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Fast Facts: Policy Issues in Nevada Education

UNLV College of Education

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A black and white photograph of the Nevada State Capitol building, featuring a prominent dome and classical architectural details. An American flag flies on a tall pole in the upper left. Bare tree branches are visible in the top left corner. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

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Fast Facts:
Policy Issues
in Nevada Education

Volume 4, Number 1



Introduction

Since 2004, the Center for Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (CREA) at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas has served as a major academic center that provides expert, nonpartisan program and education policy evaluation and assessment services for decision-makers in national, state, and local organizations. CREA also provides expert consultation on research design (quantitative and qualitative) for UNLV and non-UNLV researchers.

In collaboration with the leadership of UNLV's College of Education, CREA is pleased to sponsor and introduce Volume IV of *Policy Issues in Nevada Education*. This document provides summaries of eight issues that have been researched and outlined with the intent of informing thoughtful policy development around particularly acute educational issues in Nevada. Full articles can be found in Volume IV of *Policy Issues in Nevada Education*.

As Nevada's 81st (2021) legislative session approaches, Volume IV aims to tackle the current and future challenges and opportunities facing Nevada's education system with the best available research evidence. Many of the papers that appear in this edition were drafted as reflections on the issues that history will regard as the cornerstones of the new decade—The many impacts the COVID-19 pandemic and the citizenry's collective introspection of systemic inequality in the United States.

We hope that this volume is not the end of the conversation on these topics but that readers engage with the authors and that these discussion spur action within Nevada's education policy landscape. CREA and the UNLV College of Education take seriously a commitment to serve as a leading source of knowledge to inform and affect policy, practice, and research in Nevada and beyond. This volume is in partial fulfillment of that commitment.

Center for Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (CREA) Approach

CREA is a major academic center that provides expert, nonpartisan program and education policy evaluation and assessment services for decision-makers in national, state, and local organizations. The Center also provides expert consultation on research design (quantitative and qualitative) for UNLV and non-UNLV researchers.



College of Education Vision Statement

The College of Education will achieve prominence locally, nationally, and internationally as a leading source of significant knowledge and innovative models to inform and affect policy, practice, and research.



For More Information...

You are invited to contact paper authors directly or the Center for Research, Evaluation, and Assessment should you seek further comment from any faculty/student experts or information about any of the issues we have addressed in this publication. Digital versions of this publication and the *Policy Issues in Nevada Education* journal are available at unlv.edu/education/policy.

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The COVID-19 Pandemic and its Implications for Nevada's Future Workforce

PROBLEM. Nevada's capacity for economic recovery in the pandemic's wake has been jeopardized by COVID-related educational impacts. The diversity of Nevada's student population and inequitable rates of college participation and degree attainment infer imminent skilled labor shortages.

PURPOSE. Based on the assumptions of prior research, the authors suggest a multi-tiered strategy of policy triage to address workforce pipeline erosion at its weakest juncture, when students transition from high school to college.

RECOMMENDATIONS. The paper outlines short-term and long-term policy options that target students and institutions. During school closures, nudge interventions are a low-cost option that sends text messages to remind students about college-related deadlines. Once campuses reopen, students will need increased access to in-person advising. To ensure advising is consistent across institutions, partnerships between K-12 and higher education can be an initial step. Yet, to safeguard the state's long-term workforce stability, state-sanctioned changes to educational structures are warranted.

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Success in STEM: Diversifying our STEM Workforce by Supporting our English Learner Students' Mental Health and Academic Achievement

PROBLEM. Nevada faces a shortage in STEM-qualified employees. Given that our English Learner (EL) community is one of the fastest growing communities in Nevada, policymakers have a vested interest in supporting these students in STEM careers. Unfortunately, EL science scores in Nevada are particularly low, implying they are not on a trajectory towards STEM careers.

PURPOSE. This paper provides an overview of recent trends in Nevada policies addressing ELs, STEM, and counseling. It also provides an overview of evidence-based strategies for improving EL success in STEM.

RECOMMENDATIONS. We recommend that Nevada educators and policymakers work to 1) Improve quality instruction for ELs by integrating language learning into STEM curriculum; 2) Involve school counselors to promote EL social-emotional needs and mental health; 3) Invest in professional development for STEM educators on how to specifically integrate language into content; and 4) Lower the student-to-counselor ratio in Nevada to the recommended best practice (i.e., 250:1).

