

The Social Health of Nevada

Leading Indicators and Quality of Life in the Silver State

Academic Achievement and School Resources

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This chapter examines the national and local trends in educational policy, focusing in particular on Nevada’s academic achievement, standardized test performance, available school resources, and unmet needs. The discussion begins with the concept of academic achievement and the ways it is measured. After that, we analyze the policies impacting academic achievement, most notably the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Next, we suggest the strategies to improve academic performance in the Nevada K12 System and make recommendations to increase parental involvement in education and encourage culturally competent policies of bringing together children, families, and schools. Finally, we discuss the resources needed to raise academic performances in Nevada schools.

No Child Left Behind Act

In 2001, U.S. Congress passed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act that established “adequate yearly progress” as the major criterion for judging academic achievement. Adequate yearly progress is a state defined standard for evaluating the academic achievement of schools and districts. This standard

Chapter Highlights

- The U.S. education system is comprised of nearly 14,000 school districts and 99,000 schools. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, 100% of these students are expected to attain proficiency by 2014.
- In 2011, 48% of the nation’s public schools did not make adequate yearly progress; only 45% of Nevada’s public schools made adequate progress during the same period.
- Over the last decade, NAEP scores in reading and math have improved nationally, but average NAEP scores in Nevada continue to trail national averages.

How to Cite this Report

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spells yearly targets or measurable objectives that can be used to judge how well the school is doing (Center on Education Policy, 2011b). Annual measurable objectives reflect the percentage of students demonstrating proficiency on state standardized assessments. Since these objectives vary by state, national comparisons are rather difficult. Still, NCLB requires states to demonstrate that their educational system meets the following criteria (US Department of Education, 2002):

- A single statewide accountability system applied to all public schools and local education agencies.
- Inclusion of all public school students in the state accountability system.
- A definition of “adequate yearly progress” informed by expectations for growth in student achievement that is continuous and substantial and that enables all students to become proficient in reading and math no later than 2013-2014.
- Annual state decisions about the achievement of all public schools and local education agencies.
- All public schools and local education agencies are held accountable for the achievement of various population segments, such as racial groups, students with special needs, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged.
- A definition of “adequate yearly progress” based primarily on the state’s academic assessments, which includes graduation rates for high schools and other indicators for elementary and middle schools.
- Adequate yearly progress that is based on separate reading/language arts and math achievement objectives.
- A statewide accountability system that is statistically valid and reliable.
- State assurance that at least 95% of enrolled students in each subgroup were assessed before a school is judged to be making adequate yearly progress.

NCLB stipulates that the school failing to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years must be designated as needing improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Once identified as academically deficient, the school that fails to reverse the trend is given one of the following designations:

1. School Improvement (Year One)
2. School Improvement (Year Two)
3. Corrective Action (Year Three)
4. Restructuring (Year Four)
5. Implementation of Restructuring (Year Five)

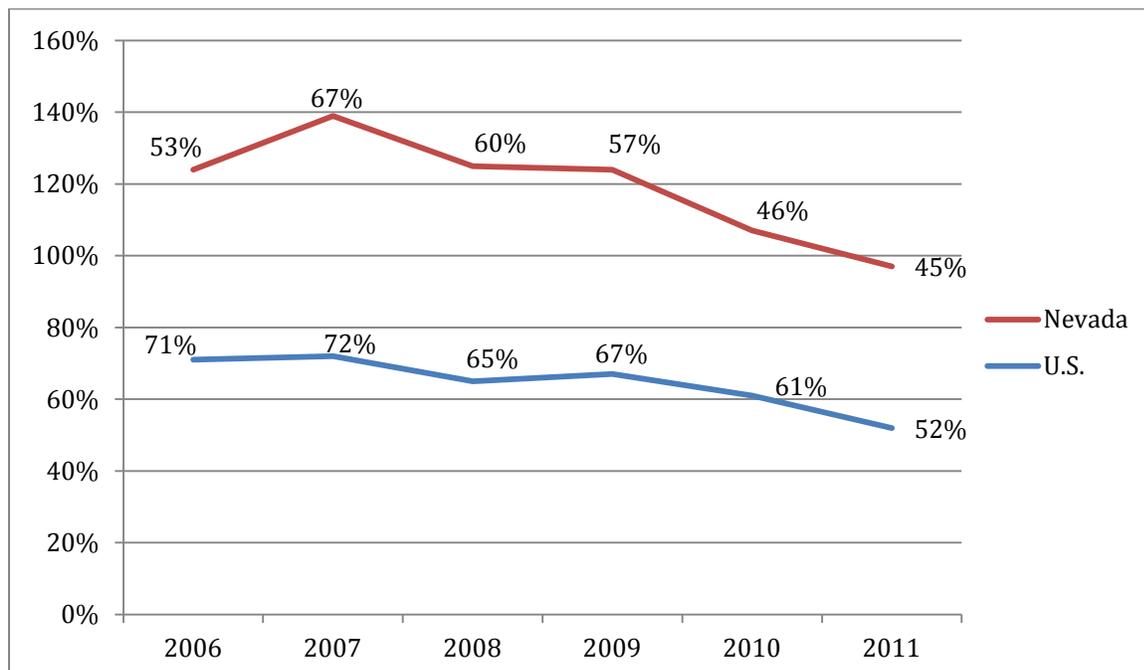
Under NCLB, 100% of students are expected to attain proficiency by 2014. However, in September 2011, the Secretary of Education (Center on Education Policy, 2012b) announced the provision of waivers to states agreeing to

- Establish “college-ready and career-ready” expectations for all students
- Develop and implement differentiated accountability, recognition, and support policies
- Develop and implement teacher and principal evaluation and support systems
- Evaluate and eliminate duplicative or burdensome administrative and reporting requirements

National Achievement

Forty eight percent (48%) of the nation’s public schools did not make adequate yearly progress in 2011 (Center on Education Policy, 2011b). During the same period, only 45% of Nevada’s public schools made adequate yearly progress (Center on Education Policy, 2011b). Furthermore, performance is trending downward in Nevada and nationally. Since 2006, the percentage of schools making adequately yearly progress nationally has ranged from 71% to 52% (Center on Education Policy, 2011b). Similarly, the percentage of schools making adequately yearly progress in Nevada has ranged from 53% to 45% (Center on Education Policy, 2011b).

