grass Valley, California. These staff members selected the Reading Renaissance Program for implementation at E.C. Best Elementary School, and the program was initiated in November of 1998. The Reading Renaissance Program has been a key factor in the students= improved achievement levels.
- \$ He is of the opinion that E.C. Best Elementary School=s library has between 17,000 to 20,000 children=s books. The Reading Renaissance Program requires that the school maintain multiple copies of some books, particularly at the beginning reading level, because of the number of books checked out by students. The library typically checks out in excess of 2,500 books per week.

Assemblyman Manendo inquired about parent involvement in the Reading Renaissance Program. Mr. Meihack reported that the school has incorporated a fall and a spring family reading night into its Reading Renaissance Program. Parents are invited to visit the school library with their child, select a book, and listen to the student read. Mr. Meihack extended an invitation to the Committee to attend the school=s spring family reading night in March 2000. Attendance at the fall 1999 family reading night was approximately 180 parents and students. Mr. Meihack explained that a daily reading log is also sent home each day with students so that parents and students can document the books that are being read and the amount of time spent reading. This data is recorded and the percent-to-goal for the entire school is monitored. In addition, parents receive a weekly report of the number of points their child has earned and how he or she has performed on tests during the week. Assemblyman Manendo commended

Mr. Meihack for the programs implemented by E.C. Best Elementary School to improve student achievement and opined that parent involvement is an important component of a child=s education.

Senator Raggio congratulated Mr. Meihack and his staff for their efforts to meet the students= needs. He commented that the Committee has received presentations from a number of schools that in the past had been designated as needing improvement. These reports indicate that the remediation programs authorized by the Legislature are effective at improving student achievement. Continuing, Senator Raggio related testimony given to the Committee at its last meeting by officials of Libby Booth Elementary School in Reno, Nevada, regarding parents who refuse to respond to school communications, and stated that in his opinion, lack of parenting is one of the root causes of poor student achievement. He noted that staff at Libby Booth Elementary make continuing efforts to contact difficult-to-reach parents and expressed concern for those students whose parents are either disinterested or do not understand the importance of education to their child=s future. Senator Raggio opined that securing parent involvement needs to be a priority of school officials and invited Mr. Meihack to share any ideas he might have on this issue with the Committee.

Mr. Meihack reported that at E.C. Best Elementary School, it is the administration=s policy to make home visits if parents do not respond to communications regarding their child. He emphasized that it is important that school officials not fear offending parents who do not respond to communication attempts.

Concluding his report, Mr. Meihack thanked the Committee for the remediation funds of \$251,174.78 that E.C. Best Elementary School has received over the past two years, and noted that the success of the Reading Renaissance Program is clearly evident in the students= improved achievement levels. He stressed that the school could not have attained the level of success it enjoys today had it not received additional funding of \$80,000 for the program=s second year. Without remediation funds, the school would have been unable to purchase needed books, hire a person to oversee the program, or provide two full-day training sessions for each teacher. Mr. Meihack stated that in his opinion, first-hand training of staff members was vital to the program=s success.

Assemblyman de Braga reported that she has observed the Reading Renaissance Program in operation at E.C. Best Elementary School, and it epitomizes what the Committee sought to accomplish through the funding of remediation programs for schools needing improvement. Continuing, she stated that the Reading Renaissance Program is creative and innovative, and could well serve as a model for other schools throughout the state. On behalf of the Committee on Education, Assemblyman de Braga presented Mr. Meihack with a letter of commendation in recognition of the efforts of staff, students, and parents, and the remarkable improvements made at the school, and wished the school continued success.

