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**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Todd Butterworth, Senior Research Analyst, Nevada Legislative Council Bureau (LCB)  
**FROM:** Jane Splean, Assistant Director, ELL Programs Supervisor, Nevada Department of Education (NDE)  
**SUBJECT:** Recommendations on SB 504: English Language Learners

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**In consultation with LEA and school personnel, the Nevada Department of Education provides the following specific recommendations for legislative consideration relative to SB 504:**

1. Ensure that appropriate evaluation tools are available or provide resources for their development.
  - a. Currently, no appropriate prekindergarten (PreK) assessments exist to identify children as ELL or to measure their English language proficiency.
    - i. Until SY 2013-14, Nevada used the pre-LAS, a very weak English proficiency screening tool designed in the 1970s for Kindergarten children.
    - ii. In 2013-14 Nevada began to replace the pre-LAS with WIDA MODELS, a comprehensive assessment tool designed to evaluate Kindergarten children for English proficiency in Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing.
  - b. The NDE is negotiating with WIDA and working to secure funding for a contract to develop and pilot a suite of assessments to identify and assess the English proficiency level and development of PreK ELL students, ages 2.5 – 5.5.
2. Ensure the alignment of all state funded and federally funded PreK programs (i.e. SB 504, State PreK, Title I and Title III).
  - a. The proposed WIDA contract will include a customization of the existing WIDA PreK English Language Development Standards to support Nevada's PreK Standards and the corresponding Professional Development for Nevada's PreK personnel.
  - b. All Nevada PreK programs and the children they serve will benefit from requirements to ensure uniformity and consistency in implementation of standards, evidence-based practices and evaluation measures across programs.

3. Ensure availability of necessary resources, especially qualified/trained personnel and appropriate facilities for program implementation and expansion.
  - a. Districts experienced difficulty securing appropriate classroom facilities.
    - i. Some districts had to delay their program start-up to find rooms with bathrooms and access to play areas.
    - ii. Some districts looked to rent facilities or had to displace other classes.
  - b. Districts experienced difficulty recruiting and hiring qualified early childhood personnel.
    - i. Some districts postponed their programs while looking for qualified personnel.
    - ii. Some districts hired long-term substitutes while looking for qualified personnel.
4. Clarify the student population (i.e., grade levels) who are to receive required services. The current bill does not indicate the target population but districts were informed by the Legislative Counsel Bureau that the legislative intent was Kindergarten through grade 4.
5. Consider expansion of target population to receive services (K-4) to include middle school (Kindergarten through Grade 8).

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**In consultation with LEA and school personnel, the Washoe County School District provides three specific recommendations for legislative consideration relative to SB 504:**

- Due to the school calendar in Washoe County District, it is anticipated that summer academies will always cut across two budget years. For example, the 2014 Summer Academy will have a portion in June (6 days will be funded out of the 13-14 budget) and a portion in July (18 days will be funded out of the 14-15 budget). WCSD's ability to offer a summer academy in 2015 will be dependent upon the legislators' decision to renew Zoom funds for the 15-16 school year.
- Permit SB 504 funds to be used for professional development, as providing training and support to teachers is critical to implementing any new program. Allowing Zoom schools to fund professional development will further support teachers in using effective strategies to provide high quality Tier 1 instruction for all students at Zoom schools.
- Family engagement is an important part of success at Zoom schools, and WCSD recommends that SB 504 funds should support this important work. Increasing the presence and involvement of parents at the Zoom schools will create a sense of community that will be beneficial to the students, the parents, and the schools.
- In the future, ideally deadlines for reports will take into account the availability of academic achievement data. Many of the key metrics, such as DRA, MAP, CRT and ACCESS data, were not yet available to include in our Year 1 report. Similarly, it will be impossible to include end-of-year data in the Year 2 report due on February 2015.

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**In consultation with LEA and school personnel, the Clark County School District provides two specific recommendations for legislative consideration relative to SB 504:**

- **Item 1: Allowability of Professional Development Costs**

A major challenge in meeting the requirements of SB 504 is due to the fact that the Zoom schools have hired significant numbers of new staff. In addition, schools are to be changing the way they serve children so that LEP students experience accelerated academic growth. To have maximum effectiveness, staff must be trained and new teaching strategies provided to everyone.

CCSD had planned to work with higher education to implement professional development (PD) to maximize teacher effectiveness. It was the understanding of CCSD that this was part of the intention of the SB 504 plan. This would allow for both effective professional development for existing teachers, and new teacher recruitment/placement from their SEA.

It seems contradictory that legislators would understand the need for PD in the rural districts and not understand the same need would exist in Clark and Washoe in order to fully implement the four areas specifically written in the SB 504.

Due to CCSD's understanding of early guidance and the intent of the legislation, some of the funding sources previously received by the Zoom schools were directed to needs in other schools. At this time, these dollars cannot be directed back to the Zoom schools. Additionally, the "qualification" requirements tied to most funding would prohibit this being a universal service for teachers at all Zoom schools. Despite these challenges, CCSD has collaborated across departments to provide funding for some PD; however, this is not the level of immersion that CCSD had envisioned for its Zoom teachers.

- **Item 2: Allowability of Parent Engagement Costs**

Research shows that a child's education is accelerated when the family is engaged. Limiting parent engagement by not providing a funding stream reduces effectiveness of program plans, discontinues existing services in schools, and does not allow CCSD to meet full SB 504 compliance. Families need to be involved to make a sustainable systemic shift in school-based operations.

Legislation states that services were not to be discontinued at any of the Zoom schools. In fact, CCSD understood the intent of the legislation was to provide specific targeted family engagement activities in order to fully meet the four areas specifically written into the legislation. Disallowing parent engagement discontinues the monthly Pre-K meeting practices for parents. All previously existing CCSD Pre-K programs have a required monthly parent meeting where parents are engaged in the classroom for literacy development and student progress and planning.

The SB 504 legislation describes a comprehensive plan to improve outcomes for ELL students. While not all sections are specific to Zoom school operations, it is reasonable to assume that Zoom schools would meet the requirements set forth in this same legislation. Specifically, Section 1.7(2) requires that parents (family) of ELL students be provided an opportunity to participate in the program. Section 4(1)(k) describes that teachers who teach these students must have experience with and knowledge of parental and family engagement. It would be unreasonable to anticipate these outcomes without identifying a funding source to support such practices.