



March 25, 2015

## Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Education

*Prepared Statement of 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 whether appointed vs. elected school boards are associated with better student outcomes. Based on our findings, we offer the following for consideration.

### Do Appointed School Boards Increase Student Achievement?

- No significant impact: Existing research shows that there is no significant difference in student outcomes in districts with elected, appointed, or hybrid school boards.
- Diversity of board members matters: Some studies, however, suggest that school boards that are more representative of the students they serve are associated with positive student outcomes.
  - One study found that Latino students in districts without Latino board members were suspended and expelled more frequently, were underrepresented in gifted and talented classes, and were overrepresented in special education (Meier and Stewart 1991).
  - Latino students in districts governed by Latino board members experienced better educational conditions.
  - Conclusion: If school boards in Nevada were designed to more accurately reflect the students they represented, then one would be more likely to observe improved student outcomes.

### Implementing School Board Best Practices Can Improve Student Achievement

More than method of selection (appointed vs. elected), effective boards are associated with improved student outcomes. One study found that school boards that engage in strategic planning, view their superintendent as a collaborator, and mitigate conflict, perform better on academic outcome indicators (Ford 2003). Eight characteristics of effective school boards have been identified by the Center for Public Education.<sup>1</sup>

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision.
2. Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.
3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Public Education. January 28, 2011. Eight characteristics of effective school boards: full report. <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Public-education/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards.html>



## Legislative Testimony

## Assembly Bill 339: Appointed School Boards

4. Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.
5. Effective boards are data savvy; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.
6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals.
7. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
8. Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts.

### Recommendations

1. The Nevada Legislature should establish a Task Force to explore the process by which school boards would be appointed.
2. Identify mechanisms for ensuring that school board members reflect diversity and needs of the local community.

**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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