Figure 1: Percentage of Schools Meeting Adequately Yearly Progress (2006-2011)

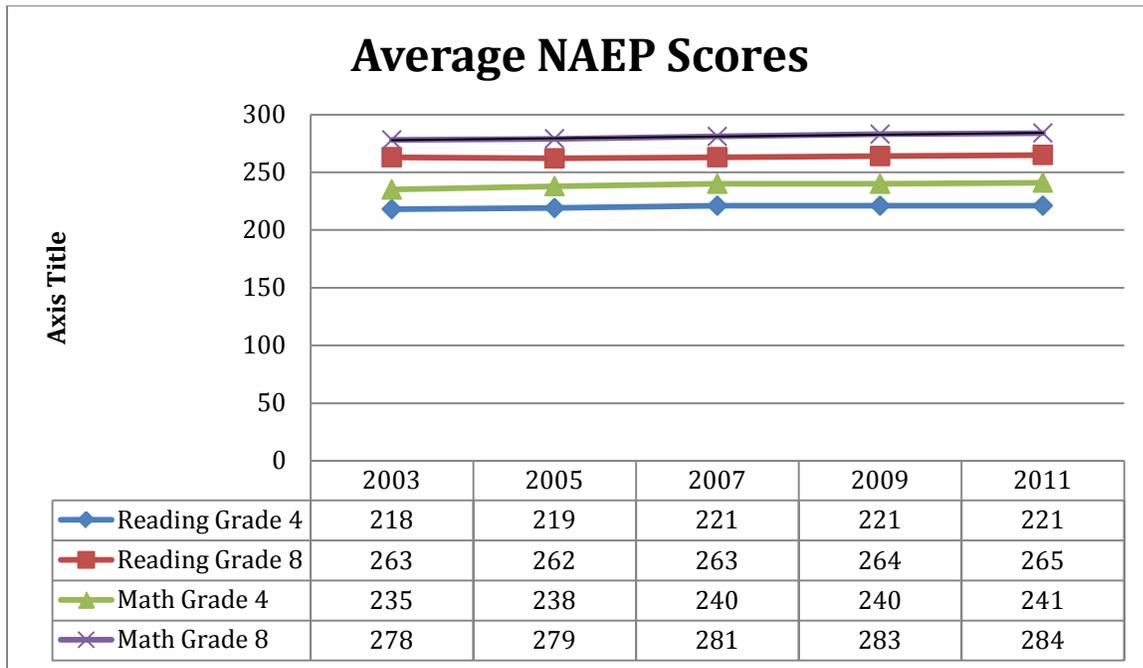


Source: Center on Education Policy, 2011b.

National Assessment of Educational Progress

Another measure of academic achievement is the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The National Assessment of Educational Progress assesses academic achievement in the areas of mathematics, science, reading, and writing. Over the last decade, average NAEP scores in reading and math have remained fairly stable nationally, with slight gains in Math and Grade 8 Reading scores (Center on Education Policy, 2012d).

Figure 2: Average NAEP Reading and Math Scores (2003-2011)



Center on Education Policy, 2012d.

Measuring Nevada’s Academic Achievement

Adequate Yearly Progress

During the most recent school year, Nevada did not make adequate yearly progress. Only 308 of Nevada’s 680 public schools made adequate yearly progress in 2011. Accordingly, the state was given the designation of “watch.”

The Nevada Department of Education accords a school, district, or the state one of seven designations (Nevada Department of Education, 2007; 2011):

1. Exemplary
2. Continuing exemplary-
3. Exemplary turnaround
4. High achieving

- 5. Adequate
- 6. Watch
- 7. In Need of Improvement

“Exemplary,” “Continuing Exemplary,” “Exemplary Turnaround,” and “High Achieving” are designations given to a school, district, or state for successive years of making adequate yearly progress, while not designated as “In Need of Improvement” (Nevada Department of Education, 2011). The tag “Adequate” denotes a school, district, or state that made acceptable yearly progress. “Watch” is a label given to a school, district, or state in their first year of failing to make adequate yearly progress (Nevada Department of Education, 2007). “In Need of Improvement” is a designation given to a school, district, or state failing to make adequate yearly progress two consecutive years or more (Nevada Department of Education, 2011). As previously noted, Nevada’s state AYP designation is watch.

**State of Nevada - Adequate Yearly Progress
State AYP Status**

State	
AYP Classification:	Did Not Make Adequate Yearly Progress
AYP Designation:	Watch

Data as of: Current School Year (2010-2011)
 District totals do not include state or district sponsored charter school data.
 Source: Nevada Department of Education, 2012

It is important to note that while Nevada did not make adequately yearly progress, several districts within Nevada achieved adequately yearly progress, including Esmeralda, Eureka, Humboldt, Lander, Lincoln, Lyon, Mineral, Pershing, Storey, and White Pine (Nevada Department of Education, 2012).

State of Nevada - Adequate Yearly Progress

District AYP Results

District Name	School Designation
Carson City	Adequate
Churchill	Watch
Clark	Watch
Douglas	Watch
Elko	INOI Yr 2
Esmeralda	Adequate
Eureka	Adequate
Humboldt	Adequate
Lander	Adequate
Lincoln	Adequate
Lyon	Adequate
Mineral	Adequate
Nye	Watch
Pershing	Adequate
Storey	Adequate
Washoe	Watch
White Pine	Adequate

Source: Nevada Department of Education, 2012.

