
Nevada Scholarship Opportunities: Addressing Barriers and Increasing Access

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WestEd is a nonpartisan, nonprofit agency that conducts and applies research, develops evidence-based solutions, and provides services and resources in education, human development, and related fields to improve outcomes and ensure equity for individuals from infancy through adulthood.

Assembly Bill 428 (2023)

The Nevada Department of Education (NDE) engaged WestEd to examine the barriers to scholarship opportunities and identify considerations for expanding access to them as required by Assembly Bill 428, Section 9.

Guiding Questions

The following questions guided the approach to gathering qualitative data for this report:

- What barriers exist at the state, program, and candidate level of the processes related to the Teach Nevada Scholarship (TNS), Incentivizing Pathways to Teaching (IPT), and Nevada Teacher Advancement Scholarship (NTAS)?
- What potential solutions can be implemented to mitigate identified barriers to accessing the TNS, IPT, and NTAS?

Qualitative Data Analysis

NDE's Office of Educator Development, Licensure, and Family Engagement (EDLiFE) identified seventeen individuals from Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) and the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) leadership to engage in listening sessions and follow-up interviews.

The data gathering process included representatives from

- Great Basin College (GBC)
- iteachNEVADA
- Nevada State University (NSU)
- Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE)
- Nevada Teacher Corps/The New Teacher Project (NTC/TNTP)
- University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV)
- University of Nevada, Reno (UNR)
- Western Governors University (WGU)

Qualitative Data Analysis

- Diverse roles yielded perspectives from programmatic, operations, and fiscal administration.
- Listening sessions produced initial themes of barriers.
- Interviews with programs allowed for testing, clarifying, and refining perception data to identify barriers and considerations for mitigating them.
- The resulting report shares the perceptions and experiences gathered from the EPPs.

Barriers Identified by EPPs

Initial themes were identified during the listening sessions, then refined and validated during the follow-up interviews.

- Fiscal and administrative processes
- Complexity and clarity processes
- Marketing and awareness
- Length of process and timelines
- Communication
- Accessibility and eligibility restrictions

Fiscal Administration

Current fiscal administration of the scholarships creates uncertainty and inefficiencies.

- The procedures used for administering scholarships are the same employed for K-12 Local Education Agency (LEA) grants, creating complications with procedures for higher education and alternative route providers.
- Programs reported financial recording and accounting misalignment with Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) and Alternative Certification Program (ACP) procedures.
- The annual re-approval of EPPs, including budgets, budget modifications, and other required documents, is cumbersome and causes delays.
- Currently there is no funding to support the administration of TNS, IPT, and NTAS, creating an unfunded administrative burden.

Coordination and Communication

Programs report receiving information in fragments, leading to a lack of clarity about processes and procedures, including funding timelines.

- Programs must reapply each year, and revisions to processes occur regularly, leading to less clarity about required program applications, approval as grant sub-recipients, and reimbursement requests.
- While programs report appreciation for the responsiveness and availability of NDE staff when they need assistance, unexpected changes create additional administrative burdens that make it difficult for programs to plan effectively and allocate resources efficiently.

Misaligned Timelines

Timeline challenges create significant logistical and financial difficulties for EPPs and teacher candidates.

- Approval of each scholarship appropriation by the State Board of Education has occurred as early as March and as late as November, which has resulted in recipients being notified of approval after the semester has started.
- Consequently, candidates must cover tuition and fees, with reimbursement often delayed for several months. Some programs handle this issue by using institutional funds to ensure candidates do not have to pay tuition upfront.
- However, this option is unavailable when program budgets lack this capacity. Candidates must pay fees out of pocket and wait for reimbursement for these programs.

Field Experience Pay Complications

Another challenge experienced by candidates is the delayed distribution of scholarship funds during the field experience required in programs.

- IPT is intended to cover expenses during student teaching, as students cannot work during this time.
- Due to funding timelines, candidates typically receive this compensation in one payment at the end of the semester, which is a significant delay.
- The delays experienced at this crucial time for candidates can significantly impact their ability to complete their programs.

Imposed Eligibility Limits

EPPs shared that the new requirement for TNS candidates to hold a Nevada high school diploma is a significant constraint.

- This requirement has excluded groups of viable candidates, career changers who are Nevada residents but who attended high school in another state, and those who hold a GED.
- Following this eligibility change, one program saw its numbers drop from 50 new teachers annually to 10, as this program focused on attracting talent nationwide.

Additionally, NTAS is limited to a master's degree and does not allow for other advanced degrees or advanced training in critical shortage areas.

Restricted Scholarship Use

Significant restrictions limit the allowable use of scholarship funds.

- TNS and NTAS cover tuition and related fees, but recipients may not combine these funds with other financial aid intended for these expenses.
- These restrictions limit candidates from applying funds to other higher education and teacher preparation costs such as housing, transportation, and the general cost of living.

Additional Use Restriction

The Nevada scholarships are restricted to degree completion, excluding advanced training outside of a degree program.

- Many teachers seeking endorsements such as special education or reading can access scholarships only if enrolled in a full graduate program.
- This restriction prevents many educators from obtaining specialized training, increasing shortages in critical teaching areas.

Teaching Stigmas

Nationwide data shows a decline in the number of higher education students choosing education and entering education programs.

- The teaching profession is widely perceived as underpaid, undervalued, and undesirable, limiting the number of individuals entering EPPs.
- This stigma presents a formidable barrier to attracting new educators and addressing teacher shortages.
- These scholarships are offered primarily to students already enrolled in education programs. The scholarships themselves do not necessarily increase the number of EPP enrollees.

Considerations for Increasing Access

Considerations for increasing access to scholarships offered by interest holders include the following:

- Develop an annual coordination and communication plan
- Revamp fiscal administration process
- Fund administrative costs
- Fund a statewide promotional campaign
- Expand eligibility
- Expand the use of scholarship funds beyond tuition and fees

Develop an Annual Coordination and Communication Plan

Develop an annual plan that communicates processes, procedures, and requirements to EPPs.

- Use expectations and benchmarks communicated in the annual plan to generate annual reports on the management of scholarship funds and the experiences of EPPs and students.

Include an aligned, reliable, and accurate timeline for each phase of the administration process.

- Enable EPPs to inform scholarship recipients of their award no later than the summer before the fall semester.
- Implement financial protocols that allow students participating in year-round programs to receive scholarships starting in the spring semester.
- Ensure programs receive funding before the beginning of the semester.

Revamp Fiscal Administration Processes

Develop or utilize existing fiscal processes

- Facilitate the distribution of state funds to EPPs through scholarships.
- Facilitate timely compensation of students, such as through paid internships or work study, for work performed during field experience.
- Facilitate the distribution of state scholarship funds to EPPs in a manner similar to Nevada Promise or Millennium scholarships.

Fund indirect costs to EPPs

- The burdensome administrative workload of coordinating and managing the scholarships requires significant resource capital.
- An indirect cost included in the appropriation would give EPP partners, especially smaller institutions, increased capacity to administer the scholarships and recruit more candidates.

Strategies to Increase Number of Candidates

- Direct a portion of the scholarship appropriation to fund a **statewide promotional campaign** that promotes entry into the teaching profession and interest in utilizing scholarships to fund preparation.
- **Change eligibility requirements** to eliminate the requirement of a Nevada high school diploma.
- Make scholarships **available for advanced training and advanced degrees** rather than limiting them to master's degrees.
- Ensure scholarships can **integrate with other financial aid**.
- Allow recipients to use the scholarships for costs related to housing, transportation, and **general living expenses** associated with attending post-secondary programs.

Thank You