

May 18, 2015

Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Education

Prepared Statement of the Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities

Introduction

In February 2015, the Guinn Center (in collaboration with Nevada Succeeds) published a report titled, *Examining Nevada's Education Priorities: Which Initiatives are Worth the Investment?*, in which we examined the Read by 3 proposal and its potential impact on student outcomes. Based on our findings, we offer the following analysis.

Early identification and intervention are critical to student success

Students who do not achieve reading proficiency by third grade are less likely to graduate from high school.¹

- **Early identification:** Over 30 states have implemented policies requiring an assessment in at least one grade during P-3.² Assessments can be state or locally determined. SB 391 provides flexibility to local school districts and charter schools to determine the assessment but does not specify how often the assessment must be given (e.g., annually, beginning/end of year, etc.).
- **Early Intervention:** Interventions based on research-based practices can help improve student achievement. The effectiveness of interventions should be continually analyzed and retooled as needed for each student. Currently, 29 states and the District of Columbia require intervention or remediation in grades P-3. Some states require specific interventions while others provide a list of suggested interventions. SB 391 includes a list of suggested interventions, which provides flexibility.

Professional development can improve literacy

- Research suggests that implementing ongoing, job-embedded professional development can help improve literacy outcomes.³
- The requirement in SB 391 to have a learning strategist at each school to provide professional development can help fulfill this need.
- However, the funding provided in SB 391 is not sufficient to place a learning strategist at every school.
- Schools currently use Federal Title I funds for learning strategists. Schools will need to carefully analyze the impact of this mandate on Federal supplement/ not supplant rules.

Research is mixed on efficacy of grade retention

- A 2013 study of Florida's retention policy found that student achievement increased temporarily due to retention, but only when accompanied by more effective teaching.⁴
- Research in Los Angeles, California found that retention in first and second grade was more strongly correlated with higher student achievement.⁵
- A meta-analysis of 91 studies conducted by RAND found that retention does not appear to benefit students academically and that retained students have a significantly increased risk of eventually dropping out of school.⁶ In addition, retained students are more likely to be male, minority, and low-income.

¹ L. Fiester. 2010. Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters. Annie E. Casey Foundation. http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-Early_Warning_Full_Report-2010.pdf.

² Education Commission of the States. Third Grade Reading Policies. 2012. <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/03/47/10347.pdf>

³ See for example: G. Biancarosa, A.S. Bryk, & E.R. Dexter. 2010. Assessing the value-added effects of Literacy Collaborative professional development on student learning. *The Elementary School Journal*, 111(1), 7-34.

⁴ G. Schwertz and M. West. 2013. The Effects of Test-Based Retention on Student Outcomes over Time: Regression Discontinuity Evidence from Florida. Harvard Kennedy School. http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/PEPG12-09_West.pdf.

⁵ J. Cannon and S. Lipscomb. 2011. Early Grade Retention and Student Success Evidence from Los Angeles. Public Policy Institute of California. http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_311JCR.pdf.

Read by 3, Zoom Schools, and Victory Schools have overlapping populations, goals and eligible uses

- Programs aim to serve overlapping populations:
 - Read by 3 funds are competitively available. SB 391 does not establish any target populations or criteria for selecting schools (Section 15). Schools that receive these funds will have a mix of ELL and FRL students. The plan required by Read by 3 includes a focus on ELLs.
 - Zoom Schools are targeted at English Language Learners (ELLs) but these schools also have high rates of students eligible for Free and Reduced-price Lunch (FRL). In FY 2014, Zoom Schools had an average FRL rate of 97 percent and an average ELL rate of 52 percent.
 - Victory Schools are targeted at high poverty areas but also have high rates of ELLs. In FY 2014, the schools proposed to become Victory Schools had an average FRL rate of 86 percent and an average ELL rate of 32 percent.
- All three programs aim to improve literacy and/or English language acquisition:
 - Assessment of reading and literacy problems is included in the Zoom and Read by 3 programs.
 - Instructional intervention to enable students to read proficiently by grade three is included in all three programs.
- The three programs have overlapping eligible uses:
 - All three programs allow funds to be used for intervention programs, summer academy, extended school day, and professional development.
 - Zoom and Victory Schools both allow funds to be used for pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, reading centers, recruitment and retention, and parental involvement.

Decision-makers Should Explore Advantages of Consolidating Categorical Programs

- Consolidating Read by 3, Zoom and Victory programs into one grant could remove the artificial barriers between these programs and recognize that all of the targeted schools have a combination of both ELL and FRL students.
- Having one program could move the focus to individual student needs as opposed to creating different labels for schools.
- Having one program could reduce State and district administration costs.
 - The Governor's budget includes one position for Victory Schools and two positions for Read by 3 in the Nevada Department of Education. Two positions for Zoom Schools are included in the base budget.
 - The Governor's budget includes \$30,000 per year to evaluate each of the three programs for a total cost of \$180,000 over the 2015-2017 biennium.
 - Allocations for staff and evaluation could be reduced if there is one categorical grant instead of three.

See full report: *Examining Nevada's Education Priorities: Which Initiatives are Worth the Investment?*
<http://guinncenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Guinn-Center-Nevada-Succeeds-Education-Priorities-FINAL.pdf>

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⁶ J. Sloan McCombs, S. Nataraj Kirby and L. Mariano, *Ending Social Promotion Without Leaving Children Behind: The Case of New York City* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2009). http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2009/RAND_TR678.pdf