High School Proficiency Exams

High school proficiency exams are also used as a measure of academic achievement. As the Center on Education Policy (2011d) notes, there are generally two types of high exit exam policies:

- A policy requiring successful passage of a high school exit exam to receive a diploma
- A policy requiring students attempt passage of a high school exit exam to receive a diploma

While high proficiency exams vary by state, Nevada currently utilizes proficiency exams to examine academic achievement in four areas: mathematics, writing, reading, and science. Recent administrations of the high school proficiency exam indicates that Nevada is meeting its annual measurable objective for performance in mathematics and reading but falling short of its annual measurable objectives for performance in science and writing.

The results also suggest ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic disparities in performance. The percentage of students exceeding the annual measurable objective for performance on the Mathematics High School Proficiency Exam ranged from 15.8% above the annual measurable objective (Asian Students) to 18.4% (Black Students) below the annual measurable objective (Nevada Department of Education, 2012). These disparities become starker when one compares the performance of students with limited English proficiency and special needs with the State’s annual measurable objective for performance on Mathematics High School Proficiency Exam. The State’s annual objective for Mathematics was 71.3% during the most recently reported exam administration (Nevada Department of Education, 2012). Students with limited English proficiency performed 40.6% below the objective, while students with special needs’ performance varied by 42.3% to 44.2% below the annual measurable objective for performance on the Mathematics High School Proficiency Exam (Nevada Department of Education, 2012).

HSPE - Grade 11							
Annual Measurable Objective (AMO): 71.3%							
Mathematics							
	Number Enrolled	Not Tested	% Above AMO	1	2	3	4
State	30,115	1.0%	1.3%	1.1%	26.3%	54.4%	18.2%
Male	15,442	1.1%	1.0%	1.2%	26.6%	52.9%	19.4%
Female	14,672	0.9%	1.7%	1.0%	26.1%	56.0%	17.0%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	357	1.7%	-4.4%	1.1%	31.9%	59.5%	7.4%
Asian	1,939	0.4%	15.8%	0.3%	12.6%	51.2%	35.9%
Hispanic	10,517	1.1%	-8.9%	1.5%	36.1%	52.8%	9.6%
Black/African American	3,197	1.8%	-18.4%	2.5%	44.5%	46.1%	6.9%

White/Caucasian	12,468	0.8%	11.6%	0.5%	16.6%	57.7%	25.2%
Pacific Islander	343	0.3%	5.6%	0.9%	22.2%	55.0%	21.9%
Multi Race	1,292	0.9%	11.6%	0.3%	16.8%	60.0%	22.9%
IEP	2,771	3.1%	-43.6%	5.5%	66.9%	26.0%	1.7%
IEP With Accommodations	1,963	2.9%	-44.2%	5.3%	67.6%	25.8%	1.4%
IEP Without Accommodations	808	3.7%	-42.3%	5.9%	65.0%	26.5%	2.6%
LEP	2,446	1.3%	-40.6%	4.1%	65.2%	27.9%	2.8%
FRL	11,605	1.4%	-9.7%	1.5%	36.9%	51.5%	10.1%
Migrant	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: (Nevada Department of Education, 2012).

During the most recently reported administration of the Reading High School Proficiency Exam, Nevada’s annual measurable objective was 86.7% (Nevada Department of Education, 2012). In general, Nevada students exceeded this measurable objective. Further, percentages disaggregated by racial or ethnic group indicate all racial/ethnic groups exceeded the annual measurable objective for performance on the Reading High School Proficiency Exam. Racial/ethnic percentages ranged from 11.1% above the annual measurable objective (multiracial students) to a 2.5% above the annual measurable objective (Black/African American).

However, during the same period, the performance of students with limited English proficiency and special needs fell below the annual measurable objective. The performance of students with special needs fell below the annual measurable objective by as much as 16.8% (Nevada Accountability Report Card, 2012). Similarly, the performance of students with limited English proficiency fell 15.4% below the annual measurable objective for Reading (Nevada Department of Education, 2012).

HSPE - Grade 11							
Annual Measurable Objective (AMO): 86.7%							
Reading							
	Number Enrolled	Not Tested	% Above AMO	1	2	3	4
State	30,014	0.6%	7.7%	0.6%	5.0%	47.2%	47.2%
Male	15,408	0.9%	6.1%	0.8%	6.4%	48.6%	44.2%

Female	14,605	0.4%	9.4%	0.5%	3.4%	45.7%	50.4%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	353	0.6%	7.6%	1.1%	4.6%	57.0%	37.3%
Asian	1,935	0.3%	9.3%	0.6%	3.5%	39.6%	56.4%
Hispanic	10,482	0.7%	5.0%	0.8%	7.5%	58.3%	33.4%
Black/African American	3,191	1.4%	2.5%	1.2%	9.6%	59.5%	29.6%
White/Caucasian	12,425	0.4%	10.7%	0.4%	2.2%	36.2%	61.2%
Pacific Islander	343	0.3%	8.9%	1.2%	3.2%	48.0%	47.7%
Multi Race	1,283	0.3%	11.1%	0.3%	1.9%	41.1%	56.7%
IEP	2,761	2.9%	-16.2%	3.7%	25.8%	60.0%	10.5%
IEP With Accommodations	1,139	2.7%	-15.3%	3.3%	25.3%	61.3%	10.1%
IEP Without Accommodations	1,622	3.0%	-16.8%	4.0%	26.2%	59.0%	10.8%
LEP	2,441	1.5%	-15.4%	2.9%	25.8%	65.2%	6.0%
FRL	11,574	1.0%	4.5%	0.9%	7.9%	57.3%	33.9%
Migrant	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: (Nevada Department of Education, 2012).

Nevada students did not meet the State’s annual measurable objective for performance on the Science High School Proficiency Exam. As a state, Nevada performed 15.7% below the annual measurable objective of 86.7% (Nevada Department of Education, 2012). Further, disparities across ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups were noted. While all performance was below the annual measurable objective, percentages were as low as 35.7% below the annual measurable objective (Black/African American Students). In the case of performance disaggregated by socioeconomic status, students qualifying for free or reduced lunch (FRL) performed 27.7% below the annual measurable objective (Nevada Department of Education, 2012).

