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## Education and Educational Attainment in Southern Nevada

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### Abstract

Failure to complete high school has a direct impact on a person's earning potential and quality of life. Higher levels of education are associated with better health. Because of this association, it is important for children and adults to have access to quality education. The percentage of adults who have successfully pursued higher education in Southern Nevada is lower than the peer Mountain West metropolitan areas and the national average. Nevada high school graduation rates are the lowest in the nation. High school graduation rates and dropout rates vary by race/ethnicity in the Clark County School District. High school graduation rates for the Class of 2010 were the lowest for Native American/Alaskan Native, Black and Hispanic students. The highest graduation rates were for Asian and White students. Clark County ranks last in per pupil spending in Nevada. Clark County School District experienced budget cuts due to the economic recession. Cuts have resulted in increased pupil/teacher ratios. Southern Nevada has nine public and private universities or colleges and six career and technical institutions to support adult higher education and career development.

### Introduction

Education greatly impacts a person's health. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF, 2009) lists three avenues through which educational attainment influences health. These include: 1) increasing health knowledge and healthy behaviors, 2) better employment opportunities and higher income and 3) social and psychological factors.

People who have a higher education (i.e. college graduate) are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors while people with lower levels of education are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors. A person with a college degree is less likely to smoke, be physically inactive, be obese or forgo preventive medical care when compared to a person without a college degree (Marmot & Wilkinson, 2006). There is also a link between education and literacy and health literacy. Health literacy or the degree to which a person can understand health information to make health related decisions, increases with higher educational attainment (RWJF, 2009).

More education typically means a greater chance of being employed, healthier working conditions, access to benefits such as health insurance and a higher income (RWJF, 2009). People who are employed have better health outcomes such as lower rates of chronic disease and better mental health when compared to people who are unemployed (Pharr, et al., 2012). They are also better able to afford resources critical to health such as nutritious food and preventative care. People with less education tend to have lower paying jobs. People with lower paying jobs are typically exposed to more occupationally hazards which put them at risk for injury and illness (RWJF, 2009).

Lastly, educational attainment has been linked to social and psychological factors such as a sense of control, social standing, and social support. Each of these is positively associated with better health. For example, the greater a person's sense of control over their life and job, the greater their health (RWJF, 2009). The purpose of this report is to examine key data related to education in Southern Nevada and demonstrate how improving this area also contributes to health improvements for the region. Data on such existing conditions was used by members of the Southern Nevada Strong team to set goals and priorities for future development of the region. The overall goal of the Southern Nevada Strong project was to develop the *Southern Nevada Regional Plan for Sustainable Development* (SNvRPSD); a single, integrated and consolidated plan that will promote and guide sustainable regional

development in Southern Nevada over the next 20 years.

**Methods**

Regional, state, and national data sources were utilized for data collection. Data sources for education included: US Department of Education, Nevada Department of Education, U.S. Census, American Community Survey (ACS) 3-Year Estimate 2008-2010, and U.S. Census, ACS 5 Year Estimate 2006-2010. Throughout, the Mountain West Metropolitan Areas of Albuquerque, NM; Boise, IA; Colorado Springs, CO; Denver, CO; Ogden, UT; Phoenix, AZ; Provo-Orem, UT; Salt Lake City, UT and Tucson, AZ were used for comparisons. Because Clark County, Las Vegas

Metropolitan Area and Southern Nevada are the same geographic area, they are used interchangeably throughout the manuscript and are referred to as ‘the region’.

**Educational Attainment**

The percentage of residents who have successfully pursued higher education is lower than both the Mountain West metropolitan areas and the national average. Among the regional population 25 years and older, 14.5 percent hold a bachelor’s degree and 7.2 percent hold a master’s, professional, or doctoral degree (Figure 1).

