

High School Dropout Rates

The Problem

Nevada has one of the highest dropout rates in the country. As states and districts mandate higher standards and increased numbers of credits for graduation, many students are falling behind, giving up, and opting out. Today's workplace requires skilled and better educated workers, yet the most prevalent and fastest growing positions in Nevada require minimal education. The largest and fastest growing job category in the state is cashier, but the position rarely pays a living wage. As students drop out they may find work, but without additional education or training, they find it difficult to be economically self-sufficient.

Determining a true dropout rate is complicated. Three national studies report different rates for Nevada. The National Center for Education Statistics reports the Nevada High School Completion Rate at 77.9%; the Manhattan Institute Study reports 58%; while the Business Roundtable reports 64.7%.

[<http://www.pbs.org/now/society/dropouts.html>]

While these rates may vary, one fact is constant: Nevada is among the bottom three states in the nation. Historically, students at the highest risk for not completing an education are those who have fallen behind in achieving the necessary credits for graduation, who are faced with pregnancy, are from lower-socioeconomic families, are learning disabled, or who are employed out of school. The impact of not graduating from high school is reflected in the following national statistics:

- The unemployment rate for adults over 25 without a diploma was 7.2 in 2001 while the rate for those with a diploma was 4.2
 - Earnings were 27-30% less for those without a diploma than those with a diploma or GED.
- [www.bls.gov/emp/emptab7.htm]

Current Services

Nevada is providing multiple options for students, especially those who have been traditionally disenfranchised or at risk of dropping out of

school. With the advent of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) initiative, schools are being held accountable for the performance of all students including those who have traditionally been disenfranchised by the system. Schools are required to meet certain performance levels for all students and are required to test certain percentages of students so all groups are included in accountability reports.

On the surface this may seem like a good attempt to ensure the success of all students. So where is the problem? By focusing solely on the results of standardized tests, we are utilizing a biased assessment system. Test results do not necessarily transfer to broader measures of performance and success, especially when considering the traditional purposes of education that include civic, social, and employability skill development. Schools need to consider these goals of education and the motivation and engagement of the student through disciplines such as the fine arts, occupational programs, and health and wellness, to actively engage students in the educational process.

To meet these challenges Nevada provides a variety of options to support educational achievement. Students who attend schools that are low-performing based on NCLB have the right to attend a different school. Districts are obligated to provide transportation and allow access for those students to attend a higher performing school. As a result districts are required to "hold" a certain amount of funding to provide such transportation should parents choose that option. This money cannot be utilized to actually improve the failing school.

Nevada law provides for the establishment of charter schools that provide alternative programs for students within the framework of the public education system. Charter schools are public schools and must provide services to students in the same way as regular public schools. There is no charge to attend a charter school. They operate under a charter granted by a local school district or, in some cases, by the State Board.

Unique charter schools provide on-line distance education, bilingual education, services for pregnant and parenting young women and men, construction-related trades, and project-based education. They are held to the same performance standards as are other public schools.

In Nevada, some districts provide alternative education programs for special needs students or those who require smaller class sizes or alternative times to attend school. Career-focused magnet school programs strive to make the academic content relevant through application in a career area. The state also provides funding for adult high school diploma programs for older teens and other adults who have not completed a high school diploma.

Gaps In Services

Education funding in Nevada is well below the national average resulting in fewer dollars to provide the necessary services to ensure that all students will achieve at high levels.

Tutoring and mentoring services are needed at the middle school and high school levels to personalize the education and engage learners.

Parents who are not English speaking need to be empowered to advocate for their needs and those of their children.

Many high schools in Nevada today are large facilities where students are not known personally. Students need to feel invited and included in our schools.

There is a shortage of capacity-building and support services, including tutoring, teacher training and professional development, programs that personalize education, utilizing data to provide continuous evaluation and improvement of educational programs.

Nevada Can Do Better

- Fully fund kindergarten programs to provide the necessary good start needed for all children.
- Fund capacity-building and support services so schools can address the needs of students rather than focus on the punishment and sanctions of schools.
- Support measures that bring the goals of education into line with business, parent, and community needs and values.

Ashley's Story

Ashley is a 10th grade student who, until last year was a good student making mostly As and Bs. She arrived at a large high school to find herself on the fringes of the social milieu of the school. Problems at home, including a single mother recently finished with a drug rehab program, and two older sisters, one of whom recently became pregnant, the other trying to stop a drug-use problem, create stress and tension in a home already emotionally and financially strained.

Ashley has no way to participate in extracurricular activities because there is no bus service and no one at home can pick her up after school. Her grades have dropped in part due to a high number of absences and her wish to help out at home. Her mother can no longer afford the medication she was taking for hyperactivity and depression. Ashley is failing all her classes except art. She is behind in credits for graduation and is worried about being able to graduate.