Students with limited English proficiency performed 65.8% below the annual measurable objective for performance on the Science High School Proficiency Exam (Nevada Department of Education, 2012). Similarly, students with special needs performed as low as 51.7% below the annual measurable objective for performance on the Science High School Proficiency Exam (Nevada Department of Education, 2012).

HSPE - Grade 11							
Annual Measurable Objective (AMO): 86.7%							
	Science						
	Number Enrolled	Not Tested	% Above AMO	1	2	3	4
State	30,004	1.4%	-15.7%	8.7%	20.3%	64.3%	6.8%
Male	15,346	1.5%	-13.6%	9.2%	17.7%	64.1%	9.1%
Female	14,657	1.4%	-17.8%	8.1%	23.0%	64.5%	4.4%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	354	1.7%	-19.2%	9.5%	23.0%	64.7%	2.9%
Asian	1,938	0.9%	-7.4%	5.4%	15.3%	69.6%	9.7%
Hispanic	10,464	1.8%	-28.3%	13.0%	28.6%	55.6%	2.9%
Black/African American	3,162	2.7%	-35.7%	17.8%	31.2%	49.3%	1.7%
White/Caucasian	12,451	1.0%	-2.5%	3.8%	12.0%	73.4%	10.9%
Pacific Islander	343	0.3%	-12.7%	8.2%	17.8%	67.5%	6.4%
Multi Race	1,290	0.6%	-5.1%	4.6%	13.8%	73.7%	8.0%
IEP	2,750	3.6%	-55.4%	37.6%	31.2%	30.2%	1.1%
IEP With Accommodations	1,424	3.2%	-57.1%	38.6%	31.7%	28.9%	0.7%
IEP Without Accommodations	1,326	4.1%	-53.7%	36.4%	30.6%	31.5%	1.5%
LEP	2,440	2.6%	-65.8%	38.2%	40.9%	20.6%	0.3%
FRL	11,506	2.2%	-27.7%	13.4%	27.6%	55.9%	3.1%
Migrant	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Nevada Accountability Report Card, 2012.

The annual measurable objective for performance on the most recently reported administration of the Writing High School Proficiency Exam was 86.7%. Nevada failed to meet this objective by 8%. Moreover, there were significant disparities in performance by gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, and

special needs. In the case of gender, performance varied by 11.6 percentage points (Nevada Department of Education, 2012). Similarly, performance varied by 18.5 percentage points by racial and ethnic group.

Consonant with these trends, performance by students qualifying for FRL was 17.5% below the annual measurable objective for performance on the Writing High School Proficiency Exam. Even more disconcerting were the performance trends for students with limited English proficiency and students with special needs. Students with limited English proficiency performed 61.3% below the annual measurable objective, while students with special needs performed as much as 53.8% below the annual measurable objective (Nevada Department of Education, 2012).

HSPE - Grade 11							
Annual Measurable Objective (AMO): 86.7%							
	Writing						
	Number Enrolled	Not Tested	% Above AMO	1	2	3	4
State	30,495	2.2%	-8.0%	1.2%	20.1%	76.4%	2.3%
Male	15,666	2.8%	-13.7%	1.9%	25.2%	71.2%	1.8%
Female	14,828	1.6%	-2.1%	0.6%	14.9%	81.8%	2.8%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	366	3.6%	-11.4%	1.4%	23.3%	75.3%	0.0%
Asian	1,958	1.6%	-1.8%	0.7%	14.3%	80.2%	4.7%
Hispanic	10,607	2.4%	-18.1%	2.1%	29.4%	67.7%	0.9%
Black/African American	3,227	3.3%	-18.6%	1.6%	30.3%	67.3%	0.8%
White/Caucasian	12,680	1.9%	0.9%	0.6%	11.8%	84.1%	3.4%
Pacific Islander	347	2.0%	-2.9%	0.3%	15.9%	81.2%	2.7%
Multi Race	1,308	1.5%	2.5%	0.2%	10.6%	86.0%	3.2%
IEP	2,987	10.2%	-53.7%	7.8%	59.1%	32.8%	0.3%
IEP With Accommodations	1,215	2.1%	-53.8%	8.2%	58.9%	32.6%	0.3%
IEP Without	1,772	15.8%	-53.5%	7.5%	59.3%	33.0%	0.2%

Accommodations							
LEP	2,458	3.1%	-61.3%	8.0%	66.6%	25.3%	0.1%
FRL	11,755	3.2%	-17.5%	2.0%	28.9%	68.3%	0.8%
Migrant	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Nevada Department of Education, 2012.

National Assessment for Educational Progress

In Nevada, NAEP scores have consistently fallen below the national average. The majority of Nevadan students are not proficient in NAEP-assessed subjects (Nevada Department of Education, 2012). Less than 5% of Nevadan students demonstrated advanced achievement in any NAEP subject, in a given year, since 1996 (Nevada Department of Education, 2012).

State of Nevada - National Assessment for Educational Progress

Subject	Grade	Year	Scale Score		Achievement Level			
			State Avg.	[Nat. Avg.]*	Percent at or Above			
					Basic ¹	Proficient	Advanced	
Mathematics (scale: 0-500)	4	1996 ⁿ	218	[222]	57	14	1	
		2000	220	[224]	60	16	1	
		2003	228	[234]	69	23	1	
		2005	230	[237]	72	26	3	
		2007	232	[239]	74	30	3	
	8	2000	265	[272]	55	18	2	
		2003	268	[276]	59	20	3	
		2005	270	[278]	60	21	3	
		2007	271	[280]	60	23	4	
Reading (scale: 0-500)	4	1998	206	[213]	51	20	4	
		2002	209	[217]	54	21	3	
		2003	207	[216]	52	20	3	
		2005	207	[217]	52	21	4	
		2007	211	[220]	57	24	5	
	8	1998	258	[261]	70	23	1	
		2002	251	[263]	62	19	1	
		2003	252	[261]	63	21	1	

		2005	253	[260]	63	22	1
		2007	252	[261]	63	22	2
Science (scale: 0-300)	4	2000 ⁿ	142	[148]	58	19	1
		2005	140	[149]	55	17	1
	8	2000 ⁿ	141	[148]	52	22	2
		2005	138	[147]	48	19	1
Writing (scale: 0-300)	4	2002	145	[153]	82	18	1
	8	1998	140	[148]	77	17	0
		2002	137	[152]	75	16	1

* Includes public schools only

ⁿ Accommodations were not permitted for this assessment

¹ Students who scored below the Basic achievement level are not included in this table.