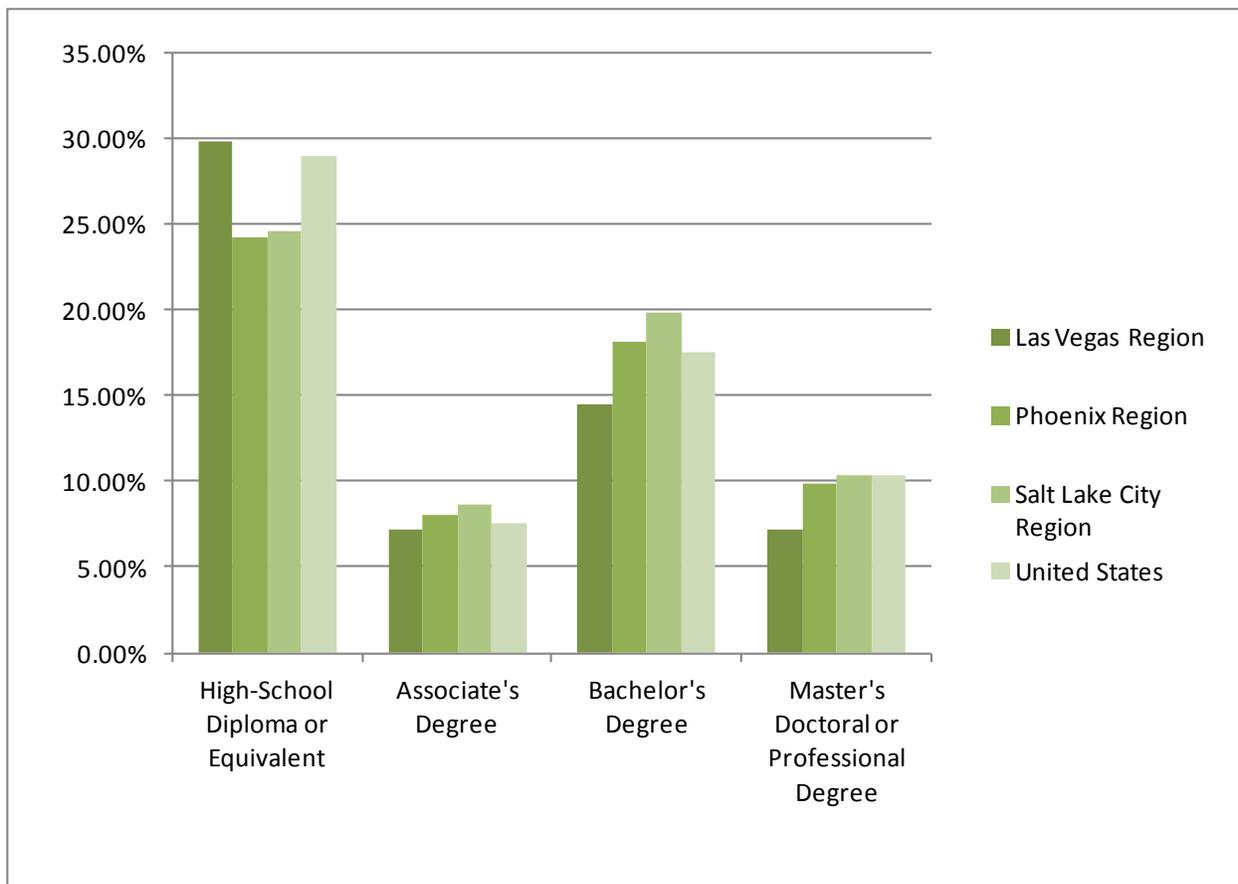


Figure 1: Educational Attainment, Population 25 and Older, 2010 (US Census, ACS (2006-2010))

Educational attainment is higher for White and Asian populations and lower for Hispanic and Black populations in the Region. Among the population 25 and older, Asian (38.5 percent) and White (21.5

percent) have completed a Bachelor’s degree or higher. By comparison, Black (16.2 percent) and Hispanic (8.2 percent) residents have completed a bachelor’s degree or higher (Table 1).

