

April 7, 2015

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Education

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 Read by 3 proposal and its potential impact on student outcomes. Based on our findings, we offer the following analysis.

Early identification and intervention are critical to student success

Students who do not achieve reading proficiency by third grade are less likely to graduate from high school.¹

- Early identification: Over 30 states have implemented policies requiring an assessment in at least one grade during P-3.² Assessments can be state or locally determined. SB 391 provides flexibility to local school districts and charter schools to determine the assessment but does not specify how often the assessment must be given (e.g., annually, beginning/end of year, etc.).
- Early Intervention: Interventions based on research-based practices can help improve student achievement. The effectiveness of interventions should be continually analyzed and retooled as needed for each student. Currently, 29 states and the District of Columbia require intervention or remediation in grades P-3. Some states require specific interventions while others provide a list of suggested interventions. SB 391 includes a list of suggested interventions, which provides flexibility.

Professional development can improve literacy

- Research suggests that implementing ongoing, job-embedded professional development can help improve literacy outcomes.^{3,4}
- The requirement in SB 391 to have a learning strategist at each school to provide professional development can help fulfill this need.
- However, the funding provided in SB 391 is not sufficient to place a learning strategist at every school.
- Schools currently use Federal Title I funds for learning strategists. Schools will need to carefully analyze the impact of this mandate on Federal supplement/ not supplant rules.

Parental involvement is integral to academic improvement

- Academic research shows a strong link between parent involvement and early literacy.⁵
- SB 391 includes provisions to notify parents/guardians of reading difficulties and the possibility of retention. The notice must also include a description of strategies the parent/guardian can use at home.
- Some states allow parents to select an intervention strategy, provide parents with strategies to assist children, or require parents to agree to implement a home reading program.

Research is mixed on efficacy of grade retention

- A 2013 study of Florida's retention policy found that student achievement increased temporarily due to

¹ 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.

² Education Commission of the States. Third Grade Reading Policies. 2012. <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/03/47/10347.pdf>

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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>

retention, but only when accompanied by more effective teaching.⁶

- Research in Los Angeles, California found that retention in first and second grade was more strongly correlated with higher student achievement.⁷
- A meta-analysis of 91 studies conducted by RAND found that retention does not appear to benefit students academically and that retained students have a significantly increased risk of eventually dropping out of school.⁸ In addition, retained students are more likely to be male, minority, and low-income.

Decision-makers Should Explore Advantages of Consolidating Categorical Programs

- The Governor has proposed funding for three programs that seek to improve outcomes for at-risk students, with an emphasis on English Language Acquisition: Victory Schools, Zoom Schools, and Read by 3. Decision-makers should weigh the advantages of combining these programs into a single grant program given that they have duplicative goals and all serve English Language Learners (ELL) and low-income students.
- In the long term, this funding should be placed in the funding formula as the funding weights for at risk students and ELLs. This can provide schools with the flexibility to implement data-driven practices tailored to student needs. In return for this flexibility, strong accountability provisions should be put in place.

Recommendations

1. Explore the advantages of combining Victory, Zoom, and Read by 3 programs into a comprehensive English Language Acquisition program that targets English Language Learners and students eligible for Free and Reduced price Lunch.
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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⁶ G. Schwertz and M. West. 2013. The Effects of Test-Based Retention on Student Outcomes over Time: Regression Discontinuity Evidence from Florida. Harvard Kennedy School. http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/PEPG12-09_West.pdf.

⁷ J. Cannon and S. Lipscomb. 2011. Early Grade Retention and Student Success Evidence from Los Angeles. Public Policy Institute of California. http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_311JCR.pdf.

⁸ J. Sloan McCombs, S. Nataraj Kirby and L. Mariano, *Ending Social Promotion Without Leaving Children Behind: The Case of New York City* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2009). http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2009/RAND_TR678.pdf