Source: Nevada Department of Education, 2012.

Criterion Referenced Tests

Another measure of academic achievement is criterion referenced tests. In Nevada, criterion referenced tests are used to evaluate academic achievement in math and reading in response to NCLB reporting requirements (Nevada Department of Education, 2011). Consistent with trends in high school proficiency exam performance, the most recent administration of criterion referenced tests in Nevada indicates significant disparities in performance across racial groups and other populations (see tables below).

Ethnic/racial group performance varied by as much as 32.7% points on mathematics criterion-referenced test, and 31.7% points on the reading criterion referenced test (Nevada Department of Education, 2012). In the case of students with special needs, performance on the mathematics criterion-referenced test fell 37.9% points below the annual measurable objective (Nevada Department of Education, 2012). Similarly, the performance of students with special needs fell 50.6% points below the annual measurable objective for performance on the reading criterion-referenced test (Nevada Department of Education, 2012). Students with limited English proficiency performed 14.5 percentage points below the annual measurable objective for performance on the reading criterion-referenced test and 5.3% points below the annual measurable objective for performance on the mathematics criterion-referenced test (Nevada Department of Education, 2012).

CRT - Grade 4							
Annual Measurable Objective (AMO): 65.9%							
	Mathematics						
	Number Enrolled	Not Tested	% Above AMO	1	2	3	4
State	33,722	0.2%	3.6%	7.2%	23.3%	55.4%	14.1%
Male	17,199	0.2%	3.2%	7.7%	23.3%	55.0%	14.1%
Female	16,523	0.1%	4.0%	6.6%	23.4%	55.9%	14.1%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	366	0.3%	-4.6%	8.2%	30.5%	54.1%	7.1%
Asian	1,993	0.2%	19.4%	2.5%	12.3%	56.8%	28.5%
Hispanic	13,836	0.1%	-3.0%	8.8%	28.2%	53.9%	9.0%
Black/African American	3,207	0.4%	-14.3%	15.6%	32.8%	46.4%	5.2%
White/Caucasian	12,290	0.1%	12.5%	4.2%	17.5%	58.9%	19.5%
Pacific Islander	364	0.0%	3.6%	5.8%	24.7%	57.4%	12.1%
Multi Race	1,666	0.0%	9.6%	5.4%	19.2%	57.6%	17.9%
IEP	3,252	0.5%	-25.9%	24.5%	35.4%	35.3%	4.8%
IEP With Accommodations	2,098	0.0%	-37.9%	30.6%	41.4%	26.8%	1.2%
IEP Without Accommodations	1,153	1.3%	-3.6%	13.3%	24.4%	51.0%	11.3%
LEP	9,894	0.1%	-5.3%	9.8%	29.6%	52.1%	8.6%
FRL	19,359	0.1%	-4.5%	9.9%	28.7%	52.8%	8.6%
Migrant	16	0.0%	-22.1%	6.3%	50.0%	25.0%	18.8%

Source: Nevada Department of Education, 2012.

CRT - Grade 4							
Annual Measurable Objective (AMO): 63.8%							
	Reading						
	Number Enrolled	Not Tested	% Above AMO	1	2	3	4
State	33,722	0.1%	1.0%	15.9%	19.3%	46.3%	18.5%
Male	17,199	0.1%	-3.3%	19.0%	20.5%	44.7%	15.9%
Female	16,523	0.1%	5.5%	12.7%	18.0%	48.0%	21.3%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	366	0.0%	-5.4%	16.2%	25.5%	46.6%	11.8%
Asian	1,993	0.2%	15.6%	7.4%	13.2%	52.0%	27.4%
Hispanic	13,836	0.1%	-8.7%	21.5%	23.4%	43.4%	11.7%
Black/African American	3,207	0.3%	-16.1%	26.0%	26.3%	38.5%	9.2%
White/Caucasian	12,290	0.2%	12.9%	9.1%	14.1%	50.0%	26.8%
Pacific Islander	364	0.0%	1.9%	13.7%	20.6%	52.8%	12.9%
Multi Race	1,666	0.0%	9.9%	10.5%	15.7%	49.5%	24.3%
IEP	3,252	0.4%	-36.6%	53.1%	19.7%	21.6%	5.6%
IEP With Accommodations	1,106	0.0%	-50.6%	66.0%	20.8%	11.9%	1.4%
IEP Without Accommodations	2,140	0.3%	-29.4%	46.4%	19.1%	26.7%	7.8%
LEP	9,894	0.1%	-14.5%	25.4%	25.3%	40.0%	9.3%
FRL	19,359	0.1%	-9.3%	21.7%	23.8%	43.1%	11.4%
Migrant	16	0.0%	-7.6%	37.5%	6.3%	50.0%	6.3%

Source: Nevada Department of Education, 2012.

These facts and figures are at odds with the characteristics that research identifies as central to good learning and teaching experience – deep knowledge of course content, familiarity with how students learn, competency in teaching and creating a positive learning environment, assessment strategies, collaborating with parents and colleagues

(Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2003). The Nevada diverse student population also makes it difficult to utilize proper incentives for teachers, maintain focus on accountability, track student achievement, and implement organizational improvement strategies brought forth by the mandates of No Child Left Behind.

