

COVID AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: THE MOST VULNERABLE MAY NEVER RECOVER
Professor Sylvia Lazos, Joint Interim Standing Committee on Education, April 20, 2021

I. COVID and STRUGLE WITH REMOTE LEARNING.

Covid had a crushing impact on the children of Nevada and the most vulnerable have been the most severely impacted. ELL and immigrant families were overwhelmed by the challenge of broad band connectivity and then remote learning.

A. CONNECTIVITY WAS A CHALLENGE.

On the positive side, Governor's CoVID task force muscular response to distribution of chrome books and connectivity remains a stellar achievement. From the beginning, Connecting Kids and its partners¹ struggled to reach the most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations.² Latinx, Asian Pacific Islander leadership, community organizations, and businesses stepped up. Demonstrating leadership, legislators, like Assemblywoman Selena Torres, and community groups canvassed communities where connectivity access was a challenge.

B. THE DIFFICULTY OF REMOTE LEARNING COMPOUNDED THE CHALLENGES THAT OUR DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS FACE

During remote learning, the Nevada Hispanic Legislative Caucus convened a Covid Education committee³ to monitor remote learning and communicate to the large school districts the community's needs. This Committee found

- Slow and spotty connectivity in low-income zip codes impacted student learning⁴

¹ Connecting Kids Nevada was a public/private partnership created by the Governor's COVID-19 Response, Relief, and Recovery Taskforce through Mr. Jim Murren, former CEO of MGM, and Ms. Elaine Wynn, former President of the Nevada State Board of Education. See "Connecting Kids Ensures 100% Of Nevada's Students Participating In Digital Learning Have Access To A Computer And The Internet At Home," <https://connectingkidsnv.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/January-5-2021-Release.pdf>

² Nevada Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *The Impact of Remote Learning on Education Equity in Nevada*, p. 19 <https://www.usccr.gov/files/2021-11/nv-sac-remote-learning-and-equity-in-education-report.pdf>

³ Members of this Committee were Sylvia Lazos, Chair, Gil Lopez, Convenor, Sen Mo Denis, Prof Magdalena Martinez (Lincy Institute UNLV), Valeria Gurr (Padres y Madres), Silvina Jover (Desert Pines, Emerging Bilingual program), Mike Flores (NSHE Chief of Staff), Nancy Brune (Guinn Center) and others.

⁴ Nevada PTA statewide survey of families showed that 80 percent of families and educators reported internet connectivity issues and 51 percent had paid more for additional internet capacity. *Impact of Remote Learning in Nevada* at p. 19. In the immigrant community, schools that had purchased chrome books with Victory monies were able to react quickly and provide families with the equipment.

- Poor communication and outreach to parents who spoke languages other than English.
- Remote learning websites difficult to access for parents who were not fluent English speakers. Confusing translations. Lack of clarity as to who to get help from.
- Parents tried to help children but did not always have the tools or English fluency to be able to support remote learning, difficult under any circumstance.⁵
- Finding quiet spots for children to learn and listen was challenging

C. Warning signs that 2021-22 would be another year of hurt

Governor Sioslak fully reopened schools on June 9, 2020,⁶ allowing Nevada school districts to begin the 2021-22 school year in person.

To provide input from ELL families on ARP/ESSR spending plan, Councilwoman Olivia Diaz, then-CCSD Board President Linda Cavazos, Trustee Irene Cepeda and Cecilia Alavarado, Mi Familia Vota, convened three townhalls in August 2021⁷:

- Mental health was number one issue for students. One student memorably stated “estamos locos” (we are crazy). If we don't feel well about ourselves, we can't learn. Another student shook her head as she said, “we have suffered so much.” Yet another student pleaded that schools make school fun so students could reengage in learning⁸
- Parents uniformly agreed that remote learning was difficult for everyone.⁹
- Parents knew that teachers were beginning the school year exhausted from remote learning. They pleaded for more support for teachers.
- Within the first week of school, high ELL schools were already experiencing HEAVY teacher vacancies.

These needs were communicated to CCSD through the process that they had set up. However, in the resulting ARP/ESSER spending plan, none of these needs were prioritized. In particular, CCSD underestimated how important mental health and teacher burnout were to children in their return to the classroom.

⁵ PTA survey showed that approximately 40 percent of parents reported feeling unprepared to support their children's online learning. *U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, The Impact of Remote Learning on Education Equity in Nevada*, p. 19, <https://www.usccr.gov/files/2021-11/nv-sac-remote-learning-and-equity-in-education-report.pdf> In conversations with ELL parents, most simply did not have the English fluency to navigate remote learning, so older siblings were expected to help the younger family, but these students as well were overwhelmed..