Table 1

Educational Attainment, Population 25 and Older by Race/Ethnicity in Southern Nevada, 2010 (US Census, American Community Survey, 5-year (2008-2010))

Highest Educational Attainment	White	Asian	Black	Other	Hispanic
High-School Diploma or Equivalent	26.2%	20.1%	29.4%	27.3%	26.1%
Associate's Degree	6.7%	9.2%	7.9%	12.1%	4.1%
Bachelor's Degree	14.1%	29.8%	10.4%	5.0%	6.1%
Master's Doctoral or Professional Degree	7.4%	8.7%	5.8%	3.5%	2.1%

Nevada high school graduation rates are the lowest in the nation. Failure to complete high school has a direct impact on a person's income potential and quality of life (Tyler & Owens, 2010). Based on data from the US Department of Education, Nevada had

the lowest high school graduation rate (56.3 percent) in 2008-2009 (Figure 2) as compared to 75.5 percent nationally. The state with the second lowest graduation rate was Mississippi at 62 percent.

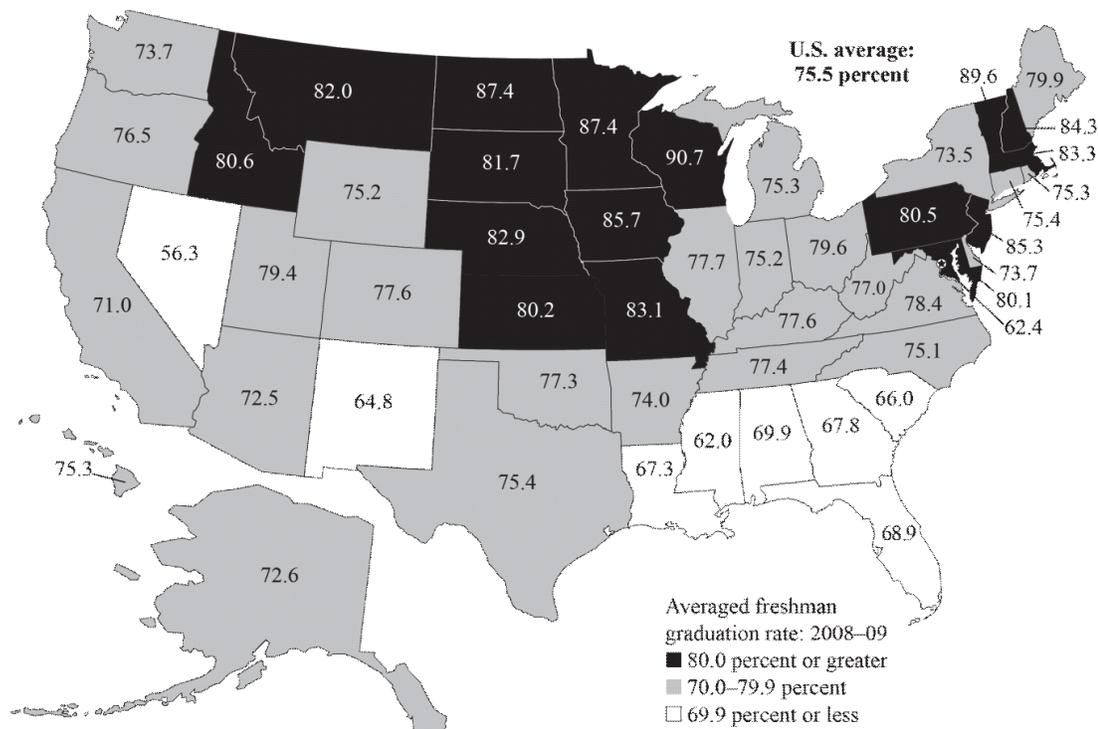


Figure 2: Average Graduation Rate for US States, 2009 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009)

