



NEVADA'S PROMISE

excellence,
rigor, and
equity

EDUCATION REFORM
BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE REPORT

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Call to Action

At this time in the history of our country and our state, there is a critical call to action to address the education of future generations. There is consensus at all levels of our society that for America to remain vibrant as an economy and a civilization, we must assume ultimate responsibility for what our children learn and how effectively they are taught. In Nevada, it is clear we have abandoned this responsibility. By all measures we have failed our children.

State of Education in Nevada

Education has become the civil rights movement of our time. There is a need to address the issues of poverty and diversity and to ensure that every child has an opportunity to learn. The hard reality is that Nevada has consistently ranked at or near the bottom in most education-related categories across the country. Current student outcomes are not acceptable.

- Nevada has the lowest graduation rate in the nation at 41.8%, falling 42% below the graduation rate of the highest ranked state, New Jersey.ⁱ
- Higher income students in Nevada perform worse in eighth-grade math than those in any other state except Hawaii and Washington, D.C.
- A wide achievement gap for African-American and Hispanic students continues to prevail, with graduation rates at 30.7% and 29.9%, respectively.ⁱⁱ
- Post-secondary education enrollment rates of 39.2% are the second lowest in the nation.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Nevada ranks last in the nation for students graduating from college in four years.
- In 2007, per pupil spending in Nevada was \$7,845, 26% lower than the \$10,557 U.S. average.^{iv}
- The percent of taxable resources spent on education in Nevada is 2.9%, whereas the U.S. average is 3.8%, making Nevada the second lowest in the nation.^v

Despite some isolated pockets of excellence and hope, when half of our children fail to graduate high school, when post-secondary education enrollment rates are the lowest in the nation and when the wide achievement gap for African-American and Hispanic children continues to prevail, we have failed. Nevada's diverse student population faces challenges of mobility, poverty and English language acquisition. As a result, Nevada is well below the national average in overall student achievement indicators.^{vi} The consequences this portends are obvious—a sad escalation of social needs and a dismal prognosis for our state's desperate economy. Nevada's unemployment rate of 14.5% is already the worst in the nation and has strained state and county resources. In 2009, personal income fell more rapidly in Nevada than in any other state. The staples of our economy—gaming, tourism and construction—are no longer sufficient to provide for our children's future.

State of the Economy in Nevada

Education reform is not merely an educational exercise. *Nevada's Promise* represents a plan for the state's economic health, sustainable economic development opportunities and, ultimately, an improved quality of life for Nevadans. Based on the economic indicators listed below, it is abundantly clear that the state is in a crisis situation as jobs have disappeared and the economy is simply unable to generate the revenue needed to support expected and desperately needed public services.^{vii}

- Nevada's unemployment rate is 14.5%, the highest in the country.
- There are 195,000 reported Nevadans looking for work; 220,000 estimated.
- Nevada ranks last in the nation in jobs available for college graduates.
- Nevada ranks third in the nation in employing high school drop-outs.
- In 2009, personal income fell more rapidly in Nevada than in any other state.
- Nevada's foreclosure rate is one in 17 homes (the national rate is one in 78 homes).
- Nevada's budget deficit is estimated to be \$2.9 billion, which is 42% of the \$7 billion budget.
- Nevada spends 15% more per capita than any other state on incarceration.
- In 2009, Nevada's population declined by 2.6%, marking the first population decline in the state since 1920.

Education is the Key to Nevada's Economic Future

Nevada's long-term success will be determined largely by its educational system's capacity to prepare students for success in today's world. Nevada must create a new strategy for the future if the state is to prosper, and it cannot create a new economic reality unless it has a workforce that is better educated and has the skills that will meet the needs of a workforce of the future—a workforce that will demand graduates with much greater mastery in subjects such as math and science. *Nevada's Promise* makes an unequivocal and decisive link between the state of education in Nevada and the economic distress that it faces, and the state will only solve its economic challenges through major reforms in education.