Senator Raggio thanked Mr. Meihack for his comments and commented that both the Executive Branch and the Legislature made a strong commitment not only to raise student academic standards, but to establish effective remediation programs. He noted that the Committee and the NDE put a great deal of effort into selecting the best remediation programs for Nevada=s schools. Senator Raggio assured Mr. Meihack that funding of remediation programs will continue to be an integral part of Nevada=s education program. Continuing, Senator Raggio agreed that first-hand training of teachers is more effective than training one teacher and then having that person return to his or her school and pass the training on to other staff members. Further, he indicated that the four regional professional development centers created by the 1999 Legislature will continue to be funded to ensure that all teachers have an opportunity to develop the skills and acquire the knowledge necessary to teach to the new higher standards.

Melinda Braun

Chairman Williams asked Melinda Braun, Education Program Analyst, Fiscal Analysis Division, LCB, Carson City, to explain how remediation funds are prioritized. Responding, Ms. Braun reported that under Senate Bill 555 (Chapter 559, *Statutes of Nevada 1999*), which Amakes appropriation to state distributive school account,@ the Legislature set aside \$3.3 million to fund remediation programs for schools designated as needing improvement. A school which has been designated as Alow-performing@ or needing improvement is one in which more than 40 percent of its students scored in the lowest quarter across all four subject areas on the *TerraNova* test.

Continuing, Ms. Braun explained that three levels of applications were prioritized and funded this year as follows:

1. Schools that had been officially designated as needing improvement received funding to implement up to two programs.
2. The eight schools that had been designated as needing improvement the prior year received additional funding for their remediation programs for a second year.
3. Schools in which more than 40 percent of the students scored in the lowest quarter in three of the four subject areas on the *TerraNova* test received the remaining available remediation funds.

Ms. Braun noted that each school that submitted an application received funding to implement remediation programs.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Roger Deidrichsen

Roger Deidrichsen, President, Churchill County School District Board of School Trustees, Fallon, welcomed the Committee to Fallon and shared some views of the Churchill County School District (District) and its administration and staff regarding educational issues that impact local schools and students. Mr. Deidrichsen made the following remarks:

- \$ The local education community recognizes that the laws, mandates, and regulations passed by the Legislature and the State Board of Education are intended to improve education throughout Nevada, and it requests that the Committee remain mindful of the potential financial impact of unfunded mandates on local school districts.
- \$ Efforts to address the concerns of school districts at a state level are appreciated, e.g., the passage of Assembly Bill 597 (Chapter 596, *Statutes of Nevada 1999*) which Amends provisions regarding school facilities, created the state planning commission for the new construction, design, maintenance, and repair of school facilities. The District appreciates the alternatives that have been developed by the Legislature to address the challenges faced by school districts; however, more must be done to assist with funding necessary projects.
- \$ Professional development of staff in strategies to teach to the new higher standards is a critical component of ensuring that students receive the preparation necessary to attain these goals. The District has taken the initiative in this area and recognizes that great strides have been made with the establishment of regional professional development centers. The Legislature's continued support of staff development efforts is encouraged.
- \$ The Legislature also has made it a priority to provide current computer technology in classrooms, and technical support is needed to maintain this equipment. The District requests that the Legislature provide school districts with the funding necessary to carry out this function.

A copy of Mr. Deidrichsen's remarks is attached to these minutes as Exhibit D.

Tina Grainer

Tina Grainer, Member, Churchill County School District Board of School Trustees, Fallon, sought clarification of the District's role as it relates to the charter school operating in Fallon. Ms. Grainer covered the following points:

- \$ The Churchill County School District is the only rural district in Nevada in which a charter school is currently operating.
- \$ In her capacity as a school board trustee, she is concerned about the duties and responsibilities of the School Board with respect to absenteeism and truancy in the charter school.

- \$ Another issue concerning charter schools is whetherCif its board is a public bodyCthe members of the boards of trustees for these type of institutions must be elected to their position.
- \$ The Churchill County Teachers Association has expressed concern regarding the role of the School Board and the District=s administration in negotiations.
- \$ Future misunderstandings could be avoided if representatives of the District participate in discussions with legislators regarding all proposed legislation on charter schools.

