



Legislative Testimony

Senate Bill 391: Read by 3, Senate Bill 405: Zoom Schools, and Senate Bill 432: Victory Schools

April 30, 2015

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Finance

Prepared Statement of the 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 the proposed investment in Read by 3, Zoom Schools, and Victory Schools and the potential impact on student outcomes. Based on our findings, we offer the following for consideration.

Programs to improve literacy and English language acquisition should be a high priority.

- Nevada faces significant challenges in literacy.
 - Only 27 percent of fourth grade students and 30 percent of eighth grade students were proficient in reading on the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).¹
 - Nevada's high school graduation rate in 2012-13 was 70.7 percent, the third lowest in the nation.²
- Students who do not achieve reading proficiency by third grade are less likely to graduate.³
- Evidenced-based intervention programs should be used to improve literacy and English language acquisition.^{4,5}
- Implementing ongoing, job-embedded professional development can help improve literacy outcomes.^{6,7}
- Academic research shows a strong link between parent involvement and early literacy.⁸

Read by 3, Zoom Schools, and Victory Schools have overlapping populations, goals and eligible uses

- Programs aim to serve overlapping populations:
 - Zoom Schools are targeted at English Language Learners (ELLs) but these schools also have high rates of students eligible for Free and Reduced-price Lunch (FRL). In FY 2014, the total FRL rate at Zoom Schools was 95.9 percent in Clark and 100 percent in Washoe.
 - Victory Schools are targeted at high poverty areas. The list of schools is not publicly available but these schools will also likely include ELL students.
 - Read by 3 funds are competitively available to all schools, which will have a mix of ELL and FRL students. The plan required by Read by 3 includes a focus on ELLs.
- All three programs aim to improve literacy and/or English language acquisition:
 - Assessment of reading and literacy problems is included in the Zoom and Read by 3 programs.

¹ National Center for Educational Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress. Available: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>

² United States Department of Education. Ed Data Express. <http://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-elements.cfm>

³ L. Fiester. 2010. Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters. Annie E. Casey Foundation. http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-Early_Warning_Full_Report-2010.pdf.

⁴ S. Davis, C. Lake, N. Madden, & R.E. Slavin. 2009. Effective Programs for Struggling Readers: A Best-Evidence Synthesis. Baltimore: Center for Research and Reform in Education. http://www.bestevidence.org/word/strug_read_Jul_07_2011.pdf

⁵ A. Cheung & R.E. Slavin. 2012. Effective Reading Programs for Spanish Dominant English Learners (ELLs) in Elementary Grades: A Synthesis of Research. Baltimore: Center for Research and Reform in Education. http://www.bestevidence.org/word/ell_read_Mar_19_2012.pdf

⁶ G. Biancarosa, A.S. Bryk, & E.R. Dexter. 2010. Assessing the value-added effects of Literacy Collaborative professional development on student learning. *The Elementary School Journal*, 111(1), 7-34.

⁷ R. Gallimore, B. Ermeling, W. Saunders, & C. Goldenberg. 2009. Moving the learning of teaching closer to practice: Teacher education implications of school-based inquiry teams. *The Elementary School Journal*, 109(5), 537-553.

⁸ Lin, Q. Parent Involvement and Early Literacy, Harvard Family Research Project. <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/family-involvement-research-digests/parent-involvement-and-early-literacy>



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- Instructional intervention to enable students to read proficiently by grade three is included in all three programs.
- The three programs have overlapping eligible uses:
 - All three programs allow funds to be used for intervention programs, summer academy, extended school day, and professional development.
 - Zoom and Victory Schools both allow funds to be used for pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, recruitment and retention, and parental involvement.
 - Victory Schools allow funds to be used for other supplemental services not included in the other programs.

Decision-makers should explore advantages of consolidating these categorical programs

- Consolidating Read by 3, Zoom and Victory programs into one grant could remove the artificial barriers between these programs and recognize that all of the targeted schools have a combination of both ELL and FRL students.
- Having one program could move the focus to individual student needs as opposed to creating different labels for schools.
- Having one program could reduce State and district administration costs.
 - The Governor's budget includes one position for Victory Schools and two positions for Read by 3 in the Nevada Department of Education.
 - The Governor's budget includes \$30,000 per year to evaluate Zoom Schools. Funding for evaluation of Read by 3 and Victory Schools is included within the appropriations for these programs.
 - Allocations for staff and evaluation could be reduced if there is one categorical grant instead of three.

Recommendations

1. Explore the advantages of combining Read by 3, Zoom, and Victory programs into a comprehensive English Language Acquisition program that targets ELL and FRL students.
2. The State (and districts) should provide technical assistance to principals at schools funded by English Language Acquisition funds that support selection of research based literacy programs and NDE/3rd party evaluators should conduct an independent review of the selection of literacy programs.
3. Ensure that the State implements a high quality formative assessment to monitor student outcomes.
4. Ensure the State designs effective, evidence-based intervention programs that reduce retention rates.
5. Ensure the availability of high quality professional development for effective teaching.
6. Review skill development annually for each targeted school and for targeted populations.
7. Require schools to track progress by student annually and report these results publicly and to the state.
8. Require districts to maintain and report out data on other factors related to improved school performance such as teacher experience, teacher turnover rates, etc.

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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