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UNLV - CCSD Collaborative English Language Learners

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Final Report for Lincy Institute Fellowship Project

Submitted by

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Introduction

Professors Reynolds, Lazos, and Putney were awarded a Lincy Institute Fellowship of \$20,000 in January 2011 to provide a data-based description of the English Language Learner (ELL) population of Clark County School District (CCSD) and collect qualitative data on the perceptions of Principals of high ELL schools as to how best to address the issue of comparatively low ELL academic performance. This project was proposed as Phase I of a multiple phase research and service effort to understand and assist CCSD ELL children in prospering academically. Three specific goals framed Phase I of the project:

- ❖ The creation of an ongoing UNLV-CCSD partnership to work on the educational issues of CCSD ELL students.
- ❖ The collection of qualitative data from the Principals and teachers of selected schools to better understand the impediments to school success faced by ELL children.
- ❖ The quantitative characterization and delineation of these ELL children in CCSD.

All of these goals were accomplished between January 2011 to May 2011, with the exception of some more focused and in-depth data analysis of both the collected qualitative and quantitative data. These additional analyses will be performed during the 2011 summer.

Phase I of the project culminated on May 5th, 2011 with a conference at which preliminary research results were presented to an audience of more than 100 people. A majority of the conference attendees were Principals and other administrators from CCSD, exactly the audience the conference was designed to reach. Another positive aspect of the conference audience was the many significant decision makers from CCSD, UNLV, and the Las Vegas community who attended. Among the notable conference attendees were:

- ❖ Ms. Lindy Schumacher
- ❖ Mr. Pedro Martinez, new CCSD Deputy Superintendent
- ❖ Ms. Lisa Pitch, Coordinator, CCSD Research and Innovation
- ❖ Dr. Brett Campbell, Coordinator, CCSD Research and Innovation
- ❖ Dr. Norberta Anderson, CCSD ELL Director
- ❖ Dr. Magdalena Martinez, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs
- ❖ Dr. Edith Fernandez, College Access Challenge Grant Program Director - NSHE
- ❖ Dr. Lori Navarette, Dean of the Nevada State College (NSC) College of Education
- ❖ Dr. Lee Bernick, Interim Dean of the UNLV College of Urban Affairs
- ❖ Dr. William Speer, Interim Dean of the UNLV College of Education
- ❖ Ms. Carolyn Edwards, CCSD Board of Trustees
- ❖ Ms. Erin Canor, CCSD Board of Trustees

Featured conference speakers were Dr. Ron Haskins, Senior Brookings Fellow in Economic Studies, Co-Director for the Center on Children and Families and Dr. Socorro Herrera, nationally known ELL instruction expert from Kansa State University.

CCSD-UNLV Partnership for English Language Learners

The first effort we undertook was to form a long-term working relationship with our colleagues from CCSD. This was necessary for many reasons; however, the major reasons that were on our minds were:

- ❖ Our work for all phases of our project was going to require permission from CCSD for us to work in schools with students, Principals and teachers.
- ❖ CCSD teachers and administrators have extensive knowledge about, and experience with, ELL issues because they have had to address the needs of these children in increasing numbers in their classrooms for more than a decade. We wanted to be sure that we had access to their expertise as we moved forward with the current and future phases of our efforts to help ELL and other academically vulnerable students improve their school achievement.
- ❖ Our CCSD colleagues will help us evaluate any possible solutions that might emerge from our research and service activities. Also, they will advise us on the classroom feasibility of new ideas that emerge from this work.

Dr. Lauren Kohut-Rost, CCSD Associate Superintendent for Instruction, was our first contact in our attempt to form this partnership. Dr. Kohut-Rost brought Dr. Byron Green on board. Dr. Green is the new Associate Superintendent for Instruction at CCSD after Dr. Kohut-Rost's retirement in May, 2011. Other CCSD personnel who have joined the partnership are: Ms. Sue Daellenbach, Director of CCSD's Research and Innovation group, Ms. Lisa Pitch, CCSD Research and Innovation Coordinator, Ms. Diane Reitz, Director, CCSD Literacy group, Dr. Norberta Anderson, CCSD ELL Director. Also, Dr. Reynolds, Professor Lazos, and Dr. Putney are members of the partnership.

Initially, the general mission of the CCSD-UNLV partnership is to increase the level of collaboration between CCSD and UNLV in terms of addressing the educational performance gaps among CCSD ELL students. This collaboration includes promoting joint research and service projects that have the potential to improve ELL achievement. It is hoped that as the partnership grows and trust increases, the partnership will assist UNLV scholars' access to students, teachers, and Principals for research purposes, support easier access for UNLV scholars to student performance data, allow CCSD administrators and teachers easier access to the resident scholarly and research expertise at UNLV, and increase collaborative interaction between the two units on important educational issues. This latter goal is already being realized as demonstrated by the appointment of Dr. Reynolds to the CCSD Superintendent's

Technical Advisory Board on growth modeling. Dr. Reynolds is the only university person appointed to the Board.