Policy Changes and Reform Prospects

Common Core Standards

The Common Core State Standards articulate rigorous grade-level expectations in the areas of mathematics and English language arts. These standards identify the knowledge and skills students need in order to be successful in college and careers. Promoting a culture of high expectations for all students is a fundamental goal of the Common Core State Standards. Implementing this change allows a school district to:

- Support increased student achievement, focusing resources on schools with the most need.
- Help students to transition from elementary to middle schools and middle schools to high school.
- Sustains ongoing school policies, such as attendance zones and bus transportation for families.
- Provide clear expectations for all schools with performance targets.
- Reduce management structure over the schools (flattens the organization).
- Represent part of the long-term plan to improve school performance.

Common Core State Standards are different from the Current State Standards. In some cases, concepts that are currently taught in one grade will be moved to another. In other cases, concepts are still taught in the same grade, but the expectations might be more rigorous and concepts investigated more deeply.

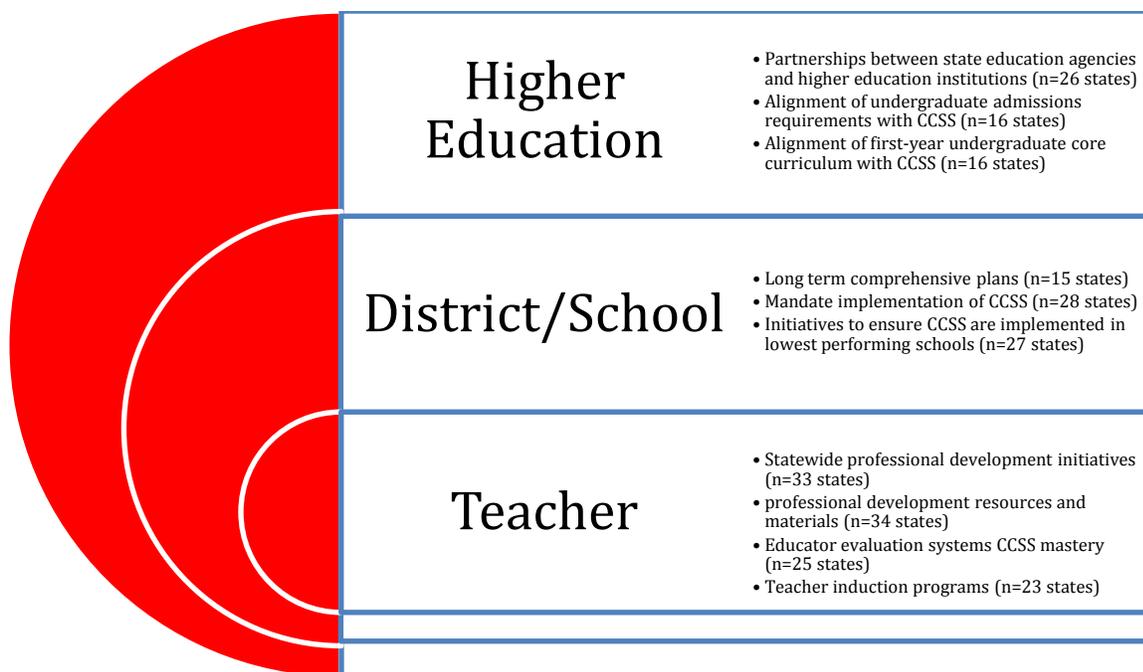
The Common Core Standards (CCSS) were adopted by the Nevada State Board of Education in October of 2010 to ensure that Nevada students are college and career ready. As of August 2011, the CCSS have been adopted by 46 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands. These standards will become the foundation for curriculum design, instructional practice, as well as formative, interim, and summative assessments used at the state and local levels.

Common Core State Standards were fully implemented in the state of Nevada during the 2011-2012 school years, in kindergarten through grade two in mathematics and kindergarten through grade eight in English language arts. The Nevada State Mathematics Standards will be utilized with targeted CCSS in grades three through eight. For example, in eighth grade, some of the Nevada State Mathematics Standards

will be replaced with the CCSS. Each year, an identified percentage of CCSS will replace the Nevada State Mathematics Standards in third through eighth grade.

How will this policy change impact students? Eight grade classes will be based on the Nevada State Mathematics Standards, but some introduction on the CCSS is to be included. High school English and math instruction and proficiency exams for these students will be based on the CCSS. Information from the Department of Education suggests that proficiency exams based on CCSS will count for schools AYP purposes but not for individual student’s graduation requirements.

In support of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a number of practices and policies are underway nationally, including state planning, assessments, curriculum guides, and reform efforts at various levels (Center on Policy Education, 2012a):



Source: Center on Policy Education, 2012a.

As Common Core State Standards make headways, potential problems come to the fore, some of which are considered major challenges by states adopting the Common Core State Standards are (Center on Policy Education, 2012a; Center on Education Policy, 2011c):

- Inadequate guidance from state education agencies on modifying educator evaluation systems, aligning local assessments, and aligning teacher induction programs
- Resistance from principals, teachers, parents, and community members

- Inadequate curriculum materials
- Identifying adequate funding to support the implementation of Common Core State Standards
- Providing adequate professional development and resources to ensure teachers are enabled to implement Common Core State Standard instructional activities
- Alignment of teacher preparation programs and college content with Common Core State Standards
- Development of educator evaluator system incorporating mastery of Common Core State Standards
- Development and adoption of assessments aligned with Common Core State Standards

Nevada Growth Model

Another reform effort is the adoption of the Nevada Growth Model. As a part of Nevada's state reform agenda, the Nevada Growth Model was instituted in 2009 under Assembly Bill 14, Nevada Revised Statute 385. Assembly Bill 14 required the Nevada Department of Education to institute a model measuring student achievement in grades three through eight in a manner that determines the progress a school makes in achievement from year to year (Nevada Department of Education, 2012b).

