

Legislative Testimony

Senate Bill 474: Great Teaching and Leading Fund

April 3, 2015

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Education

Prepared Statement of the Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities and Nevada Succeeds

Introduction

The Guinn Center for Policy Priorities and Nevada Succeeds have collaborated on two reports addressing professional development: *Reforming Professional Development to Improve Literacy Outcomes in Nevada* and *Examining Nevada's Education Priorities: Which Initiatives are Worth the Investment?*

We have identified efforts to improve professional development as a high priority because of the potential to improve student achievement. Current professional development efforts are insufficient in the following ways:

- The overall system lacks coordination
- Uniform standards have not been adopted by school districts and Regional Professional Development Programs (RPDPs)
- Implementation of professional development is inconsistent
- Resources are limited
- Time for instruction is limited
- Rigorous evaluation is not conducted

Great Teaching and Leading Fund can align priorities for professional development

- **Policy goals:** By prescribing the annual priority for use of funds, the State Board of Education can set clear policy goals for all schools in the State, such as improvement in literacy and the creation of incentives for placing the highest quality teachers in the neediest schools.
- **Geographic Priorities:** The priorities can articulate which areas of the State should be served. Priority can be given for areas with the lowest achievement levels and for rural areas that do not have sufficient resources to provide their own professional development. It can also strategically align with other key education reforms such as the Zoom and Victory schools.
- **Input into priorities:** The bill indicates the State Board shall review and consider the annual assessment of training needs done by the Regional Professional Development Programs (RPDPs) as it develops priorities. The State Board can also take into account the needs assessments done by each school district required by Title II of the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- **Annual review of priorities:** By reevaluating goals each year, the State will be able to create professional development that is responsive to current challenges and priorities.

Great Teaching and Leading Fund can unify standards and improve evaluation of professional development

- **Standards:** To adequately evaluate the program, the State Board should adopt standards for professional development so that there are uniform expectations and evaluation criteria for all grantees. These standards should also apply to programs funded by school districts, unlike the current standards that just apply to the RPDPs.
- **Evaluation:** It is critical that funds be included to evaluate this program and that the evaluation focus on student achievement. Currently, the RPDPs are working to create a system of common program evaluation in the state. This bill will allow their work to be scaled up to the state level.

Focus on Teacher Shortages

- By expanding the definition of professional development to include the strengthening and expansion of our teacher and leader pipeline, Nevada can help address the dramatic teacher shortages in our schools. The State will also be able to measure the effectiveness of various providers.

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Coordination with other school professional development programs is critical to success

- The Great Teaching and Leading Fund will only represent about 20 percent of all funds spent on professional development. The majority of professional development will continue to be provided by school districts and charters.
- Professional development providers will need to collaborate with schools to ensure efforts funded by the Great Teaching and Leading Fund align with other efforts funded by schools.
- The emphasis should be on provided job-embedded professional development so providers will need to build strong relationships and trust with schools.

Grant review process should be open and transparent

- The committee to review the applications should exclude individuals with potential conflicts of interest.
- The criteria for reviewing applications should be clearly articulated in the Request for Proposals.
- The current timeline is well defined in the law so all parties know whether or not they receive the grant six months before the start of implementation.
- The bill gives authority to award the grants to the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The Legislature should consider having the State Board of Education award the grants to ensure transparency and accountability.

Recommendations

1. Adopt standards for quality professional development programs statewide.
2. Ensure NDE develops rigorous evaluations of all professional development training and programs.
3. Ensure NDE conducts annual evaluation based on student achievement to ensure effectiveness.
4. Use the Great Teaching and Leading Fund to provide incentive grants to high quality, effective teachers who want to teach in Title I schools or rural areas.
5. Fund disbursement decisions should be weighted toward overall state educational goals such as literacy.
6. Provide the State Board of Education with the authority to award the grants in lieu of the Superintendent of Instruction to ensure transparency and accountability.

See full reports:

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>; Reforming Professional Development to Improve Literacy Outcomes in Nevada

http://guinncenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Reforming-Professional-Development-to-Improve-Literacy-Outcomes-in-Nevada_July-2014.pdf

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