We have plans to expand the Partnership’s mission as we move forward with future Phases of our projects. Our initial Lincy research suggests that the main academic problem that most ELL students have is the **delayed acquisition of adequate reading skills**. The inability to read well then causes many ELL students to fall behind in other contents areas and begins a downward academic and social spiral from which many children cannot escape. The cumulative downward academic spiral has been called the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 2000); meaning that the rich (kids who read well by the end of third grade) get richer and the poor (kids who do not read well by the end of third grade) get poorer.

Research suggests (Adams, 1980) that minority children and low SES children are confronted with exactly the same reading issues as are ELL children. In addition, children from these three different groups – linguistically diverse, culturally diverse, and low SES -- tend to respond well to the same general approach to reading instruction and reading intervention strategies (National Research Council Report: Preventing reading difficulties in young children, 1998); hence, the notion of grouping them together to address their academic issues is appropriate. For the present at least, we have decided to call this more inclusive group of children **“academically vulnerable”** children to underscore their similarities in terms of academic issues and proposed solutions. Also, addressing the three designations of vulnerable students together promises efficiencies of scale when implementing programs to assist them in acquiring the skills necessary for them to do well academically. The efficiencies of scale gained by this approach are particularly important at this time in Nevada because of our budget concerns.

Qualitative Results from Initial Lincy Studies

We identified 11 possible schools for our initial Lincy study in collaboration with our CCSD-UNLV Partnership group. All of these schools contained significant populations of ELL students. Six of the schools were considered higher achieving in the sense that they were either making AYP or showing improvement over time. The remaining five were considered lesser achieving because they were not making AYP or showing improvement over time – many were designated as “in need of improvement.” The Principals of each of these schools were to be interviewed concerning ELL issues in their schools. Time constraints and scheduling difficulties allowed us to interview only nine of the 11 before the May 5th conference; hence, the data presented was based on only those nine interviews. The CCSD elementary schools that participated, or intend to participate, in our initial study are as follows:

J.T. McWilliams Elementary School	Jeffers Elementary School
Pittman Vail Elementary School	Adams Elementary School
Fitzgerald Elementary School	Cunningham Elementary School
Harmon Elementary School	Rose Warren Elementary School
Hinman Elementary School	Roundy Elementary School

Jeffers Elementary School	
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Table 1. Schools included in initial Lincy study.

Our initial scoring of the qualitative data saw five separate categories of information emerge from the Principal interviews: existing Leadership approaches, current teacher professional development expertise, programs being used in the schools that addressed ELL students, approaches to parent development, and current pressing policy issues. I will briefly summarize our initial results across all participating Principals next:

- ❖ Leadership Issues – All Principals had similar educational philosophies. They intended to meet the needs of all children individually, regardless of ELL status. All had as a goal the use of “best instructional practices” for their students; however, opinions differed in terms of exactly what constituted best instructional practices. All advocated some form of adult to child tutoring for ELL children to enhance language acquisition.
- ❖ Desired Teacher Professional Development – Principals were again in agreement that teachers in ELL settings should possess a TESOL endorsement on their teaching certificate; however, only two of the schools in our sample had a significant number (50% or more) of TESOL endorsed teachers on their faculty. All of these schools were using some form of High-Quality Sheltered Instruction (HQSI), a program of instruction supported by the CCSD ELL group. All Principals expressed a desired to have more ELL specialists available to assist teachers with their ELL students. This was exemplified by one Principal who stated,

“We don’t need any more programs. We need expert educators to spend time with kids.”

- ❖ Curriculum – We compiled a list of all programs used in our schools by pooling responses across all of the Principals. All of the schools were using either Trophies (a District endorsed Basal Reading program) or Voyager (a reading intervention program for struggling readers) or both. In addition, several supplemental programs were used. These included Rosetta Stone (a language acquisition program), Imagine Learning (a technology-based program for ELL), and several other programs aimed directly at improving reading performance: Lexia, Reading A to Z, Walk to Read, and Leap Frog. It is easy to deduce that the Principals in our sample of high ELL schools saw that a major issue for ELL students was poor reading skills, given the preponderance of supplemental programs aimed directly at increasing student reading performance they had implemented in their schools.
- ❖ Parent Involvement – All the Principals understood the importance of parent involvement in their children’s education as a key factor in raising student achievement. All of the schools in our sample had parent events such as Parent Centers, Parent Workshops, Parent Event Nights, and Family Leadership Institutes to promote parent involvement; however, none reported having a high level of parent involvement in their

schools. One Principal provided a possible explanation for the low levels of parent involvement,

“Again, it’s tougher for our parents. We are not the kind of school where you have a ton of parent volunteers. Because if I’m [linguistically diverse parents] not confident of my English skills and I know I’m going to be asked to help kids, I’m less apt to come into school.”

- ❖ **Policy Issues** – Not surprisingly, all Principals expressed concerns about the Nevada budget issues. They were particularly upset concerning the expected loss of ELL facilitators and specialists, literacy specialists, teachers (creating higher teacher/student ratios), and the expected lack of funding for additional programs.