⁶ *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, "Sisolak says Nevada schools can reopen facilities immediately," June 9, 2020

⁷ East Las Vegas Townhall on August 8, 2021 (Rep Dina Titus was also present); Desert Pines HS, Student Community Forum Aug 13, 2021

⁸ Desert Pines HS, Student Community Forum Aug 13, 2021

⁹ La Luz del Mundo, Church Community Forum Aug 3, 2021

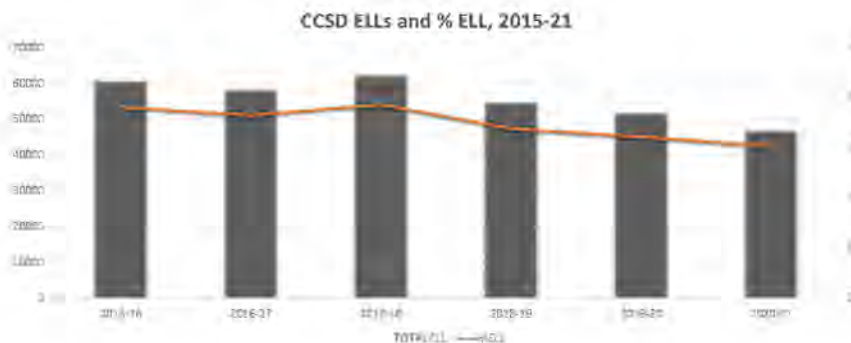
D. Precipitous Drop in ELL student Counts, Catastrophic Learning Loss, Increase in Dropouts

1. ELL Missing Students, children not engaged with public education

According to WIDA data, CCSD lost 6,400 ELL students during Remote Learning from 2020 to 2021,¹⁰ suggesting that CCSD is under-identifying students who require ELL services.

Nevada's public school enrollment dropped 2.94% from 2019-20 to 2020-21.¹¹ CCSD alone experienced a drop of 15,000 students. Enrollments in public charter schools, private schools and home schooling have increased. There are still missing students and the worry is low income, and vulnerable populations may have fallen through the cracks because of COVID related economic and social disruptions.¹² In particular, observations from high ELL high schools is that students who had to work during Covid for survival (about 80% of whom qualify for free and reduced lunch,¹³) did not return. In CCSD with the largest ELL student population, ELLs have dropped from 61,100 in 2015-16 to 41,200 in 2020-21, a 33% drop in just five years.

CCSD ELLs and % ELL, 2015-21



¹⁰ Nevada Dept of Education WIDA data (Dec 2021)

¹¹ Nation's Public School Enrollment Dropped 3 Percent in 2020-21
https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/06_28_2021.asp

¹² ANYA KAMENETZ ET AL, Where are the students? For second straight year, school enrollment is dropping (Dec 15, 2021) <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/15/1062999168/school-enrollment-drops-for-second-straight-year>

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¹³ CCSD, Closing the Literacy Gaps (2017)

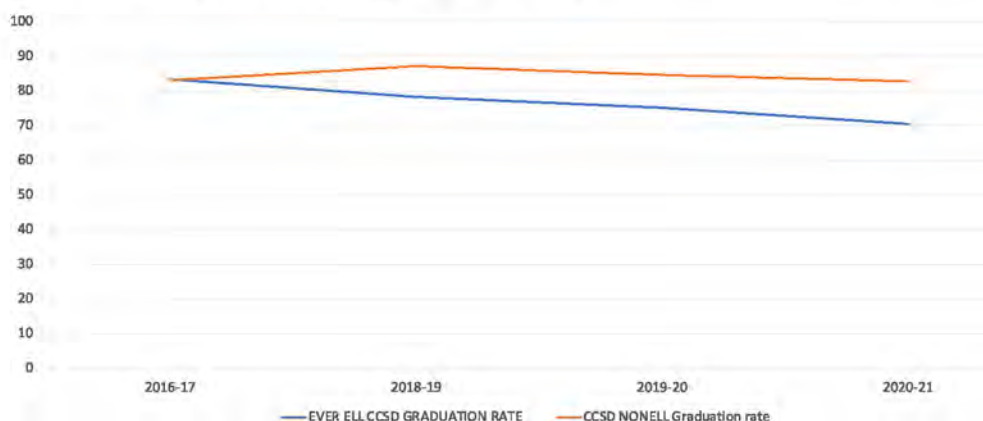
2. Student Achievement GAPS

All students suffered learning loss, but learning gaps for ELLs are catastrophically large. In 2020-21, 92% of ELL students were NON-proficient in English Language Arts; by comparison 57% of nonELL students scored as non-proficient. For this same 2020-21 period, 94% of ELL students tested NON-proficient in Mathematics, while nonELL nonproficient students were at 54%. The ELL/nonELL achievement gap has widened to 35 points in 2020-21 in English Language Arts, and 40 points in Mathematics.

3. Graduation Rates

In 2016-17, CCSD and the state had achieved parity in the graduation rates of English Language Learners and students who had never been classified as ELLs. Graduation rate gaps have now reappeared, the most recent cohort year of ELL students underperformed by 13 points compared to their never=ELL counterparts.

CCSD GRADUATION RATES EVER-ELL vs NEVER-ELL, 2016-21 (excluding 2017-18)



II. WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- A. Nevada Joint Committee on Education should require transparency from LEAs on ESSER/ARP spending.