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Challenges and Opportunities for Virtual Teaching in Nevada

PROBLEM. School closures in Nevada due to the COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented challenge to schools, districts, teachers, parents and students. The rapid switch to virtual teaching left many students unaccounted for and teachers unprepared for teaching virtually. Therefore, there exists a need for advanced planning to assure education in Nevada continues at a high level, whether through on-premise learning in schools or through remote teaching.

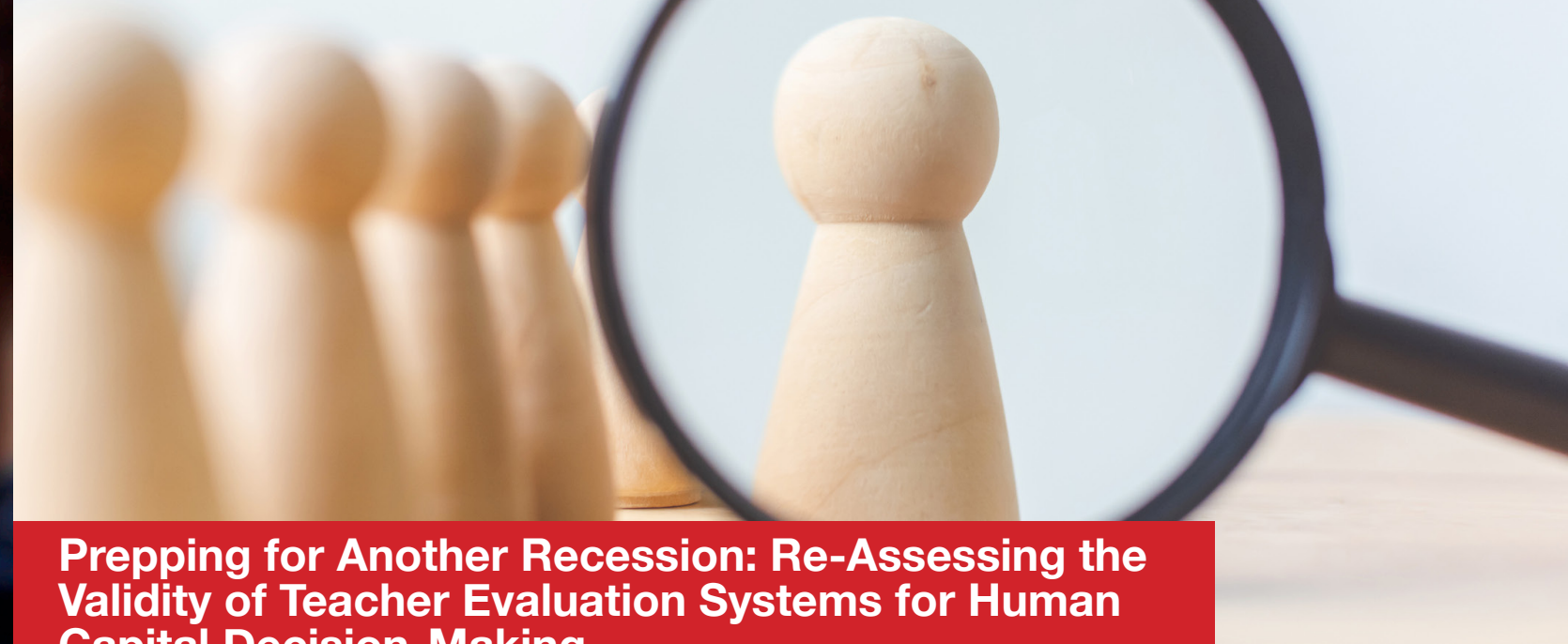
PURPOSE. This policy paper discusses ways virtual teaching requires adaptations to teacher professional development, access to technology, and teacher preparation. Ways to improve the viability of virtual teaching to enhance student achievement, teacher performance, and transform schooling in Nevada are also discussed.

RECOMMENDATIONS. A legislative commission could be established to capture lessons learned from this year's virtual teaching and offer guidelines to ensure schools in Nevada always have the capability of switching between on-premise and remote learning.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Prepping for Another Recession: Re-Assessing the Validity of Teacher Evaluation Systems for Human Capital Decision-Making

PROBLEM. The school budget cuts concomitant with the COVID-19 pandemic mean educator jobs may again be threatened by layoffs. During prior recessions, school district administration primarily determined teacher layoffs by virtue of seniority. However, as new evidence emerges that seniority policies may not be the most equitable way to determine teacher layoffs, some have turned towards performance-based measures from evaluation systems.

PURPOSE. To examine the validity and reliability of the Nevada Educator Performance Framework (NEPF) for making human capital decisions like layoffs.