In summary, the Principals in our sample have a strong desire to provide the best education they can to all of their students, including academically vulnerable students. Their main concerns for the future centered on not have enough funding to hire enough ELL specialists and literacy specialists, to hire enough TESOL endorsed teachers, and to purchase needed curriculum materials. The Principals agreed unanimously on one point; they did not need or want more programs in their schools. Their real need was to have more knowledgeable, well-educated specialists and teachers in their school working to directly address the needs of all of their students.

Quantitative Results from Initial Lincy Studies

The goal of our initial quantitative analyses was to provide a data-based description of the distribution and concentration of ELL children in CCSD. We expanded our task to include the distribution and concentration of academically vulnerable students based on our acquired understanding that the central problem impeding the progress of linguistically diverse children, culturally diverse children, and low SES children is essentially the same. It is the **delayed acquisition of adequate reading skills** and the diminishing effects this problem has on future learning and academic success.

Table 2 demonstrates only the top 10 elementary schools in CCSD in which academically vulnerable students are clustered. Data are based on the 2009/2010 CCSD fourth grade cohort. The table could have easily listed the top 50 CCSD elementary school with the same effect. The high density of these types of schools in CCSD attests to the possible efficiencies of scale that could be achieved by addressing the needs of these children with one program and approach, rather than developing a difference approaches and purchasing different programs for each subgroup.

School	Percent Culturally Diverse Students	Percent Linguistically Diverse Students	Percent Low SES Students
Herron	98.4%	89.2%	100%
Cahlan	97.1%	76.9%	74.5%

Jeffers	96.7%	70.8%	84.4%
Lincoln	95.5%	68.2%	83.2%
Camberio	96.6%	67.5%	89.9%
Sunrise Acres	97.3%	66.0%	83.8%
Lunt	95.4%	65.5%	83.7%
Squires	95.2%	65.3%	83.9%
Wynn	92.1%	65.2%	76.4%
Ronnow	93.0%	65.0%	78.3%

Table 2. Top 10 high-density ELL, Minority, and Low SES CCSD elementary schools.

Table 3 demonstrates the reading performance of fourth grade CCSD students that are neither ELL nor low SES compared to CCSD students who are either ELL, low SES, or both. This data shows the high overlap between being an academically vulnerable student and having serious reading problems. Please note that these data are based on test scores from the State-Mandated Criterion Referenced tests (SMCRTs). These results must be interpreted with caution because of the relatively poor quality of the SMCRTs. Indeed, these test results seem to over-estimate student ability when compared to better designed, national tests. Also, note that vulnerable students comprise more than 55% of the fourth grade cohort at CCSD. Demographic predictions suggest that this percentage will continue to increase over the next decade given high immigration rates and high child birth rates for this group.

The results that stand out in this table are that only 20.3% of the neither ELL/FRL students are performing below standard, while 48.7% of the either ELL and/or FRL students fall below standard. Again, these data highlight the connection between academically vulnerable students and reading problems. A more accurate estimate of CCSD, fourth grade student reading performance would likely be had if students in the “Meets” category on this test were included in the falls below standards groups, given the tendency of this test to over-estimate student reading performance. This would raise the estimated number of students with reading issues among academically vulnerable student to a staggering 86.5%. Also, it would increase the estimated number of non-academically vulnerable students with reading issues to 65.2%, yielding an overall average of about 75.6% of CCSD fourth graders with reading issues. Again, these are staggering numbers.

	Proficiency Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative %
Neither ELL/FRL	Emergent	343	3.2%	3.2%
	Approaches	1842	17.1%	20.3%
	Meets	4837	44.9%	65.2%
	Exceeds	3755	34.8%	100%
	Total	10777	100%	
ELL and/or FRL	Emergent	1561	11.9%	11.9%
	Approaches	4857	36.9%	48.7%
	Meets	4970	37.8%	86.5%

	Exceeds	1775	13.5%	100%
	Total	13172	100%	

Table 3. Percentages of fourth grade students at each proficiency level. The Emergent and Approaches levels are considered below standard, the Meets level is considered as meeting standards, and the Exceeds level is considered as above standard.

Table 4 shows the ethnic breakdown of the groups entitled neither ELL/FRL and either ELL and/or FRL on Table 3. Table 4 again demonstrates how linguistically diverse, culturally diverse, and low SES students tend to cluster together around the issue of reading difficulties. The most important numbers on Table 4 are the number of African American students and Hispanic students who fall into the either ELL and/or FRL group. Notice that the 66% of African American students fall into this category and that 78% of Hispanic students fall into this group. Again, this table reinforces the notion that linguistically diverse, culturally diverse, and low SES students cluster together as academically vulnerable students when we look at reading issues.

	Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
Neither ELL/FRL	White	5936	55.1%
	African American	1154	10.7%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	1350	12.5%
	American Indian /Alaskan Native	94	0.9%
	Hispanic	2247	20.8%
	Total	10781	100%
ELL and/or FRL	White	2059	15.6%
	African American	2206	16.7%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	945	7.2%
	American Indian /Alaskan Native	90	0.7%
	Hispanic	7891	59.8%
	Total	13191	100%

Table 4. Neither ELL/FRL and either ELL and/or FRL groups broken down into ethnic classifications. All data in this table relate to the 2009/2010 cohort of CCSD fourth graders.

