

2004 Progress Report
on the
Nevada System of Educational Accountability

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2004 Review of Nevada's Statewide System of Accountability

Introduction

Nevada has had a strong history of accountability of its public schools which began in 1993. Early reviews focused on the extent to which school districts complied with statutes. Most reviewing included comparisons of achievement and other important data from year-to-year. With the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2001 the face of public school accountability changed considerably. This NCLBA required a different focus in accountability efforts and this report represents the first effort to determine how schools, school districts, and the state of Nevada have responded to the law. Senate Bill 1 of the 19th Special Session of the Legislature sets forth the accountability requirements for both state and federal compliance and it is upon that legislation that this review was guided.

This report is comprised of three sections: 1) general demographic and achievement data which was obtained almost exclusively from the Nevada Report Card; 2) NCLBA related information which was obtained for the Nevada Report Card, and visits to 16 schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress; and 3) recommendations based on the findings of this review.

The Review Process

Upon receipt of the contract, assignments for portions of the review were made to the seven subcontractors and the contractor in areas of interest and expertise. Each area specified in the RFP was reviewed. Each area had a secondary reviewer assigned as well to ensure accuracy. All reviewers met in April 2005 to examine the critical facets of the system review, discuss issues in reviewing the system, and determine the scope and direction of the final report. A representative from the Legislative Bureau of Educational Accountability & Program Evaluation (LeBEAPE) also attended and participated in the meeting.

Glossary of Terms & Commonly Used Acronyms

Since most of the information is exclusively related to the field of K-12 public education, the following glossary is provided to assist the reader with certain terms, phrases, and acronyms. Many of the following are commonly used “educational” acronyms.

ADA—Average Daily Attendance - Refers to the average percentage of students present in a school over the course of the year. The target goal for ADA is 90%. It should be noted that this report also refers to ADA for teachers.

Analytic Writing Examination—Nevada uses two types of direct writing assessment: holistic and analytical trait scoring. The analytic trait scoring considers components of good writing and is scored using a rubric with a scale of 1 to 5. The assessment considers six writing traits: ideas, organization, voice, conventions, word choice, and sentence fluency.

AMO—Annual Measurable Objective - Refers to the target goal which the school and all its subgroups must meet for Adequate Yearly Progress analyses.

AYP—Adequate Yearly Progress is the accountability system required by the federal government to determine if schools are making progress toward narrowing the achievement gap and ensuring that all students are proficient in the areas of mathematics and English language arts by the 2013-2014 school year.

CRT—Criterion-Referenced Test - A criterion referenced test provides a score that indicates how well a student does in relation to set, pre-determined goals or outcomes. Currently, Nevada uses CRTs in reading and mathematics based on state standards.

FRL—Free or Reduced Price Lunch - Refers to students qualifying for free or reduced price lunches. Commonly used as a proxy for socio economic status.

Habitual Truancy—Any child who has been declared a truant three or more times within one school year must be declared a habitual truant. A pupil who has one or more unapproved absences from school is considered truant. (NRS 392.140)

HSPE—High School Proficiency Examination - A high stakes test in Nevada which students must pass to obtain a standard high school diploma. All students in public school who expect to earn a standard high school diploma must pass the exam in Reading, Mathematics, and Writing. Beginning with the class of 2009, students must also pass the Science exam.

IDMS—ETS Pulliam Instructional Data Management System is a system of data management designed to help schools align curriculum, assessment, and instruction. The system has an extensive pool of grade level items for each content area.

IEP—A child who is referred to as IEP is a child who is receiving special education services and has an Individualized Education Plan.

ITBS—The Iowa Test of Basic Skills is a standardized achievement test that provides scores in several content areas including reading, language arts, science, and mathematics.

INOI—In Need of Improvement - refers to schools, districts, or states which have not demonstrated adequate yearly progress in the same area for two consecutive years or more.

LEA—Local Educational Agency - Commonly used to refer to a school district or educational organization which oversees the operation of schools.

LEP—Limited English Proficient - refers to students who are learning English as a second language and qualify for English language learner services. Also, the term is commonly referred to as English language learners (ELL).