Chairman Williams asked Ms. Grainer to provide the Committee with details of the District=s concerns and specific problems it is experiencing so that the Committee may have an opportunity to review the issues prior to the 2001 Session.

Senator Washington inquired about the performance of the charter school in Churchill County and asked Ms. Grainer, in her capacity as a school board trustee, to share any reports she has received from the local community regarding the school. Responding, Ms. Grainer commented that the concept of charter schools is to improve education, and competition among schools and raising achievement standards will both benefit Nevada=s education system. She opined that the process for implementing charter schools and the procedures for their ongoing operation must be clear and precise to ensure that all students receive a good education. Specific concerns voiced to her by the public are:

1. Why does the charter school require students to complete only 222 credits for graduation from high school while the Churchill County High School has required 24 credits for the past four years?
2. In view of the fact that charter school students are not always required to attend school for the same number of hours as their public school counterparts, are they still receiving an adequate education?
3. Teachers within the District are attempting to teach to the new higher standards that have been set, yet they are not receiving the training required to implement the necessary remediation programs. At the same time, the taxpayers are funding charter schools. Are taxpayers= education dollars being used effectively?

Ms. Grainer also pointed out that the concept of charter schools is a difficult one for many people to understand.

Senator Washington questioned whether the students who are attending the charter school are individuals who were at risk for quitting school. Responding, Ms. Grainer shared her personal views with the Committee, stating that the impression she gained from her visits to the charter school is that some of its students likely would have quit school or would have presented a challenge to the Churchill County High School administration. Continuing, she stated that she is of the opinion that many parents view the charter school as an option that enables their children to expend the least amount of effort to earn a high school diploma. In her view, this line of reasoning defeats the District=s goal of involving parents in their children=s education in that it offers parents an avenue that requires less participation on their part. She reported that parents had raised these and other concerns about the school.

Continuing the same line of questioning, Senator Washington asked Ms. Grainer if the concerns regarding the charter school were voiced by parents of children enrolled at the school; Ms. Grainer indicated that they were not. Senator Washington suggested that Ms. Grainer, as a public official, make an effort to talk to some parents of charter school students before forming an opinion regarding the school.

Assemblyman de Braga pointed out that Ms. Grainer=s primary concern is the role of the school board as it relates to the charter school. She explained that the local school district was required to approve the charter school as long as it met certain criteria, and its oversight ended at that juncture. Further, as a school board trustee, Ms. Grainer does not have oversight of the charter school, and therefore has no reason to speak with parents of charter school students. Assemblyman de Braga noted that these circumstances are not a criticism of parents who choose to enroll their child at the charter school.

Senator Washington suggested that the Committee=s legal staff be directed to provide the Churchill County School

District Board of Trustees with clarification of the laws pertaining to charter schools and public schools so that the board members might better understand their relationship and role in this new arena.

Chairman Williams thanked Ms. Grainer for her testimony. He noted that Senator Washington was closely involved in the development of Nevada=s charter school legislation, and the Committee intends to propose improvements to the law in the future. The testimony of local education officials provides valuable information with regard to issues that have arisen as a result of the new legislation. Continuing, Chairman Williams explained that the intent of the new legislation is to create successes in a charter school setting that can be duplicated in traditional public schools. He reported that the Committee plans to review the status of charter schools at one of its future meetings.

Elaine Starr

Elaine Starr, an English teacher at Churchill County High School, Fallon, expressed concern regarding the English portion of the HSPE. She pointed out that if a student has poor reading skills, his or her performance across all areas of the HSPE is impacted. Continuing, she noted that some students in the junior class at Churchill County High School cannot read and are in need of remediation in the subjects of reading and writing. There are ten English teachers at Churchill County High School; however, none of them possesses a specialty in reading. The high school English teachers have sought guidance from primary teachers on reading and writing techniques, but their remediation efforts with high school students have not met with the same degree of success experienced at the elementary school level. Ms. Starr requested that English high school teachers be provided with appropriate training so that they may help high school students acquire the reading and writing skills necessary to pass the HSPE. Chairman Williams requested that the Superintendent of Public Instruction investigate possible funding sources to address this issue.