RECOMMENDATIONS. We recommend that Nevada and other states improve the differentiation in scores across the varying evaluation domains by engaging in more rigorous training of evaluators. Additionally, we recommend that Nevada and other states improve the distribution of final teacher evaluation scores so that the performance measure really distinguishes among teacher performance. Strategies could include lessening the administrative burden of filling out the final evaluation, increasing the number of performance levels, or rotating the specific standards focused on each year.

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Educational Equity Perspectives in Response to the Black Lives Matter Movement: A Road Map for Nevada

PROBLEM. Communities across Nevada call for more equitable practices, especially to reduce contact between communities of color and law enforcement, particularly in the African American community. By increasing our cultural awareness and highlighting the state's commitment to supporting an Antiracist Nevada, we foresee a reduction in unrest and an increase in educational outcomes for all student groups.

PURPOSE. To highlight the importance of addressing racism and racialized bias in education.

RECOMMENDATIONS. To address the rising need for equity practices and policies in Nevada, we propose six recommendations to acknowledge and address equity and systemic racism issues: Building community legislative task force, addressing hiring practices, diversifying curriculum, increasing professional development, addressing discipline policies in education, clarifying legislation related to restorative justice, and increasing clarity regarding socioemotional learning standards and practices. The following document highlights research and support for these practices and more detail on the practicality of these recommendations.

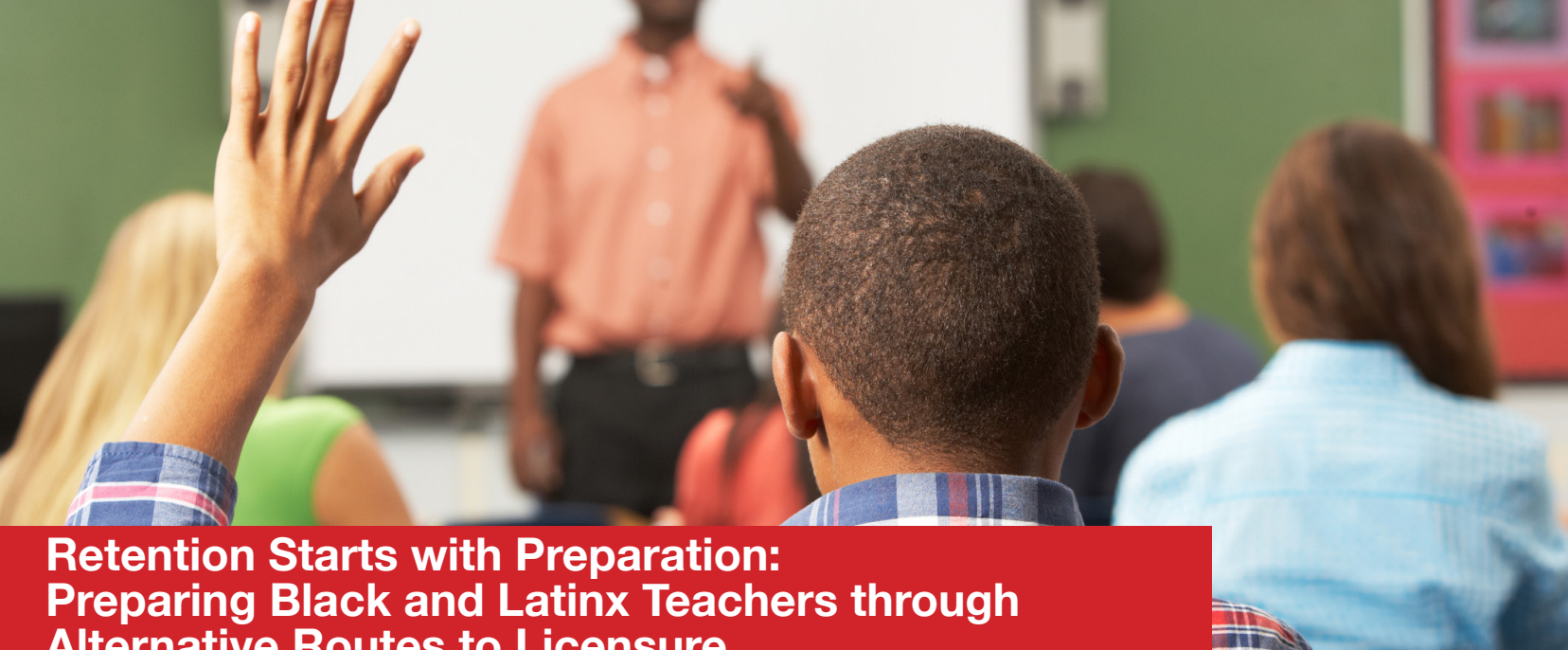
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Retention Starts with Preparation: Preparing Black and Latinx Teachers through Alternative Routes to Licensure

PROBLEM. Critical to the support and success of students of color is support for Black and Latinx teachers. Yet, teacher preparation programs often neglect the culturally relevant perspectives and experiences of teachers of color. This can contribute to retention issues given challenging school climates that Black and Latinx teachers must navigate.