The economic benefits of improving Nevada's drop-out rates:^{viii}

- More than 23,900 students did not graduate from Nevada's high schools in 2010; the lost lifetime earnings for that class of drop-outs alone total nearly **\$6.2 billion**.
- Nevada would save more than **\$230.1 million** in health care costs over the lifetimes of each class of drop-outs had they earned their diplomas.
- If Nevada's high schools graduated all of their students ready for college, the state would save almost **\$25.8 million** a year in community college remediation costs and lost earnings.
- Nevada's economy would see a combination of crime-related savings and additional revenue of about **\$78.4 million** each year if the male high school graduation rate increased by just 5%.

In the Las Vegas metropolitan area, an estimated 13,600 students dropped out from the class of 2008. Reducing the number of dropouts by 50% for this single high school class would result in the following economic benefits to the Las Vegas region:^{ix}

- **\$70 million** in combined earnings in the average year.
- An additional **\$51 million** in increased spending, including **\$7 million** on vehicles, and an additional **\$20 million** in investments during the average year.
- This additional spending and investment would likely be enough to support **450 new jobs** and increase the gross regional product by as much as **\$91 million** by the time these new graduates reach the midpoint of their careers.
- By the midpoint of their careers, these new graduates would likely purchase homes totaling a value of as much as **\$194 million** more than what they would have spent without a diploma.
- State and local tax revenue would likely grow by as much as **\$5 million** during the average year.
- **56%** of these new graduates would likely continue to pursue some type of post-secondary education.

Nevada's Promise contains a pledge to achieve significant, positive and transformative changes for education in Nevada—**every school will be led by an effective principal, every classroom will be led by an effective teacher and every student will graduate**. *Nevada's Promise* is not only a blueprint for education reform in the state, but also a call to action for the continued support of all sectors in implementing this agenda.

Education is seriously underfunded in Nevada, as shown by national data that ranks Nevada second to last in the nation in per-pupil expenditures, with 2.9% of total taxable resources spent on education. It is equally true that funding without major reform in Nevada will not lead to better results. Many of the recommendations in this report can be undertaken through statutory amendments and by changing the culture of low expectations that exists in many schools to one of success for all students. The task force recognizes that certain reforms contained in this report will require additional investment, in some cases substantial new funding. This is the reality of the state today.

The task force recommends use of this report as a blueprint for our investment in and commitment to the future. While time and circumstances will bring about some refinements, the basic plan is here and should serve to guide Nevada's progress.

With the election of a new governor and the convening of a new legislature, we are faced with a unique opportunity to value education reform more highly than ever before and forge a new path today for Nevada's tomorrow. Nevadans can no longer accept 51st place for a student's chance of success, and must begin demonstrating a commitment to true reform with *Nevada's Promise: Excellence, Rigor, and Equity*.^x This reform agenda represents the first truly tough-minded, bold approach to changing the way we do business in education in Nevada.

The task force now urges that citizens across the state become familiar with these proposals and that our policymakers and newly elected state leaders shape this report into the roadmap for the future of Nevada's children.

Executive Summary

Nevada's Promise: Excellence, Rigor, and Equity

On March 15, 2010, Governor Jim Gibbons signed an executive order forming the Nevada Education Reform Blue Ribbon Task Force to guide and oversee Nevada's Race to the Top application and to facilitate public and private discussion and consensus for overall reform of public education for Nevada's children.

Compelled by the seriousness of this challenge, more than 200 stakeholders provided input into *Nevada's Promise: Excellence, Rigor, and Equity*, representing the Nevada Department of Education (NDE), Nevada's 17 school districts, local school boards, parents, the Regional Professional Development Programs, the Nevada System for Higher Education (NSHE), the Nevada State Education Association, state charter schools, the State Board of Education, elected officials, business and community-based organizations and public foundations. These stakeholders are committed to achieving *Nevada's Promise* because a better educated Nevada will be a more prosperous Nevada.

The task force's efforts in preparing the Race to the Top application sparked a wildfire of interest in and support for moving forward on an education reform agenda for the state. That agenda is now known as *Nevada's Promise*, and the next step is to lay the groundwork for the public support necessary to implement the following reforms in our state.