Gail Bursill

Gail Bursill, a teacher at E.C. Best Elementary School, Fallon, stated that she is pleased that the Legislature is making students accountable by requiring them to pass the HSPE in order to receive a high school diploma. She expressed concern that elementary teachers must test students, but if the results of the test indicate that the student is not ready to be passed to the next grade, the teacher does not have the power to retain the student. A teacher can inform parents that in his or her professional opinion a child should not be passed, but if the parents do not agree with the teacher=s judgment, the teacher must pass the student to the next grade. Mrs. Bursill opined that parents need to know that at some juncture, their child will be tested, and if he or she fails to achieve a certain standard, the school district will have the power to retain the student in the same grade without the parents= consent.

Senator Raggio indicated that it is his understanding that teachers are not required to pass a child when it is their professional judgment that the student should be retained in the same grade. He stated that in his opinion, it would be a great disservice to pass a child who had not met minimum achievement standards on to the next grade. Continuing, Senator Raggio read Subsections 1, 2, and 3 of NRS 392.125, ARetention of pupil in same grade: Requirements; limitation; exception for charter schools,@ into the record:

1. Except as otherwise provided in subsection 4, before any pupil enrolled in a public school may be retained in the same grade rather than promoted to the next higher grade for the succeeding school year, the pupil=s teacher and principal must make a reasonable effort to arrange a meeting and to meet with his parents or guardian to discuss the reasons and circumstances.
2. The teacher and the principal in joint agreement have the final authority to retain a pupil in the same grade for the succeeding school year.
3. No pupil may be retained more than one time in the same grade.

Karen Lawson

Karen Lawson, a department head and mathematics teacher at Churchill County High School, Fallon, thanked the Committee for its efforts to set higher standards and opined that this action will result in better quality students upon graduation. She also expressed appreciation to the Legislature for increasing the minimum mathematics requirement to three years, and pointed out that this will enable teachers to more effectively help students achieve the new higher academic standards. Ms. Lawson covered the following points:

- § In January 1999, Churchill County High School increased its minimum mathematics requirements to three years of integrated math effective for the class of 2002. This year, the school has its first opportunity to review the results of the integrated approach to teaching mathematics. This new integrated approach to teaching math is modelled upon the program used in Gardnerville, Nevada, which currently enjoys the state=s highest passing rate on the HSPE.
- § The increase in achievement standards is a significant change and presents Churchill County High School with a difficult challenge. She requested that the Committee remain mindful that school staff will require transition time to adjust to the new standards.
- § With regard to the new higher academic achievement standards, the District needs more specific time lines and deadlines. For instance, the NDE often requests input from all counties on a number of issues, and while this action is appreciated by the local members of the education community, it is difficult to find staff to participate when inadequate notice is provided by the NDE.
- § There is a need for remediation funding at the high school level so that teachers may more effectively prepare students to pass the HSPE.
- § In addition, there is a desperate need for qualified teachers who can focus solely on the areas of English, mathematics, science, and social studies.
- § Funding of staff training is appreciated.

Senator Raggio commented that the work of the Council to Establish Academic Standards for Public Schools (Council) has been exceptional, and noted that the Council has taken into consideration many of the issues raised. He indicated that it is his understanding that the time lines have been reviewed and modified.

Continuing, Senator Raggio stated that one of the Legislature=s goals is to have school districts employ instructors with expertise in certain subject areas. Because of the lack of teachers, it is difficult to find instructors who possess special qualifications in a particular subject area. Senator Raggio asked Ms. Lawson if she would endorse a hiring program that would provide incentive pay to teachers who possess expertise in certain subject areas. Linda Busboom, a teacher for the Churchill County School District, Fallon, declined to discuss the issue, stating that she is of the opinion that Nevada has qualified teachers. Rather, instructors must be informed exactly what is expected of them and how quickly they must produce results. Ms. Lawson pointed out that she is a department head and is also responsible for teaching six classes, and it is difficult for her to visit the classrooms of other mathematics teachers. She suggested that it would be helpful if she had access to a mathematics trainer who could evaluate teacher performance in the classroom and act as a resource for teachers. Senator Raggio thanked Ms. Lawson for her remarks.