Language Proficiency

The Problem

The number of English Language Learner (ELL) students in the United States increased by 73% from 1992 to 2002, but in Nevada the ELL student enrollment increased by a dramatic 457% from 1994 to 2004. In 1994 the ELL student enrollment was 14,296, approximately 6% of the student population, compared to the current 65,372, or 16% of the student population.

Since 1997 Clark County School District has seen an average annual growth of over 12% in the number of ELL students. There were 19,764 ELL students in Clark County in 1997, and 50,946 in 2004.

The No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to effectively reach the English Language Learner student. Unfortunately, in 2003-2004 45% of the ELL students in high school did not meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets on the English Language Arts portion of the High School Proficiency Exam and 76% did not make AYP in the math portion. Students who are not provided with adequate programs to transition into English risk not being competitive in employment and higher education. Students who are English Language Learners are much more likely to drop out of high school.

With improved programs for English Language Learners, students will transition into the regular classroom curriculum much faster. Once students have made that transition they have the opportunity to accelerate their achievement and graduate from high school. This results in a positive impact on Nevada's workforce.

Current Services

During fiscal year 2003-2004, the average statewide expense to serve ELL students was \$286 per student, which totaled \$18.7 million. Because school districts must pay for ELL from the general budget in order to maintain services for ELL students as the ELL enrollment continues to grow, other academic programs have been

affected. Even so the districts are currently unable to maintain adequate ELL services.

Gaps in Services

Approximately 90% of ELL students are Hispanic. There is a high demand for teachers who can effectively teach students whose native language is one of the 66 languages spoken in Nevada other than English. Nevada already ranks 47th in the nation in per pupil expenditures and spends 19% below the national average. Clark County's per pupil spending is 26% below the national average.

Every year, the need for programs designed to reach ELL students dramatically increases. Not all districts have been able to adopt some of the programs. Nevada can benefit by implementing and continuing such best practices as: the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), or High Quality Sheltered Instruction (HQSI) which train teachers to develop the necessary strategies to address the needs of ELL Students; Welcome Centers that provide high school students with transition skills; testing in the student's home language to determine the appropriate placement, especially for those students who are new to the district; programs like the Family Leadership Institute to increase parental involvement; smaller class sizes; implementing English language development through supplemental materials, such as the Waterford Program for ELL Students in Kindergarten and 1st grade.

Sources: United Way of Southern Nevada's Community Assessment, iNVEST '05 Funding and Accountability Proposal, State Department of Education.

Nevada Can Do Better

- Increase funding for ELL programs as recommended in the iNVEST '05 Proposal.
- Increase the number of teachers who can teach ELL students

Nevada - Demographic Profile Special Populations

Demographic Profile - Special Populations	Total Enrollment	IEP		LEP		FRL		Migrant	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<u>Nevada</u>	384230	42543	11.1 %	64181	16.7 %	132129	34.4 %	490	0.1 %
<u>Carson</u>	8798	1230	14.0 %	1323	15.0 %	3073	34.9 %	25	0.3 %
<u>Churchill</u>	4500	729	16.2 %	111	2.5 %	1582	35.2 %	70	1.6 %
<u>Clark</u>	267858	27122	10.1 %	52352	19.5 %	95364	35.6 %	40	0.0 %
<u>Douglas</u>	7117	1014	14.2 %	475	6.7 %	1793	25.2 %	0	0.0 %
<u>Elko</u>	9581	1221	12.7 %	612	6.4 %	2819	29.4 %	0	0.0 %
<u>Esmeralda</u>	69	9	13.0 %	16	23.2 %	38	55.1 %	15	21.7 %
<u>Eureka</u>	220	35	15.9 %	N/A	N/A	70	31.8 %	N/A	N/A
<u>Humboldt</u>	3507	451	12.9 %	283	8.1 %	1238	35.3 %	48	1.4 %
<u>Lander</u>	1255	144	11.5 %	31	2.5 %	269	21.4 %	7	0.6 %
<u>Lincoln</u>	866	81	9.4 %	14	1.6 %	345	39.8 %	7	0.8 %
<u>Lyon</u>	7660	959	12.5 %	269	3.5 %	3019	39.4 %	26	0.3 %
<u>Mineral</u>	733	134	18.3 %	N/A	N/A	309	42.2 %	N/A	N/A
<u>Nye</u>	5353	911	17.0 %	256	4.8 %	2258	42.2 %	96	1.8 %
<u>Pershing</u>	841	147	17.5 %	116	13.8 %	336	40.0 %	5	0.6 %
<u>Storey</u>	467	107	22.9 %	0	0.0 %	28	6.0 %	0	0.0 %
<u>Washoe</u>	60125	7572	12.6 %	8126	13.5 %	18741	31.2 %	142	0.2 %
<u>White Pine</u>	1366	203	14.9 %	0	0.0 %	447	32.7 %	0	0.0 %

"N/A" indicates that this population was not present.

