

**May 18, 2015**

**Testimony before the Assembly 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 proposed expansion of Zoom Schools and its potential impact on student outcomes. Based on our findings, we offer the following for consideration.

**Effectiveness of Zoom Schools has not yet been determined**

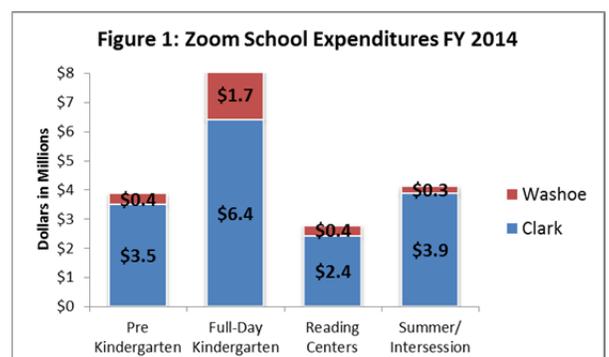
- State and local authorities failed to establish a rigorous scientific evaluation system for the Zoom Schools upon their opening in 2013. Current assessment efforts are neither methodologically rigorous nor uniform across the State.
- Four of the Zoom Schools lost a star in the Nevada School Performance Framework ratings. However, star ratings only account for results in grades 3-5 while the Zoom School literacy interventions were primarily aimed at grades P-3. Extended school year was provided to all students but occurred after the summative assessments.
- In Clark County, reading proficiency in grades 3-5 increased in 13 of the 14 schools, but math proficiency only increased in one school. In Washoe County, only two of the five Zoom Schools realized an increase in reading and/or math proficiency levels.
- The performance metrics, outcome indicators, and external evaluation proposed in SB 405 can help provide a more accurate picture of the impact of Zoom Schools and other programs for English Language learners on academic outcomes.
- Provisions in SB 405 that require corrective action plans for schools that do not implement all required program components place an unnecessary emphasis on compliance over outcomes (Section 1, Subsection 12).

**Need for flexibility in interventions**

- All schools receiving funding for English Language Learners should have the flexibility to use funds for evidence-based interventions, tailored to the needs of each student.
- SB 405 could be amended to allow elementary schools to use funds for evidenced based practices targeted at English Language Learners. The bill already provides this flexibility to middle schools, high schools, charter schools, and rural schools.

**Full Day Kindergarten already funded in budget**

- SB 405 requires Zoom Schools to pay for full-day kindergarten (Section 1, Subsection 2) but the budget closed by Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means includes funding for all full-day kindergarten under a separate line item (See May 16 work session document, page 40).
- In FY 2014, kindergarten was the largest expenditure of Zoom Schools in both Clark and Washoe (see Figure 1).
- SB 405 could be amended to not require Zoom Schools to use funds for full-day kindergarten. This would free up funds for more intensive interventions and/or allow services to be expanded to more schools.



Source: Nevada Department of Education SB504/Zoom School Reports:

**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, Zoom Schools had an average FRL rate of 97 percent and an average ELL rate of 52 percent.
  - Victory Schools are targeted at high poverty areas but also have high rates of ELLs. In FY 2014, the schools proposed to become Victory Schools had an average FRL rate of 86 percent and an average ELL rate of 32 percent.
  - Read by 3 funds are competitively available. Schools that receive these funds 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.
  - 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, reading centers, recruitment and retention, and parental involvement.

**Decision-makers Should Explore Advantages of Consolidating 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. Two positions for Zoom Schools are included in the base budget.
  - The Governor's budget includes \$30,000 per year to evaluate each of the three programs for a total cost of \$180,000 over the 2015-2017 biennium.
  - Allocations for staff and evaluation could be reduced if there is one categorical grant instead of three.

**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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