The Nevada Growth Model utilizes criterion-referenced test scores to examine student growth and school growth in percentiles (Nevada Department of Education, 2012b). These percentiles are encapsulated in two achievement constructs (Nevada Department of Education, 2012b):

- Student growth percentile scores
- School growth scores

For an individual student, growth is the progress shown by the student in a particular subject over a given period of time. The Nevada Growth Model describes how much growth a student has made relative to his or her academic peers, "by providing a student growth percentile in reading and mathematics." For a school district, or other relevant student grouping, student growth is summarized using the median of the student growth percentiles for that group.

For example, Doug and John are participants in the triple jump. This year, Doug jumps 56 feet, and John jumps 58 feet. Last year Doug jumped 53 feet and John jumped 58 feet. Doug's growth percentile is higher than John's. If the bar of proficiency is 60 feet clearly John is closer, however Doug demonstrates that he is gaining ground in his competition. Doug cannot be compared to John; rather he should be compared to triple jumpers that achieved his jump of 53 feet last year.

In the case of the school growth score, the median student growth percentile scores are aggregated to produce the school growth score (Nevada Department of Education, 2012b). Then the school growth scores are conceptualized in quadrants (Nevada Department of Education, 2012b):

- High proficiency/high growth
- High proficiency/low growth
- Low proficiency/high growth
- Low proficiency/low growth

School Improvement Grants

One federal response to improving academic achievement is school improvement grants. Authorized under Title I, school improvement grants are federal grants targeting the needs of low performing schools and the educational needs of disadvantaged youth. During the 2009 Fiscal Year, \$3.5 million was allocated federally for school improvement grants (Center on Education Policy, 2011a). A central tenet of school improvement grants is the use of one of four school improvement models: a transformation model, a turnaround model, a restart model, or a school closure model (Center on Education Policy, 2011a). The transformation model requires grantees to undertake several strategies, including (Center on Education Policy, 2011a):

- Instructional reform
- Increased learning time
- Community-oriented schooling
- Replacement of the principal

Similarly, the turnaround model requires grantees to replace the principal and half of the school staff (Center on Education Policy, 2011a). In the same vein, the restart model requires the grantee to replace the school leadership with a charter management organization. Lastly, the school closure model seeks to address achievement by closing low performing schools and enrolling their students into a higher achieving school (Center on Education Policy, 2011a).

Recommendations to Improve Academic Performance

Reforming our schools to meet the needs of all students is a shared responsibility. The task cannot be shouldered by teachers and principals alone. We have to recognize the importance of communities and families in supporting their children's education. Although parents are a child's first teacher, they can play a vital role in the educational process to support families, communities, and schools (Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005). This can be accomplished through focused collaborative partnerships of teachers, school staff, and parents on the same team to deliver services that address the full range of student needs, including our students that are most at-risk.

There are opportunities for parents to participate in their children's academic decisions such as serving on curriculum committees. Parents, who cannot be physically involved

at the school site, can provide support in other ways. Other supportive ways include discussing the school day with the child, identifying adequate study time and place, or providing the school with constructive feedback after school-related events.

Schools must also support the needs of diverse learners, which include training for teachers and counselors as they practice more efficiently from a multicultural perspective. Teachers and counselors should be assessed as they work toward becoming culturally competent practitioners. Just as adolescents or students identified as learning disabled have developmental needs, culturally diverse students have areas of concern requiring special attention. Research shows that providing culturally competent responses to address academic performance is essential (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011). There is evidence that school-family-community partnerships promote academic achievement as school personnel can gain knowledge in cultural skills that impact learning (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010).

Cultural competence is defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system (agency, professional group) and enables that system to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Cross, 1988). Operationally defined, cultural competence embraces knowledge about individuals and groups of people to ensure that specific standards, practices, and attitudes are utilized appropriately in cultural settings, thus increasing the quality of services and promoting better outcomes (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; Paz, 2008).

Culturally competent systems value diversity, show the capacity for cultural self-assessment, rely on institutional cultural knowledge, and develop a service delivery model sensitive to diversity between and within cultures. Culture plays a key role in the way people think, make decisions, behave, and define events (Sue, 2001). As Diller and Moule (2005) note, a culturally competent system takes into account cultural dynamics in the educational process and adopts educational strategies sensitive to students' cultural status.

Effective educational policy requires regular assessments of teachers and counselors. For example, a simple tool such as the Cultural Competence Domains Model (Wakefield, Garner, Pehrsson & Tyler, 2010) can be used to assess levels of cultural competence. Students must have access to a challenging curriculum along with additional supports and resources reflecting the needs of English Learners, students with disabilities, Native American students, homeless students, migrant students, rural students, LGBTQA students, neglected or delinquent students. Thus, teachers and counselors must possess the attributes skills and abilities to engage increasingly diverse populations of students. In particular, they need to know how to implement innovative approaches to teaching and learning, bring lasting change to our lowest performing schools, evaluate what works and what can work better in America's schools. Just labeling failures while perpetuating the status quo will not allow schools to service properly the diverse student population.

School Resources

Operation Respect

Operation Respect is a program designed to insure that each child and youth acts respectfully, safely and compassionately in an environment conducive to learning, promoting cooperation, and free of bullying and violence. Founded by Peter Yarrow, a member of the folk group Peter, Paul & Mary, the organization disseminates educational resources that are designed to establish a climate that reduces the emotional and physical cruelty children may inflict upon each other through mocking, bullying and violence. The program provides a foundation for a broad scale adoption of school-based character education as well as social and emotional learning (SEL) programs.

Operation Respect has developed the Don't Laugh at Me (DLAM) programs, one for grades 2-5, another for grades 6-8, and a third for summer camps and after school programs. All of the programs utilize inspiring music and video along with curriculum guides based on the well-tested, highly regarded conflict resolution programs developed by the Resolution Conflict Creativity Program (RCCP) of Educators for Social Responsibility. Operation Respect disseminates the DLAM programs free of charge. More than 150,000 copies of the program have been distributed to educators since Operation Respects inception.