High school graduation rates and dropout rates vary by race/ethnicity in the Clark County School District. High school graduation rates for the Class of 2010 were the lowest for Native American/Alaskan Native (59.5 percent), Black (57.6 percent) and Hispanic (59.8 percent) students. The highest graduation rates were for Asian (82.3 percent) and White (76.4

percent) students (Figure 3). High School dropout rates for the Class of 2010 in Clark County were the highest among Native American/Alaskan Native (7.2 percent), Hispanic (5.5 percent) and Black (6.2 percent) and the lowest for Asian (3.1 percent) and White (3.85 percent) students (Figure 4) (Nevada Department of Education, 2012).

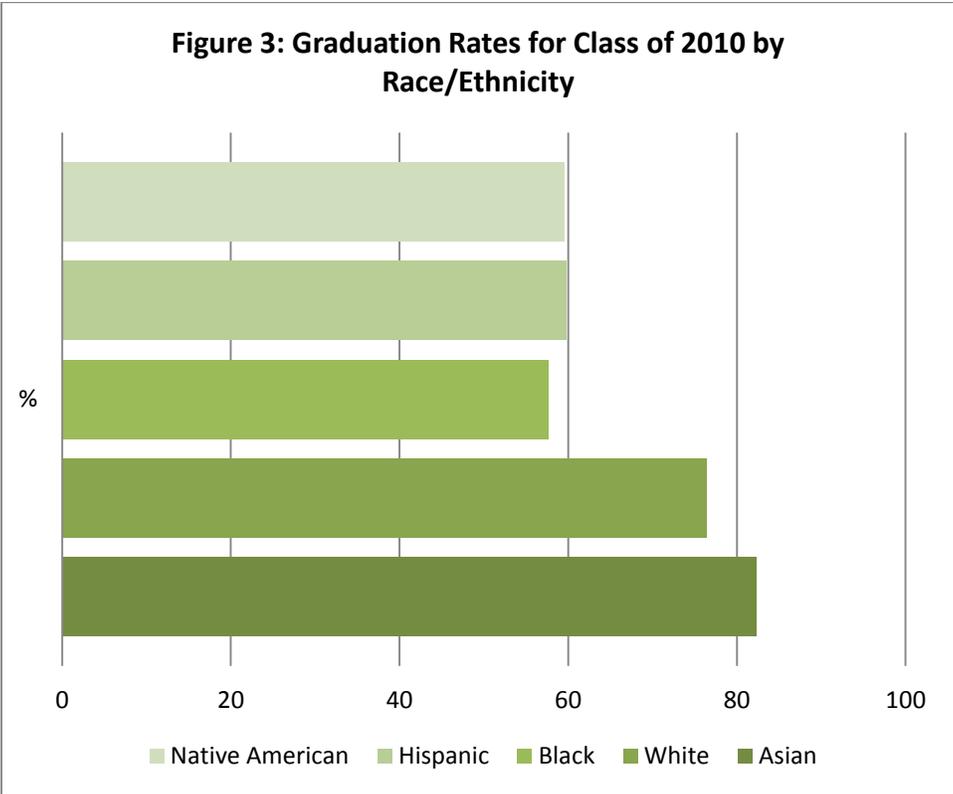


Figure 3: 2010 High School Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity in Southern Nevada (Nevada Department of Education, 2012)