IEP = Students with disabilities

LEP = Students with Limited English Proficiency

FRL = Students qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch

Public Funds for Education

The Problem

Nevada is one of the lowest-spending states in the nation when it comes to public K-12 education. It ranks 47th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in education spending per pupil. At the same time, several indicators of child well-being in the state are growing worse. Regardless of spending levels, each school in Nevada is subject to the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) program.

How does Nevada respond to these issues? How does Nevada care for and nurture its most valuable resource, its children? Honest answers to these questions outline the magnitude of the problem.

Current Status

Nevada school districts are countywide and funded on a per student basis. The actual dollar amount varies from district to district, based on numerous factors, including the district's ability to generate tax revenue for school support, and the urban or rural nature of the district. These funds must cover salaries, books, utilities, maintenance and other instructional support at each school. On the surface, this money may seem sufficient, but when paired with the increasing demand for student academic achievement and school performance it is deficient. It is also deficient when compared to national averages.

According to Education Week's *Quality Counts 2004*, published in January, 2005, the national average per pupil expenditure in school year 2000-01, was \$7,376, while Nevada's average was \$6,095. *Quality Counts 2004* compares states in a variety of areas related to K-12 education, including adequacy of funding. This publication reports that "Nevada has also seen the lowest increase in spending for education of any state, with less than a 1 percent increase between the 1999-2000 and 2000-01 school years. Fewer than 2 percent of students in the state attend schools in districts that spend at least the national average."

The *Nevada Kids Count Data Book 2004*, reports that the percentage of children living in poverty increased from 13.5% in 1999 to 13.6% in 2000. The teen violent death rate increased by 0.5% and the dropout rate increased by 1.3%.

To comply with NCLB schools must demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) in student academic achievement, graduation rates and professional qualifications of teachers. Schools that fail to demonstrate AYP are placed on a "watch list." After two consecutive years on the "watch list," they are placed on the "improvement list" and subject to improvement, corrective action and restructuring. More than a third (35%) of all Nevada schools have been placed on the "watch list." Nevada's five goals for NCLB accountability are:

- By 2013-14, all students will reach high standards, at minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.
- All limited English proficient (LEP) students will become proficient in English and reach high academic standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.
- By 2005-06 all students will be taught by highly qualified teachers.
- All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug free, and conducive to learning.
- All students will graduate from high school.

Gaps in Services

Nevada students performed poorly on the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): 23% of 4th graders were proficient or above in math; 20% of 8th graders were proficient or above in math; 20% of 4th graders were proficient or above in reading; 21% of 8th graders were proficient or above in reading.

In 2003, it was reported that only 50% of public school classes were taught by teachers who are deemed highly qualified by NCLB.

Nevada consistently ranks at or near the bottom of the list of states in comparisons of school dropout rates.

Although Nevada receives approximately \$200M in federal NCLB funds, considerably more is needed to address Nevada's education challenges.

Every Nevadan has the responsibility to ensure that our students, schools, and teachers have the tools necessary to be successful, regardless of where their school is. When we raise the standards of our public schools we raise the standards of Nevada; when every child is supported and ready to learn then Nevada wins.

Nevada Can Do Better

- Develop student assessments based on clear and challenging academic standards.
- Provide appropriate remediation for students who have not met the standards.
- Link certification standards for teachers to a national certification standards and reward teachers for excellence.
- Provide funding for professional development days for teachers.
- Continue support for class size reduction in grades 1–3, and expand the program.
- Fund all-day kindergarten.
- Analyze the existing funding structure to ensure that each school is adequately funded.

Safe Schools

The Problem

Although serious violent crime rates among youth have recently abated from their historically high levels, youth violence continues to be far too common. Violence, especially among young people, is more prevalent in the United States than any other industrialized nation in the world. Suicide and lethal violence, both preventable, are now the second and third leading cause of death among adolescents, with Nevada perennially among the highest states in terms of youth suicide. In addition, while the number of students carrying a weapon on school property decreased between 1993 and 2001, the number of girls and, more recently, the number of boys who reported threatening someone with a weapon on school grounds, steadily increased (6.9% for girls and 3.6% for boys between 1999 and 2001). The problem of increased weapons use on school property is underscored by an emerging trend among girls to carry guns (48.9% increase between 1999 and 2001).