Governance

In order to realize a K–12 public education system wherein student achievement is paramount and the necessary reforms are readily enacted, the task force firmly believes that accountability must begin with Nevada's governor. Furthermore, to facilitate this gubernatorial empowerment, the task force proposes a realigned governance structure in which responsibility for and vision of K–12 public education may be effectively carried out. As chief executive officer of the state, the governor will rely upon his/her appointed state superintendent of public instruction to execute his/her vision and an appointed state board of education to implement the policies that will enable the state superintendent of public instruction to carry out the governor's objectives. The task force recommends the following structural reforms to the K–12 public education governance system:

- Governor acts as the single point of responsibility.
- State board of education is appointed.
- State superintendent of public instruction is appointed and serves as a member of the governor's executive cabinet.
- Standing, education-related councils and commissions are realigned to establish a simple, clear and transparent K–12 public education system.

Legislation

The pledges contained in *Nevada's Promise* were thoroughly reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education in the Race to the Top grant competition and represent the task force's concerted effort to solve the education crisis in Nevada. The pledges below correspond to specific sections of *Nevada's Promise* and are identified as either legislative or administrative items for action.

Furthermore, in an effort to estimate the overall cost of implementing Nevada's Promise, the task force, in conjunction with NDE, modified the original Race to the Top budget to reflect projected costs over the 2011 and 2013 Legislative Sessions. Nevertheless, this modified budget still represents each of the major components of the plan to preserve a cohesive, integrated reform agenda. The task force has included a copy of the budget with this plan for the governor's consideration.

Legislative Actions Required for Reform

- Revise and augment the current alternative paths to licensure for teachers and principals.
- Authorize the Accelerated Alternative Route to Licensure (A²RL) pathway to support the expansion of a teacher and principal pipeline that produces effective educators for high-poverty schools and high-need areas.
- Provide strong leadership and dedicated teams to implement *Nevada's Promise*.
- Design and implement a statewide system that differentiates teacher and principal effectiveness using multiple measures of student growth.
- Revise binary evaluation system for teachers.
- Revise binary evaluation system for administrators.
- Include teacher evaluations in determination of administrator effectiveness.
- Develop a comprehensive evaluation rubric.
- Determine career ladder opportunities for effective teachers to mentor and support teachers or relocate to serve in urban and rural high-needs schools.
- Use teacher and principal evaluations to inform key decisions (pay-for-performance).
- Use teacher and principal evaluations to inform key decisions (tenure).
- Use teacher and principal evaluations to inform key decisions (termination).
- Create the Nevada Charter School Institute.
- Fund charter schools equitably.
- Establish provision for the conversion of long-term, under-performing traditional public schools to charter schools and for the conversion of long-term, under-performing charter schools to traditional public schools.

Administration

Administrative Actions Required for Reform

- Adopt the Common Core State Standards.
- Enhance and expand the statewide longitudinal data system to include student achievement growth data, indicators of teacher and principal effectiveness, and links to teacher preparation programs from post-secondary institutions.
- Comply with the twelfth, and remaining, element prescribed in the America Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education and Science Act (America COMPETES Act)—student-level college readiness test scores.
- Establish a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) coalition to effect long-term impacts in STEM, P–20 education and job training for Nevada.
- Improve the effectiveness of teacher and principal preparation programs.
- Promote early childhood outcomes.
- Expand the Nevada Growth Model for Achievement to all students K–12.
- Improve student performance through collaboration with key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, principals, employee associations, district administrators, state officials, community leaders and legislators.

Educational opportunity is a moral imperative and Nevada’s economic health and, ultimately, Nevadans’ quality of life, is reliant on our ability to produce young people with the knowledge, skills and abilities to succeed. Since the emergence of the current tourist-based economy 50 years ago, Nevada has prospered without much attention to the changing nature of educational systems in the rest of the nation and the world. While Nevada’s primary industries have been gaming, tourism and most recently construction, college readiness has not been a high priority for the student population. For the future of Nevada, this must change.

Nevada’s Promise makes a clear and decisive link between the state of education in Nevada and the economic distress that it faces, and we will only solve the problem through major reforms in education. Nevada must create and maintain an educated, well-prepared workforce. More than 436,000 students are depending on Nevada’s leaders to establish new attitudes and expectations. The work begins today, and the effort to implement *Nevada’s Promise* must be a unanimous commitment to statewide reform.