Katherine Dahl

Katherine Dahl, a special education teacher, Churchill County High School, Fallon, asked the Committee what consideration was given to the needs of learning disabled children when the Legislature enacted legislation requiring that high school students must pass the HSPE in order to earn a diploma. She noted that about three-fourths of her students did pass the HSPE. Mary L. Peterson, Superintendent of Public Instruction, NDE, explained that the primary consideration made by the Legislature over the years is the availability of a special adjusted diploma for certain children with learning disabilities. Continuing, she reported that approximately 10 percent of high school students have learning disabilities, and an adjusted diploma may be granted at the discretion of the student=s teacher and parents. In addition, the NDE is working with the Office of Civil Rights in Seattle, Washington, to appropriately address this issue.

Senator Raggio stated that a number of legislators, himself included, have devoted many years to improving Nevada=s education system. He indicated that his daughter is a special education teacher and that he recognizes the

needs of learning disabled children. Further, these considerations were included in the Legislature=s deliberations of the measure requiring that high school students pass the HSPE in order to receive a high school diploma from a public school. Continuing, he noted that the Legislature=s ultimate goal is not that all students receive a high school diploma but rather that each student who receives a diploma is qualified to compete with his or her peer group across the world.

Ms. Dahl issued a challenge to the Committee=s members to take the HSPE in February 2000 and publish their scores. Senator Raggio reiterated that the purpose of the legislation is to prepare students to successfully compete with their peers throughout the world, and stated that the ability or inability of a lawmaker to pass the HSPE will not change the Legislature=s ultimate goal. Further, he suggested that Ms. Dahl=s efforts would best be directed to encouraging her students to set higher standards for themselves.

Assemblywoman Cegavske commended Ms. Dahl for her work with special needs students. Continuing, she commented that many legislators are advocates of learning disabled children and noted that one of the Assembly=s members, Assemblywoman Chris Giunchigliani of Las Vegas, is a special education teacher. Assemblywoman Cegavske opined that the Legislature has made great strides in addressing the challenges facing Nevada=s education system, and noted that lawmakers need the support of the education community in order to carry out the necessary changes to improve student achievement.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Committee, Chairman Williams adjourned the meeting at 12:15 p.m.

Exhibit E is the Attendance Record@ for this meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Furlong Reil
Senior Research Secretary

H. Pepper Sturm
Chief Principal Research Analyst

APPROVED BY:

Assemblyman Wendell P. Williams, Chairman

Date: _____

LIST OF EXHIBITS

Exhibit A is a copy of the Nevada Mathematics Advisory Task Force Report on the Nevada High School Proficiency Examination (HSPE) in Mathematics, dated November 1999, provided by Mary L. Peterson, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Nevada=s Department of Education, Carson City, Nevada.

Exhibit B is a document titled APresentation on the Millennium Scholarship Program,@ dated January 25, 2000, provided by Brian K. Krolicki, State Treasurer, Carson City, Nevada, and Susan K. Moore, Ed.D., Director, Millennium Scholarship Program, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Exhibit C is an undated document titled AReading Renaissance Report@ provided by Scott Meihack, Principal, E.C. Best Elementary School, Fallon, Nevada.

Exhibit D is a copy of the remarks of Roger Deidrichsen, President, Churchill County School District Board of School Trustees, Fallon, Nevada.

Exhibit E is the AAttendance Record@ for this meeting.

Copies of the materials distributed in the meeting are on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau, Carson City, Nevada. You may contact the library at (702) 684-6827.