In September 2021, US Secretary of Education approved Nevada's ESSER/ARP spending plan for Phase 1 consisting of over \$1.3 billion.¹⁴ As Representative Dina Titus told the East Las Vegas community during the August 8, 2021, Townhall, "this is your money." Ongoing ESSER/ARP education spending should be monitored by this committee, in its constitutional role of being

¹⁴ <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/09/Nevada-ARP-ESSER-State-Plan-Approval-Letter.pdf>

the body that “provides a ... system of common schools.”¹⁵ The Nevada Legislature needs to understand how much of the federal ESSER grants are being targeted to help children and ameliorate the negative impacts of COVID learning in the classroom. In the largest district that received two-thirds of the federal education funding, CCSD, there has been no reporting to the Trustees, or to the public since the Trustees approved a 5-page bullet point plan, with no numbers, in September 2021.

B. CONSIDER ZOOM AND VICTORY PROGRAMMING TO ADDRESS THE GAP

In 2021, Nevada Legislature adopted a new “per pupil” funding formula (SB543, SB431) that now provides weighted funding for all ELL and “at risk” students. This weighted funding allocations does not represent the entirety of necessary funding for high-needs populations as determined by cost studies commissioned by the Nevada Legislature. More importantly, funding that had previously been invested in the Zoom and Victory programs to schools that are racially segregated, located in Nevada’s highest poverty geographic areas and historically had been one and two star schools ended. Nevada Legislative leadership, however, was able to extract commitments from several school districts to use ARP/ESSER funding to continue Nevada’s Zoom and Victory programming in though 2021-22.

It is important to appreciate Nevada’s great achievement represented by Zoom and Victory in creating better opportunities for over 65,000 of Nevada’s poorest students. Nevada Department of Education evaluations documented that the systems changes substantially improved overall instruction and provided needed supports to both students and teachers that could be measured in improved student performance.¹⁶

What made Zoom and Victory programs successful was: on-site professional training focused on the needs by particular school communities (in Zoom schools this was ELL), reading centers supporting struggling readers led by a master teacher, additional instructional time, incentives for teacher retention, parental engagement outreach that is culturally appropriate. In addition, Victory schools used funds to address social emotional supports (23 schools).¹⁷ Victory and Xoom schools were able to better navigate COVID remote learning because of these systems which refocused schools on the populations that they were serving. This approach is what Nevada will need to help the students that have been most impacted by remote learning.

The loss of Victory and Zoom structures would be catastrophic to the youngest children who most need early learning. Ending Zoom funding will mean a loss of 8% high quality preK seats,

¹⁵ Nevada Constitution, Art.11, Sec.1

¹⁶ Nevada Department Education, Annual Summary Report Senate Bill 467 (June 15, 2020) Clark County School District SB 467 Annual Report (2020) All three Nevada Department of Education (NDE) evaluations, 2015 to 2020, concluded that Zoom schools “perform significantly better than comparable schools.” The NDE 2018 evaluation concluded that Victory schools in both Clark and Washoe counties outperformed other one- and two-star schools with similar student populations.

¹⁷ NDE 2018 Evaluation of Categorical programs

In 2018- 2019, students who attended Zoom Pre-K outperformed students who did not attend Zoom Pre-K in both reading and mathematics on the Measure of Progress (MAP) assessment. Zoom Pre-K had a larger percentage of students “Not at Risk”(45.6%) than those who did not attend Zoom Pre-K, at (33.5%). (The “Not at Risk” percentage means that the Pre-K students were above the 40th percentile and on-track for reading and mathematics grade-level proficiency.)¹⁸

Nevada Early Childhood Education

| FY2019-20 SEATCOUNT | | |
|---------------------|--------|-------|
| NRIPK: | 3,094 | 8.21% |
| TITLE I: | 2,432 | 6.45% |
| HEAD START: | 1,381 | 3.66% |
| VICTORY: | 80 | .21% |
| ZOOM | 3,175 | 8.43% |
| TOTAL: | 10,162 | 27% |



C. Consider Legislation.

It will take several years to recover from the impact of remote learning, social emotional upheaval of CoVid, and a shaky 2021-22 re-entry year.

1. Fully staffing Title1 schools, one of the goals of Zoom and Victory funding, is the best way to put the most vulnerable children back on track. While overall teacher vacancy is a challenge in every school, it is less so in suburban neighborhood schools where long serving staff provide stability and engender a culture of quality teaching. For the most impacted children to not become a casualty of CoVID, the Legislature must address the inequity of insufficient educator and professional staffing for our most vulnerable students.
2. Give children more time to complete their high school credits, either through summer school or additional time in high school.
3. Tutoring, reading centers, additional teaching time must be funded. Our students are behind. It will take several years for them to catch up.
4. Address students' pleas, "estamos locos", systemically by training teachers in how to cope with SEL and more mental health supports.

¹⁸ Clark County School District SB 467 Annual Report (2020)