Table 5 provides data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a national assessment given to Nevada fourth graders in 2009. The NAEP assessment is far superior to the SMCRTs because it has been validated against all of the best known (published) reading assessment instruments available. It has exceptional construct validity because it is based on the most up-to-date reading theory and research. NAEP data ranks student reading performance into four categories: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. Students who score in the Below Basic and Basic categories are considered “not able to read well enough to do C level work in fourth grade.” It is instructive to compare fourth grade NAEP reading data to similar data from States in our region and the highest performing State in America. Note that

the NAEP data shows that about 76% of Nevada fourth graders read at the Basic level or below suggesting that these students have reading issues. Also, recall that by adding the Meets, Approaches, and Emergent reading performance categories together the SMCRTs estimated that about 75.6% of CCSD fourth graders were reading below standard; thus, verifying the lack of utility of SMCRTs estimates of reading performance.

State	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Massachusetts	20%	33%	34%	13%
Colorado	28%	32%	30%	11%
Utah	33%	36%	25%	6%
Nevada	43%	33%	20%	4%
Arizona	44%	32%	20%	5%
Mississippi	45%	33%	18%	4%
California	46%	30%	18%	5%

Table 5. Fourth grade reading data for the 2009 NAEP Assessment. Massachusetts is the highest scoring State on the NAEP assessment.

In summary, we have tried to make several important points concerning the difficulties of academically vulnerable students and how best to address them:

- ❖ The generally poor academic performance of CCSD’s fourth grade students revealed by both the CRT and NAEP assessments is not simply an ELL issue, it is not simply a cultural issue, nor is it simply a poverty issue. Instead, the poor performance identified is primarily the result of **delayed attainment of adequate reading skills** by all of these vulnerable students.
 - More than 25 years of research has verified that the best way to address reading difficulties in young children is to implement a reading curriculum that includes at a minimum:
 - Language enrichment instruction to provide appropriate cultural and linguistic context for reading comprehension,
 - Instruction in reading comprehension strategies,
 - Increased instruction to help students enlarge their spoken vocabularies to the level of middle class, dominant culture kids,
 - Research-verified word identification instruction so that students become well versed in the orthographic and phonetic structure of the English language.
 - Again, more than 25 years of research has verified that the instructional approaches used to teach this curriculum must include aspects of direct instruction, implicit instruction, and child-centered, literature-based instruction.

- ❖ Research has verified that the greatest change agent in the lives of school children is a knowledgeable, responsive teacher. Hence, to address the problems of academically vulnerable students we must ensure that all CCSD teachers are well prepared to teach all of the students in their classrooms. More specifically, the knowledge teachers need to successfully teach CCSD students certainly must include an understanding of research-verified reading instruction, a sensitivity and understanding of the issues of academically vulnerable students, and an ability to respond to each student's individual learning needs.
- ❖ Research has verified that school Principals can have a significant effect on student learning (Hall, 2009); hence, we must ensure that all CCSD Principals are well prepared to administrate to the benefit all of the students in their schools. We must ensure that all CCSD Principals understand and recommend to their teachers the best research-verified instructional practices and the best research-verified curricular materials, particularly as these pertain to early reading instruction.
- ❖ The only way to accomplish the three reforms we propose to improve CCSD student academic performance requires extensive collaboration and coordination among all relevant stakeholders. We are obsessed with being collaborative and inclusive as we move forward with future projects to address these issues for that very reason.

Our Lincy Fellowship and our clear focus on helping academically vulnerable students succeed in school has lead us to go beyond the limits of our proposed study and begin to develop other projects to address this issue. We will describe two of these new projects, one in progress and one just beginning, that we are currently developing before we end our report.

Reading Skills Development Center (SB 216)

Creating a Reading Skills Development Center was not part of our original Lincy project; however, it was the next logical step once we understood that the major issue confronting academically vulnerable children is the delayed acquisition of adequate reading skills. Also, Nevada data from our most recent national testing cycle (National Evaluation of Educational Progress, 2009) supports this same conclusion. To reiterate, more than 75% of Nevada's fourth graders do not read well enough to do "C" work in school. Overall, the reading performance of Nevada children seems ranks the State tied for 44th in the nation; however, in terms of statistically significant differences in average scores, Nevada student performance is tied for second to last place with Arizona, Mississippi, California, and Alaska. Only students from New Mexico and Louisiana score significantly lower than Nevada's students.