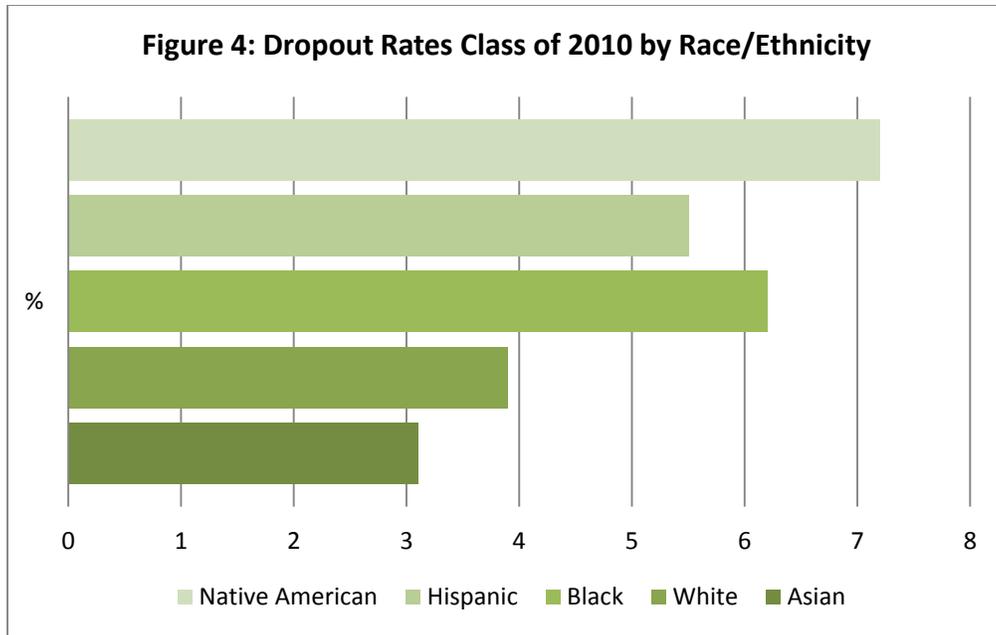


Figure 4: 2010 High School Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity in Southern Nevada (Nevada Department of Education, 2012)

Nevada students score low in national reading and math assessments. According to the 2011 National Center for Educational Statistics study titled “National Assessment of Educational Progress”, Nevada’s 8<sup>th</sup> grade average scores ranked 41<sup>st</sup> in math, 44<sup>th</sup> in reading, and 44<sup>th</sup> in science. Fourth grade average scores had Nevada ranked 39<sup>th</sup> in math and 44<sup>th</sup> in reading in 2011 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012 0.

**Education**

In 2009, Clark County School District’s (CCSD) per pupil public expenditures on education

The majority of Clark County School District (CCSD) funding is generated from local school support taxes. CCSD funding is generated from 3 sources: locally generated funding (local school support tax and property/mining tax), state obligated revenues, and ‘outside’ revenue. Clark County School District typically receives 48 percent of its State-guaranteed funding from a local school support tax and nearly 13 percent from property/mining taxes, with the State making up the

was \$8,246 spent per pupil while the average US per pupil expenditures was \$10,297 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). Additionally, CCSD has one of the highest pupil to teacher ratios in the nation. CCSD experienced budget cuts due to the economic recession. Cuts have resulted in increased pupil/teacher ratios. Compared to the 100 largest school districts in the US, Clark County School District has the thirteenth highest median pupil/teacher ratios at 18.6 while the Granite District in Utah as the highest at 22.8. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010).

remaining 39 percent of its guaranteed basic support level (FY 2008 figures) (The Nevada Plan for School Finance, 2011). The additional ‘outside’ revenues are generated from local school funding revenue sources such as property/mining tax, a governmental services tax, franchise fees, unrestricted federal revenues, and interest and other local revenues dedicated to education. Monies are then distributed to each school on a per pupil basis (Nevada State Department of Education, 2009).

The region has nine public and private universities or colleges. The largest institution by enrollment is the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) with 40,000 students. CSN has three campuses throughout LVMA and offers mostly 2 year degrees as well as 3 bachelor degrees. The University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) is the second largest institution, a public university with 22,100 undergraduate students and 5,400 graduate and professional students. UNLV also has the only Law School in NV, William S. Boyd School of Law, and the only dental school (DDS or DMD degree), the School of Dental Medicine. Other public institutions include Nevada State College. Private institutions of higher education include Touro University, National University, Roseman University of Health Sciences, DeVry University, International Academy of Design and Technology, and a branch campus of the University of Phoenix (Clark County, 2012). The University of Phoenix has two campuses in LVMA.