PURPOSE. To provide an overview of sound teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention practices nationally and draw alignment to the state of Nevada. We focus on alternative routes to licensure (ARL) because such programs are touted for increasing the number of teachers of color.

RECOMMENDATIONS. Based on national and local evidence, we recommend augmenting Nevada's SB 511 which established the Teach Nevada Scholarship (TNVS) program. Our recommendations include advancing Grow Your Own models of ARL recruitment, collecting and evaluating data on issues specific to Black and Latinx ARL teachers, and providing specialized professional development and induction.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Eliminating Exclusionary Practices in Early Childhood Education in Nevada

PROBLEM. Many young children under 5 years old spend a significant part of their days in early childhood settings which provide them access to environments and activities that foster their learning. Unfortunately, in many of these early childhood settings, young children are expelled and suspended at a rate that is three times the rate of students in a K-12 setting leading to detrimental, long-term outcomes for young children, families, and the community.

PURPOSE. This paper gives an overview of exclusionary practices in early childhood, discusses causes and consequences of these practices, and provides recommendations to eliminate exclusionary practices in Nevada.

RECOMMENDATIONS. To reduce exclusionary practices, it is recommended to embed preventive practices into early childhood state requirements; develop data systems to better understand and track practices; deliver high quality professional development and technical assistance; use developmental screening and referrals for young children in need; and increasing family engagement.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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The Viability of Bilingual Education Programs in Nevada

PROBLEM. Approximately 15% of emergent bilinguals (EBs; commonly referred to as English learners) in Nevada demonstrated proficiency in math and English language arts in contrast with the general student population, which achieved proficiencies of 42% and 55% in these subjects, respectively. Therefore, there is a critical need for programs that are responsive to EBs’ linguistic, cultural, and academic strengths.

PURPOSE. This policy paper discusses the need for alternative educational supports for EBs, the effectiveness of bilingual education models compared with prevailing English instructional models, and the possibility of bilingual programming as a viable option in Nevada.

RECOMMENDATIONS. Nevada could require that strong forms of bilingual education, supported by the new funding formula, be offered to EBs. University-school partnerships could create a pipeline between enrollment in bilingual teacher education programs and staffing of bilingual programs. The state should also allow the assessment of content knowledge in English and other languages for accountability purposes to promote bilingualism/biliteracy for all students.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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About the College of Education

As part of culturally diverse community and within the fifth largest school districts in the United States, the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas offers its students a unique learning environment with direct preparation in PK-16 and other community settings. The College is composed of four academic departments that offer undergraduate, master's, doctoral, and certificate programs: Counselor Education, School Psychology & Human Services, Early Childhood, Multilingual & Special Education, Educational Psychology & Higher Education, and Teaching & Learning. Collectively, these programs are in early childhood education, elementary education, secondary education, special education, English language learning, clinical mental health counseling, school counseling, school psychology, educational policy and leadership, higher education, learning and technology, curriculum and instruction, and teacher education.

The College boasts seven research centers and clinics dedicated to scholarship and best practices in educator preparation, literacy, autism spectrum disorders, mental health, assessment and evaluation, as well as STEM, and early childhood education. In addition, the College's Education Student Services Center provides advising and career services to ensure retention, progression, and completion of undergraduate students in the College, along with those working towards initial teacher licensure in Alternative Route to Licensure (ARL) programs.

The College is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment that values and promotes diversity. Integral to this vision is a dedication to being a premier college of education that serves our dynamic and expanding community, the state, the region, and the nation.

For more information, visit unlv.edu/education.

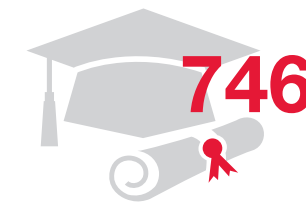
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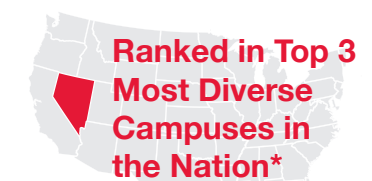


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