To address this obvious need, Professor Lazos, Dr. Reynolds, and Dr. Putney worked with Senator Moises Dennis to submit to a bill to the Nevada State legislature for consideration (**SB 216**). SB 216 requests funding for the establishment of two Reading Skills Development Centers, one in Northern Nevada and one in Southern Nevada. Requested funding level is currently \$500,000 per year for each of two years for each Center. The purpose of these

Centers will be to help Nevada's schools children improve their reading performance, particularly in grades K-3. More specifically, the Southern Center (hereafter, Center) has the following mission and is expected to provide the following services:

Center Mission

The mission of the Center will have four foci:

- ❖ **Increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the services** for Nevada children who are struggling readers at all grades. As suggested above, the majority of struggling readers are from the category of students we have identified as academically vulnerable and special emphasis must be given to students in grades K, 1, 2, and 3.
- ❖ **Providing direct tutoring services** to all student in need of assistance in this area, again with an emphasis on K-3 children.
- ❖ **Building capacity among Nevada's teaching professionals** in the most effective approaches to teaching reading in regular education classrooms and in remedial situations.
- ❖ **Changing the culture of Nevada schools** by creating and widely disseminating the most up-to-date research on reading and reading instruction to Nevada's public school teachers and schools districts.

Specific Center Tasks and Initiatives

The Center will design and implement a testing system to diagnose the specific reading problems of struggling readers. Teachers and other school personnel frequently misidentify specific student reading problems resulting in children being given inappropriate and ineffective reading interventions (Reynolds & Couzens, 2011). The proposed diagnostic system will use the most of-to-date tests and measures of reading difficulties. More specifically, cutting edge tests and measures will be used to identify specific reading problems in the two major subcomponents of reading: word identification and comprehension. Only research-based and verified instruments will be used.

The Center will design and implement specific instructional plans for referred struggling readers. These plans will be based on the individual student assessments. The prescribed interventions will use only research-based instructional strategies that are directly related to students' identified reading problems.

The Center will design and implement on site direct tutoring services for struggling readers. These children can be referred to the Center by CCSD or the can walk-in the Center. Walk-in clients will not be charged fees for services provided the Center is successful in gaining Supplemental Service Provider status with the State of Nevada.

Research Basis. The research basis for this Center strand comes from numerous studies in an extensive research literature (Stanovich, 1986, Shankweiler, 1995). The most relevant of these studies was conducted right here in Nevada. Reynolds and Couzens (2011) asked a group of CCSD teachers to identify three types of readers in their classrooms: word callers (children who can identify words, but cannot comprehend them), struggling readers (children who have general reading problems), and proficient readers (the better readers in the class). Accurate diagnostic assessments were performed on the 120 identified children. The accurate tests showed that teachers misclassified 100% of the word callers and 50% of the proficient readers.

The consequences for the children of these misclassifications were profound. Teacher identified word callers were assigned interventions focused on comprehension strategies when they should have been assigned interventions focused on improving their word identification skills. Teacher identified proficient readers were not assigned any interventions because their teachers thought that interventions were needed; yet, accurate testing showed that some needed word identification interventions and some need comprehension strategy interventions. Most of these misdiagnosed students will never reach their full potential as adult readers; however, they easily could have done so with proper and timely intervention.

Building capacity and effectiveness among Nevada's teachers, Reading Specialists, and ELL Specialists (if any of the latter two remain after the current budget cuts) will require the Center to design and implement programs for teachers, specialists, administrators, and parent development in reading research and practice. These programs will be based on the most up-to-date, research-based and verified, information available. All reading development materials and presentations will have a unifying philosophy so that the messages received are theoretically and practically integrated. A serious existing problem in Nevada's public schools is that previous professional development in reading has been electric at best, and random and contradictory at worst. The creation of a cadre of well-trained administrators, teachers, specialists, and parents serving Nevada communities will provide an invaluable resource aimed at improving the reading performance of Nevada school children.

We expect that this initial, trained cadre and subsequent groups will go forth and spread research-based approaches to their colleagues and into their schools; thus, creating a multiplier effect for the research-based instructional techniques and intervention strategies initiated by the Center. In this way, we hope to improve the quality of practice in reading instruction across all Nevada schools.

It is not enough to work with existing professionals. Capacity building must influence pre-service teachers and administrators as well. Consequently, the Center will offer opportunities for aspiring educational professionals to have exposure to, and experience with, research-based and verified instructional approaches to reading. Three types of internship experiences are suggested along with efforts to increase parent involvement and teacher knowledge:

- ❖ **Internships for pre service teachers** – aspiring teachers at all levels, but elementary teachers in particular, will be offered opportunities to work as tutors for referred and walk-in clients in the Center or in classrooms. They will work under the direction and supervision of Center staff. All pre-service teacher interns will be expected to enroll in one college credit course, Theory and Practice in Reading Instruction. The course will be taught by Center staff. Also, enrolled teachers will sit in on Center meetings in which curricula for teachers, administrators, specialists, and parents are created, tested and approved for use. This advanced training will increase the readiness of these pre-service teachers to teach effectively in Nevada’s schools.