There are six accredited career and technical institutions in Southern Nevada. These include Anthem College and Pima Medical Institute, both offer career focused training in the healthcare field, Kaplan College which offers training in the healthcare field and criminal justice, Everest College which offers training in the healthcare field, business, and paralegal, ITT Technical Institute which offers training in information and electronic technology, drafting, business, and criminal justice, and Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts (Clark County, 2012; Anthem Institute, 2012; Pima Medical Institute, 2012; Everest College, 2012; Kaplan College, 2012; ITT Technical Institute, 2012).

### **Recommendations**

Since education and health are so closely connected it is imperative that we improve our performance on many of the aforementioned metrics. As part of Southern Nevada Strong Sustainable Communities Planning Grant project, six task groups made up of subject matter experts were formed. Subject matter experts came from the public, non-profit and private sectors from across the valley. The task groups included: Healthy Communities, Economic Development and Education, Transportation, Housing, the Environment and Public

Engagement and Equity. The objective of each task group was to develop goals and strategies based on the findings from the *Southern Nevada Existing Conditions Report* to inform the regional plan. Goals and strategies formulated to address access to economic development and education in Southern Nevada included:

### **Goal 1. Support the educational system and learning environments through thoughtful land use and transportation planning.**

#### **Objective 1.1. *Prioritize the school environment for children, encouraging development that better supports existing schools.***

- Explore community-based approaches to educational improvement and reform that focuses on improving the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth in distressed communities.
- Support updates to land use plans based on the preferred land use alternative, emphasizing relationships between revitalization, urban infill and education.
- Support events and educational programming that address socioeconomic disparities and coordinate with partner organizations and initiatives to improve social equity.
- Partner with Safe Routes to Schools to integrate safe walking and biking routes in new development areas to make neighborhoods more attractive. Prioritize investments that improve the multi-modal school access.
- Promote the integration of schools, parks, and community services into neighborhoods.
- Review the impacts of restrictive zoning on the educational system. (Restrictive zoning refers to zoning that limits the types or form of development in a specific area. For instance, development of higher density buildings may be banned in certain areas of the community.)

#### **Objective 1.2. *Work closely with the Clark County School District to develop thoughtful school and service siting criteria***

- Promote the need for schools to be located adjacent to public facilities and Pre-K, health, social, and educational services that support healthy families
- Co-locate schools and other learning facilities and community resources to capitalize on community skill sets and knowledge
- Encourage local business community to support education and schools programs to better connect opportunities for student career mapping, mentoring, and educational needs of employers.
- Identify potential funding sources that could be directed to building or retrofitting schools so that they can support a better learning environment.
- Consider changes to school design, including building schools with multiple stories and locating schools in infill areas, and consider repurposing commercial or vacant big box retail spaces into schools

**Goal 2. Increase collaboration between the state government, local governments and the region's higher education institutions to align economic development and education efforts.**

**Objective 2.1. *Partner with higher education institutions to support economic development through land use investments.***

- Collaborate with local higher-education institutions to develop local revitalization and improvement efforts.
- Align complementary plans, special area plans and incentives to align with regional target sector industries, such as medical districts.
- Consider public investment in a center for research and development, in partnership with area universities, hospitals, the LVGEA, and businesses that can be leveraged to promote investment and stimulate more collaboration.

These goals and strategies will be included in the Regional Plan which is the final deliverable to HUD for the planning grant. The next step after

completing the planning grant will be to apply for the HUD Sustainable Community Implementation Grant to implement the goal and strategies outlined above. Only entities that received the planning grant can apply for the implementation grant and the awarded amounts are projected to be fifty to one-hundred million dollars

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