Popular analyses of this epidemic of violence among youth have traced its contributors to media glorification of violence (in news and entertainment), the ready availability of lethal weapons, and the economic forces that drive the separation of rich and poor. Despite the pessimistic overtones of much research and media coverage, there is reason to believe that the tide of overall youth violence is changing. The latest national statistics reveal a dramatic and sustained drop in youth violence and provide continued evidence that comprehensive and coordinated efforts at the federal, state, and local levels are making a difference for young people, their families, and their communities. Unfortunately, youth suicide rates have remained highly resistant to attempts at prevention over the past several years.

The vast majority of schools are very safe places. However, some schools do have serious crime and violence problems that compromise the learning environment and endanger children and teachers. Additionally, the effects of bullying, teasing, humiliation, and other forms of vic-

timization, often called social victimization, are pervasive among school-age youth. Such victimization and other forms of violence increase student feelings of isolation and directly lead to higher rates of school dropout, substance abuse, and delinquent behaviors.

Current Services

A range of services and programs that address youth violence, suicide, and school safety are in place. These include after-school programs, in-school counseling and conflict resolution programs, suicide prevention education, mentoring programs, substance prevention and treatment programs, mental health services for youth and their families, parent education programs, child abuse prevention and education, and strengths-based programs targeting at-risk youth. In addition, there are crisis and witness protection phone services and life skills programs for first-time and violent juvenile offenders.

Addressing the societal and environmental factors that influence these issues, including restricting access to weapons and reducing poverty, is needed. More generally, strategies such as Bully Prevention can effectively change school and community-level norms as well as build individual skills, while programs such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters emphasize mentoring as a powerful protective support for youth at low-to moderate risk. A cognitive therapy school-based treatment developed specifically for youth exposed to traumatic loss appears promising, since healing from trauma now appears to be critical before skill training can be effective.

Gaps in Services

Unfortunately, demand far exceeds services and availability is limited or non-existent in many areas. A comprehensive, integrated framework is lacking at both the state and local levels. In addition, the availability of existing services and programs has not matched the increase in numbers of youth at elevated risk for violence, suicide, or victimization in Nevada.

Throughout the country, many school districts use school social workers to help with early intervention and prevention of school violence. Between 13,000 and 15,000 social workers are employed in school districts in 50 states. Nevada has 11 school social workers as members of the services staff in only three districts.

The 1999 legislative Interim Commission on School Safety and Juvenile Violence identified many strategies that would help. These include: emergency response plans in place at all schools, more bullying and violence prevention, gang prevention and mentoring programs, increasing parental involvement with schools, school restructuring to help address barriers to learning, implementing and expanding peer hotlines, identifying and implementing effective prevention programs, and providing monies to hire additional school staff. In addition, more after-school program funding and pre- and postvention suicide policies for all schools are needed. Unfortunately, just as with the report from the Subcommittee to Study Suicide Prevention, much of the statewide plans and recommendations remain unfunded, preventing Nevada from creating an integrated approach to these issues.

Mike's Story

It started in the fourth grade when kids began teasing Mike on his way home from school. He was shorter than most kids and overweight, and compensated by turning his attention to science and math. He was good in both and enjoyed those classes in school, but now in sixth grade kids had started calling him a nerd and other names he didn't like to think about. Frank was the worst and had teased him mercilessly on the school playground and once pushed him down and kicked him on his way home from school. Mike told his teachers and dad about it and although they had talked with Frank and his parents, after awhile it started up again. He tried avoiding them, but they always seemed to find him on the playground or just outside the school.

Two weeks ago Frank and his friends forced him into a vacant area in back of some buildings on his way from school and beat him up. They told him if he told anyone they would find him

Nevada Can Do Better

- Increase funding to promote safe school environments.
- Expand funding for school and community mental health prevention and treatment services, including suicide and substance abuse prevention.
- Increase funding for early childhood psychosocial and emotional development services.
- Encourage safe school policies.
- Increase pupil services personnel to include more social workers in schools so that at-risk populations get the services they need.
- Fund the recent recommendations and statewide action plan developed by the Nevada Legislative Subcommittees on Suicide Prevention and School Violence.

and make him really pay. Mike's grades have fallen and he doesn't want to go to school anymore. He faked being sick for three days after he was beaten up, but his mother made him return. Reporting the teasing and abuse has not helped in the past and in fact has made things worse. His mom did ask a few times if Frank and his friends were still bothering him, but he just lies to her now. Instead he retreats into his room where he fantasizes about shooting Frank with his father's gun. Although he doubts he could really do that, lately he has thought more and more about turning the gun on himself. He asks himself what else he can do, since no one cares?

Submitted by Nevada Cooperative Extension, University of Nevada, Reno and the National Association of Social Workers, Nevada Chapter.