- ❖ **Internships for future school administrators** – Educational Leadership programs profess to produce administrators who are “... instructional leaders in their buildings;” yet, precious few administrators know anything about the complexities of reading instruction and reading programs. Aspiring administrators enrolled in the administrative internships would be expected to enroll in a course, Theory and Practice in Reading Instruction. Also, they would be expected to participate in some tutoring sessions with children who are at-risk of reading failure. Finally, they would receive some training in the evaluation and selection of reading programs. This advanced training will increase the readiness of these administrators to become effective school leaders in reading instruction in Nevada’s schools.

- ❖ **Internships for future School Psychologists** – School Psychologists play a vital role in the diagnosis and remediation cycle for students at risk of reading failure; yet, most school psychology programs prepare their students to give and understand only the most general assessments of reading difficulty. Also, many of the instructional interventions they create are based on outmoded ideas about reading instruction and the reading process. Internships in the Center would provide these future professionals with in depth training concerning the latest reading diagnostic tests and assessments. Also, these students would have to design and oversee the implementation of intervention strategies for each of their assigned struggling readers. Aspiring school psychologists enrolled the school psychology internships would be expected to enroll in a course, Theory and Practice in Reading Instruction. This advanced training will increase the readiness of these students to become effective school psychologists in reading instruction in Nevada’s schools.

- ❖ **Parent Development** will occur in at least two ways and across at least two modes of communication. Parents play a key role in teaching children beginning reading skills. Indeed, children need at least 2000 hours of literacy involvement before they come to school to avoid starting their public school careers behind most of their classmates (Adams, 1994). These 2000 hours of literacy experience are accomplished easily by children of high SES parent who speak English in the home. High SES parents tend to read to their children, give them books, encourage them to watch educational TV, and engage them in intellectually challenging conversations. Academically vulnerable kids are seldom exposed to these types of literacy experiences (Adams, 1994).

- The Center will help the parents of academically vulnerable children in at least two ways:
 - The Center will prepare small booklets filled with research-based tips on how to help children learn to read before they come to school. These booklets will be published in Spanish as well as English.
 - The Center will offer evening classes for parents on site and in local public schools to help them help their children learn to read and succeed in school. Classes for both English and Spanish speaking parents will be available

- ❖ **Professional Development for working teachers** will occur in collaboration with the Literacy group at Clark County School District. Together, Center and District personnel will create and conduct presentations for teachers concerning the research-based reading instruction and understanding of the reading process itself. Also, summer educational sessions will be conducted at no cost to participating teachers.

Research Basis. The research literature on professional development in reading is vast and broad (Preventing Reading difficulties in Young Children, 1998). The bulk of this research shows that professional development for teachers in reading shows significant positive effects under a number of different conditions relating to the content, duration, and delivery of the professional development. Results from the federal Reading First Initiative in Clark County School District show just how effective appropriate teacher professional development can be. The project included 14 Nevada elementary schools and was conducted over a period of five years. The results showed that students from all of the 14 schools in the project improved their reading performance on the SMCRTS and a nationally standardized test – the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). Also, improvement was shown in every minority group except American Indian; however, the low numbers of these students involved from this group render the test data meaningless.

The field of reading research encompasses many different disciplines such as Psychology, Educational Psychology, Linguistics, Psycholinguistics, Cognitive Science, Special Education, and Teacher Education to name but a sample. Also, the reading research community is local, national, and international. The research findings generated across these disciplines and by the many scholars within them are enormous; indeed, the number and complexity of articles generated is so large that no working teacher or district facilitator would ever be able to read and digest even 10% of them. More importantly, working teachers and many district facilitators have not been educated in the techniques needed to differentiate high quality from low quality research. However, keeping up with current reading research is essential if we are to keep reading instruction and services to struggling readers in Nevada up-to-date and based on the best new ideas generated in this country and globally.

A consequence of the limited time and expertise available to school districts and schools is that many reading programs and interventions are purchased and used by district schools that are not: research-based and validated, cost efficient, or particularly effective. Using the best research-based and validated reading programs and interventions is essential if Nevada is to use its limited resources to their best effect in improving students' reading performance. The Center has four goals in relation to this issue.

- ❖ Keep teachers and school district personnel current on new findings in reading research by summarizing new developments in reading research and disseminating them to all reading education stakeholders. Dissemination will occur across to modalities: written "Reading Research into Practice" reports published via paper and over the Center's website.
- ❖ Conduct cutting edge reading research in Nevada so that suggested solutions pertain directly to Nevada's unique schools and student populations.
- ❖ Evaluate Nevada students reading performance and progress each year to identify schools and interventions that are having success and those that are not.
- ❖ Write and disseminate annual reports on the progress Nevada's schools children in becoming excellent readers at every grade level.

Excellence in reading is a cornerstone skill for economic survival, economic prosperity, and social/business interaction in the information age. Nevada's efforts to diversify and improve its economy and improve the quality of life for its citizens will be unsuccessful without a literate workforce. Creating Reading Skills Development Centers in Southern and Northern Nevada is one large step in moving the issue forward in a positive direction

Professors Lazos, Reynolds, and Putney are already pursuing additional sources of money to fund the Center, beyond the allocation requested in SB 216. We have met or will be meeting in the near future with various community and philanthropic groups to discuss funding for the Center. To date, many folks have expressed interest in the Center concept; however, no additional funding has yet been found. With that said, it should be noted that:

- ❖ New CCSD superintendent Dwight Jones supports the Center concept and plans to integrate it into his plans as a source of professional development in reading for his new and ongoing teachers.
- ❖ The Democratic leadership in the State legislature has made funding the Center it top educational priority in the session.
- ❖ Governor Sandoval's top education aid, Dr. Dale Erquiaga, has expressed both his and the Governor's support for funding SB 216.