NCLBA, or NCLB—No Child Left Behind Act. On Jan. 8, 2002, President Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (P.L. 107-110) into law. The law is designed to increase accountability of public schools. The commonly used name to refer to House Referendum 1—the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

NRT—Norm Referenced Test- With norm referenced tests, a representative group of students is given the test prior to its availability to the public. The scores of the students who take the test after publication are compared to those of the norm group.

NDE—Nevada Department of Education

RPDP—Regional Professional Development Program- A group of state-funded organizations which provide training for educators by region within the state.

SES—Social Economic Status, as presented in this report, refers to the income of the family structure of the student.

SIP—School Improvement Plan is a strategic process designed to facilitate continuous progress toward key school goals. Typical key goals could relate to curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, community involvement, use of time, scheduling, reduced class size, and collaboration time.

Subcategories—Please see subpopulations.

Subgroups—Please see subpopulations

Subpopulations—These are the various groups defined within NCLBA and the corresponding Nevada statute. These subpopulations include ethnic groups, Free and Reduced Meals, Individual Education Plan (Special Education), and English Language Learners.

Testing Levels - Level 1 is low performing or very low skills, Level 2 is approaching proficiency, Level 3 is proficient, and Level 4 is highly proficient. Students performing at levels 3 or 4 are considered proficient for NCLBA purposes.

UCCSN – is the University and Community College System of Nevada, now known as the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE).

General District/School Information

Educational Goals and Objectives (All Districts)

The data to evaluate this area were drawn from two sources within each district's report card in the Nevada Report of Accountability: (a) the profile section which includes the district's self report on mission, introduction, and goals and objectives and (b) the curriculum section (www.nevadareportcard.com).

It is noticeable that districts lacked a common approach to completing these sections, and as might be expected, this complicates analysis. For example, some districts used the profile section to note past goals and progress made toward them; this seemed to occur mostly in districts that had data indicating considerable success. Other districts focused more on the future—"these are the goals we are working toward." Some districts used the curriculum section to list goals and to discuss the process to be used to accomplish goals; some used this section to list programs which are used (or will be used) in the districts; and some merely listed every course taught in the district's secondary education program. The sections are considered together because of the variability in the location of the data.

That said, within the two sections some common themes were noted in district narratives. To some extent, each of the 17 districts noted that it was striving to ensure that students did well on typical measures such as mandated grade level tests in core subjects and the state High School Proficiency Examination; factors such as the No Child Left Behind legislation and Annual Yearly Progress requirements were typically referenced. Fourteen districts (82%) specifically mentioned efforts to link teaching with the state curriculum standards, while ten districts (59%) listed efforts in staff development as an important part of their improvement strategies. Six districts (35%) identified goals in the area of community involvement. A few districts mentioned goals in such areas as technology, school safety, and facility improvement.

Similar variability was noted in the reports prepared by individual schools. In the profile sections, some schools provided past goals and data to suggest whether or not past goals were met; other schools provided the goals that they were working toward. For some schools, goals were student competencies in a long list of academic areas. Some schools listed measurable objectives while others listed specific strategies as their objectives. Some schools provided quantifiable benchmarks (percentage or numerical growth) while other schools merely noted that they planned to improve. These variations were found to exist within districts as well as between districts. For the most part, the curriculum sections for individual schools were identical throughout a district and reflected global district goals. The chief variation was that a number of high schools stated that their curriculum was the list of courses which were offered at the school.

The range of responses between and within districts makes interpretation of this information problematic—generalizations are difficult to support. It would seem worthwhile for the NDE to be more prescriptive on content and process for these

sections of the accountability report and to provide explicit training for district administrators related to expectations.

Pupil Achievement (By District)

Pupil achievement is based on results of the various mandated exams and is presented by test by district. The primary focus was on reading, language arts, and mathematics. The tests include:

- The Criterion Referenced Tests (math and reading) which were administered to third, fifth and eighth grade students;
- The Iowa Test of Basic Skills which was administered to fourth and seventh grade students;
- The Iowa Test of Educational Development which was administered to tenth grade students;
- The Analytic Writing Test which was administered to fourth and eighth grade students; and
- The High School Proficiency Examination which was administered to high school level students.