Operation Respect also offers assembly programs and professional development workshops designed to provide educators with the tools for effective implementation. To date over 40,000 educators have participated in workshops throughout the United States

Culture-Equity Audits

Consonant with the efforts underway to support the adoption of Common Core State Standards, equity-culture audits are effective mechanisms for developing achievement-focused school improvement plans. An equity-culture audit is an assessment of the existing culture of the school with an emphasis on strengths and weaknesses with respect to achievement, goals and objectives (Saddler, Thompson, Cleveland, & Tyler, 2009). Equity and culture audits assess such attributes as learning environment, discipline, classroom management, leadership, coordination, collaboration, instructional equity, cultural competence, equitable access to the curriculum and relationships (Saddler, Thompson, Cleveland, & Tyler, 2009). The assessment results assist the school and district in making decisions about next steps as they link school culture to academic achievement.

As an investigatory process, equity-culture audits allows a team of educators to visit a school or district and identify how well the system is working based on a set of specific audit criteria(Saddler, Thompson, Cleveland, & Tyler, 2009). Data gathered from this process enables educators to (Saddler, Thompson, Cleveland, & Tyler, 2009):

- Objectively assess the extent of equitable practices in schools
- Establish measurable goals for improvement and develop a plan of action

- Implement appropriate practices based on evidence of success
- Consistently monitor and assess programs for ongoing progress toward academic goals

Typically, equity-culture audits examine ten major areas that are critical to achievement: collaboration, relevance, cultural competence, leadership, school environment, rigor, relationships, equity and access, academic disparities, and communications (Cleveland, Powell, Saddler, & Tyler, 2009).

<p style="text-align: center;">Collaboration</p> <p>Collaboration is present when educators work together in multidisciplinary teams to harness their diverse strengths, study students' needs, and develop teaching policies and practices to enhance student learning.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Rigor</p> <p>Rigor is present when curriculum content is aligned to national and state standards and instructional practices elicit higher levels of thinking through cognitive complexity and Depth of Knowledge (DOK).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Relevance</p> <p>Administrative and instructional practices promote curriculum and instruction that is educationally and culturally relevant to students and society.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Relationships</p> <p>The district and school function as an effective learning community and support a climate conducive to performance excellence.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Cultural Competency</p> <p>The district and school are responsive to the cultural characteristics of the students, parents, and the community they serve.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Equity and Access</p> <p>The district and school ensure equity and access through policies, practices, decision making and allocation of resources.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Leadership</p> <p>District and school leadership promote student achievement by supporting cultures that are student centered and focused on clearly communicated goals and expectations.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Academic Disparities</p> <p>The district and school analyze assessment and non-academic data to identify disparities, develop policies, and implement practices to address them.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Environment</p> <p>The school is a safe and orderly environment that is conducive for teaching, learning, and creativity.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Communications</p> <p>The authorities circulate information about students' academic achievement and needs to school, staff and parents.</p>

Equity-culture audits hold significant benefits for all stakeholders. In the case of students, equity-culture audits can result in improved student performance by (Cleveland, Powell, Saddler, & Tyler, 2009):

- Identifying the factors that significantly contribute to dropout and retention rates
- Determining the nature and efficacy of instructional practice
- Examining the fidelity of the school's intervention programming

Similarly, equity-culture audits are an invaluable tool for school leaders. Equity-culture audits enable school leaders to facilitate the dialogue essential to school improvement, identify conditions that support and thwart school improvement efforts, and glean insight into the true expectations of each major stakeholder (Cleveland, Powell, Saddler, & Tyler, 2009).

Conclusion

No Child Left Behind Act has stressed accountability, student achievement, and organizational improvement strategies. An invaluable step in this process is to align feedback from sources such as testing measures with learning goals. However, many public school districts including several in the state of Nevada have failed to meet the annual yearly progress standards for academic achievement.

Nevada has developed several steps to remedy the challenges that hamper student achievement. Those steps include (1) Common Core State Standards that articulate rigorous grade level expectations, (2) the Nevada Growth Chart Model to promote greater clarity in individual student and school progress, and (3) school improvement grants to address the needs of low performing schools and disadvantaged youth by upgrading personnel, management, or enrollment strategies.

Key findings suggest a need to examine other factors that have been shown to affect student achievement. Student achievement is a shared responsibility that must have the support from school personnel, families, and the community as partners. Meaningful teamwork, clear measurable goals that address specific deficit areas, an environment optimal for learning, and an intentional and consistent method of thoroughly monitoring progress is critical.

More efforts are needed to render the educational policies culturally sensitive. The research shows that from 1999 on, the cultural diversity among the American teaching force has not improved, as it is currently comprised by 83% White, 7% Latino, 7% African American, 2% Other, and 1% Asian American (Center on Educational Policy, 2012c). This finding underscores the need for a focus on cultural competence. The teaching skills of qualified teachers must extend beyond content knowledge, conventional methodologies, and standard checklist for school improvement plans. Truly competent professionals stand out by their cultural awareness and social responsibility, the ability to deploy culturally sensitive techniques and strategies. A valuable resource is an equity and culture audit that helps assess such attributes as the learning environment, discipline, classroom management, leadership, coordination,

collaboration, instructional equity, cultural competence, equitable access to the curriculum and relationships (Saddler, Thompson, Cleveland, & Tyler, 2009). The assessment results can assist the school and district in making strategic decisions about next steps as they relate to school culture and academic achievement.

As this chapter of the Social Health of Nevada Report made clear, the Silver State has ways to go before it meets the national academic achievement targets set by the No Child Left Behind Act. To ensure full compliance, Nevada policy makers, educators, families, and community activists must work together in order to collect up-to-date academic performance data, analyze the statistics to ensure the proper mix of teaching skills, and align resources with strategies that lead to higher and consistent academic achievement.

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