The text of SB 216 can be found in the attached (if reading an electronic version) or in Appendix A (if reading a paper version).

Program to Promote Matriculation Among Academically Vulnerable Students

We are now in the process of writing a grant to support our continuing work to assist academically vulnerable Nevada students. Currently, only a small percentage of academically vulnerable students attend institutions of higher learning, be they community colleges, state colleges, or universities. Many scholars have attempted to address this issue, as well as the significant high school drop-out rate of these students; indeed, Dr. Mario Martinez (a UNLV faculty member and a new member of our research team) has been working with the Gates Foundation on a project that will attempt to address this issue by looking at the transitions from high school to community colleges and the transitions from community colleges to universities.

Our issue is very similar to Dr. Martinez's; however, we wish to address the issue differently and from the perspective of helping Nevada children. This is important because Nevada's demographics are very different from most other states, suggesting that research-generated approaches to resolving these issues that work elsewhere may be neither adequate nor appropriate for Nevada's unique situation. Another issue is that almost all current research begins to address this issue by working with high school juniors and seniors. This approach is problematic because many academically vulnerable students have already left school or are performing at a very low level academically before they reach their junior year in high school (Neild, 2009). Researchers have suggested that the most important academic decision point for academically vulnerable students comes between 8th and 9th grade, not in their junior or senior years in high school. Dr. Maria Ramirez (a UNLV faculty member and a new member of our research team) has suggested that key transitions are made even earlier in students' lives. We will attempt to address Dr. Ramirez's observation in future projects.

We intend a two-pronged approach to addressing the matriculation and drop-out rate issues of Nevada's children:

- ❖ We will design and implement two courses, one to be taken by high school juniors and seniors and one to be taken by 8th and 9th graders. The purposes of these courses will be fourfold:
 - To alert students to the personal, financial and social advantages gained by attending high school and college
 - To begin to help academically vulnerable students develop the academic skills necessary to succeed in high school and college
 - To begin to help academically vulnerable students develop the social skills necessary to succeed in high school and college
 - To connect academically vulnerable students with academic ambitions to each other. This is extremely important because peer groups frequently have more

impact on the choices and decision made by young adults than do parents, instructors, or counselors.

- To help each student understand the range of financial aid and work study programs available to them help them afford to continue their education.
- ❖ We will offer two summer experiences – one at the end of 8th grade and one at the end of high school. Again, we have several goals for these summer experiences:
- To help students acclimate to their new schools, be they high schools or colleges, by organizing school tours, interacting with school professionals in general and with school professionals in each student’s particular interest.
 - To acquaint each student a next-level-school mentor with whom he/she can communicate on a regular basis.
 - To acquaint each student with a next-level-school student mentor with whom he/she can communicate on a regular basis.
 - To acquaint each student with a project mentor with whom he/she can communicate on a regular basis.
 - To help each student understand the range of financial aid and work study programs available to them help them afford to continue their education and to assist them in filling out the proper application forms to apply for such financial aid.

In addition to Dr. Martinez and Dr. Ramirez, we have added Dr. Vicki Rosser ((a UNLV faculty member), Dr. Doris Watson (a UNLV faculty member), and Dr. Nancy Lough (a UNLV faculty member) to our research team for this project. Hopefully we will be successful in finding funds to support this effort.

Concluding Comments

We all thank the Lincy Institute for granting us Fellowship funding to pursue our original project. It is easy see that it has set us on a research and community service course that has grown extensively and will likely be with us for many years into the future – as can be easily seen by the new projects we already have underway. We end by noting that we have fully embraced in our endeavors the Lincy value of collaboration with UNLV level colleagues, colleagues for other local and national universities and colleges, CCSD colleagues, and community colleagues. We intend continue this approach in all of our future work.

Appendix A

SENATE BILL NO. 216—COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

MARCH 2, 2011

Referred to Committee on Education

SUMMARY—Establishes Reading Skills Development Centers.
(BDR 34-1098)

FISCAL NOTE: Effect on Local Government: No.
Effect on the State: Contains Appropriation not included
in Executive Budget.

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EXPLANATION – Matter in *bolded italics* is new; matter between brackets ~~omitted material~~ is material to be omitted.

AN ACT relating to education; establishing a Reading Skills Development Center at the University of Nevada, Reno, and at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas; setting forth the duties of the Centers; making an appropriation for the use of each Center; and providing other matters properly relating thereto.

