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Guinn Center Releases Policy Brief on Implementation of Nevada K-12 Education Initiatives

LAS VEGAS, NV— The Nevada Legislature and Governor Brian Sandoval took bold steps during the 2015 Legislative session to make targeted investments to improve student achievement. Three of the major initiatives approved include Read by 3 (\$27 million), Zoom Schools (\$100 million), and Victory Schools (\$50 million). While each of these programs has a different emphasis, they also share overlapping goals and will serve similar populations. To help ensure these policies are implemented in a comprehensive and integrated manner that maximizes the impact on student achievement, the Guinn Center has released a policy brief titled: ***Integrated Implementation of Nevada Literacy and Intervention Programs.***

“Policymakers at the State and local level will be making critical decisions over the next two months to implement Read by 3, Zoom Schools and Victory Schools,” said Dr. Nancy E. Brune, Executive Director of the Guinn Center for Policy Priorities. “Implementing these initiatives as part of a comprehensive strategy can lead to transformative change. We have developed guiding principles and specific recommendations to help ensure the public receives a positive return on its investment.”

Guiding principles for implementation include:

- Emphasize integrated implementation: The three programs should be viewed as integrated components of a comprehensive intervention strategy that utilizes all of the funding sources available at each school.
- Align goals and metrics to the State Improvement Plan and the Nevada State Literacy Plan: These plans have been approved previously by the State Board of Education and should be used to ensure that all of Nevada’s schools are working towards the same statewide policy goals.
- Provide flexibility in use of funds: Policies and regulations approved by the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) and the State Board of Education should provide flexibility to school districts and charter schools in the use of funds to meet the unique needs of each school and to achieve program goals.
- Minimize duplication of effort: Needs assessments and plans should be integrated into existing efforts. Uniform interim and summative assessments should be used to evaluate progress under all three programs.
- Emphasize accountability across all levels: Accountability is integral to success at all levels, including schools, local governing boards, and the State.

Recommendations

- Read by 3: (1) how to integrate and align literacy plans into existing efforts; (2) how to standardize early literacy assessments; (3) how to prioritize funding for learning strategist positions; (4) how to define learning strategist duties and provide them with professional development; (5) how to create statewide outcome measures; and (6) how to implement third grade retention policies.

- Zoom Schools: (1) how to integrate funds into existing planning processes; (2) how to maximize flexibility of funds; (3) how to use funds for recruitment and retention of teachers; and (4) how to determine performance outcomes and provide support to help schools meet these outcomes.
- Victory Schools: (1) how to integrate needs assessments and plans into existing efforts; (2) how to coordinate administration of Victory Schools with Zoom Schools and Read by 3; (3) how to maximize flexibility of funds; (4) how to use funds for recruitment and retention of teachers; and (5) how to define measurable objectives, evaluate performance, and impose sanctions.

Implementation Challenges Ahead

There are several key challenges that school districts, charter schools, and NDE will face as implementation of these initiatives moves forward.

1. Short implementation timeline: School districts and charter schools face very short implementation timelines which makes it difficult to conduct in-depth needs assessments, critically evaluate why some past investments have not been successful, and design quality programs. It is also challenging to make investments that will be sustainable since funding for Zoom and Victory schools may not continue at the same level in future years.
2. Capacity to implement changes: Existing staff at school districts and charter schools have varying levels of capacity to implement transformative change. It will also likely be challenging for school districts and charter schools to implement plans in a timely manner due to inadequate staffing pipelines and limited availability of contract services.
3. Learning Strategist impact on General Fund: There is limited Read by 3 grant funding available to fund the required learning strategist position at each elementary school. Because Federal funds cannot be used for this position due to supplanting restrictions, there could likely be a significant impact on the General Fund of school districts and charter schools.
4. State capacity for oversight: NDE has not previously provided oversight that emphasizes outcomes over compliance. The Department will need to build this capacity to ensure programs are implemented successfully.

The Guinn Center for Policy Priorities is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, bipartisan, policy center focused on providing independent and data-driven analysis of critical policy issues facing Nevada and the Intermountain West. The Guinn Center engages policy-makers, experts, and the public with innovative, fact-based research and analysis to advance policy solutions and inform debate.

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