Legislative Counsel’s Digest:

1 **Section 1** of this bill establishes a Reading Skills Development Center at the
2 University of Nevada, Reno, and at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, to assist
3 school districts in the assessment of reading and literacy problems and language
4 acquisition barriers for pupils in grades 1, 2 and 3, and to provide instructional
5 intervention to enable those pupils to overcome such problems and barriers. While
6 the assessment and intervention services provided by the Centers must focus
7 primarily on pupils in grades 1, 2 and 3 to correct any detected problems by the
8 completion of grade 3, such services must also be made available to pupils of all
9 ages in the public schools in this State. Each Center is also required to provide
10 school districts with a professional development program for teachers in reading,
11 literacy and language acquisition. **Sections 2 and 3** of this bill make an
12 appropriation of \$1,000,000 to the University of Nevada, Reno, and an
13 appropriation of \$1,000,000 to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, for the use of
14 their respective Reading Skills Development Centers in carrying out the
15 requirements of this bill. The money is appropriated from the State Supplemental
16 School Support Fund created by NRS 387.191.



THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEVADA, REPRESENTED IN
SENATE AND ASSEMBLY, DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

1 **Section 1.** Chapter 396 of NRS is hereby amended by adding
2 thereto a new section to read as follows:

3 1. *There is hereby established a Reading Skills Development*
4 *Center at the University of Nevada, Reno, and at the University of*
5 *Nevada, Las Vegas.*

6 2. *Each Reading Skills Development Center shall:*

7 (a) *Assist school districts in the assessment of reading and*
8 *literacy problems and language acquisition barriers for pupils in*
9 *grades 1, 2 and 3; and*

10 (b) *Provide instructional intervention to enable those pupils to*
11 *overcome such problems and barriers.*

12 3. *The assessment and intervention services provided by each*
13 *Reading Skills Development Center must:*

14 (a) *Focus primarily on pupils in grades 1, 2 and 3 to correct*
15 *any detected problems by the completion of grade 3;*

16 (b) *Be made available to pupils of all ages in the public schools*
17 *in this State; and*

18 (c) *Be available at the Center, at a public school or through*
19 *the use of interactive technology.*

20 4. *Each Reading Skills Development Center shall provide*
21 *school districts with a professional development program for*
22 *reading, literacy and language acquisition that allows teachers to*
23 *participate in the program through:*

24 (a) *Programs taught on-site at local schools;*

25 (b) *Distance education with videotapes and other electronic*
26 *forms of instruction and on-site facilitators; and*

27 (c) *Interactive delivery of classes by computer through the use*
28 *of video recordings.*

29 5. *The professional development program provided pursuant*
30 *to subsection 4 must be:*

31 (a) *Designed to enable each school district to place at least one*
32 *reading specialist or language acquisition specialist in each*
33 *elementary school in the school district; and*

34 (b) *Developed in consultation with the Commission on*
35 *Professional Standards in Education to qualify a teacher who*
36 *completes the program to be eligible to apply for an endorsement*
37 *on his or her teaching license.*

38 6. *Each Reading Skills Development Center shall provide*
39 *school district administrators and school administrators,*
40 *principals and teachers with the most current research-based*
41 *knowledge about reading and reading instruction through*



1 *nationally and internationally recognized reading researchers and*
2 *instructional specialists.*

3 **Sec. 2.** 1. There is hereby appropriated from the State
4 Supplemental School Support Fund to the University of Nevada,
5 Reno, the sum of \$1,000,000 for the use of the Reading Skills
6 Development Center at the University of Nevada, Reno, in carrying
7 out the requirements of section 1 of this act notwithstanding any
8 conflicting provisions of NRS 387.191.

9 2. Any remaining balance of the appropriation made by
10 subsection 1 must not be committed for expenditure after June 30,
11 2013, by the entity to which the appropriation is made or any entity
12 to which money from the appropriation is granted or otherwise
13 transferred in any manner, and any portion of the appropriated
14 money remaining must not be spent for any purpose after
15 September 20, 2013, by either the entity to which the money was
16 appropriated or the entity to which the money was subsequently
17 granted or transferred, and must be reverted to the State
18 Supplemental School Support Fund on or before September 20,
19 2013.

20 **Sec. 3.** 1. There is hereby appropriated from the State
21 Supplemental School Support Fund to the University of Nevada,
22 Las Vegas, the sum of \$1,000,000 for the use of the Reading Skills
23 Development Center at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, in
24 carrying out the requirements of section 1 of this act
25 notwithstanding any conflicting provisions of NRS 387.191.

26 2. Any remaining balance of the appropriation made by
27 subsection 1 must not be committed for expenditure after June 30,
28 2013, by the entity to which the appropriation is made or any entity
29 to which money from the appropriation is granted or otherwise
30 transferred in any manner, and any portion of the appropriated
31 money remaining must not be spent for any purpose after
32 September 20, 2013, by either the entity to which the money was
33 appropriated or the entity to which the money was subsequently
34 granted or transferred, and must be reverted to the State
35 Supplemental School Support Fund on or before September 20,
36 2013.

37 **Sec. 4.** This act becomes effective on July 1, 2011.



