Nevada's textbook adoption process: The state perspective

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Nevada’s Textbook Adoption Process:

The State Perspective

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SECTION ONE: The Problem

The process in Nevada used to select textbooks, the main tools for classroom instruction, is a complex web of various stakeholders and interactions. Ensuring that quality textbooks get into the hands of Nevada's teachers and students is the goal of the selection process. The main impediments affecting the selection process may be found in the structure of the process and how the stakeholders interact. In most cases, these interactions and responsibilities are dictated by state law and were established gradually over several years. While the current process functions to place textbooks in schools, it also shows great potential for improvement in accountability and efficiency.

Methods for textbook selection vary: some states allow individual school districts to develop their own methods for textbook selection based on student needs and budgets, some states create an approved list from which the district may choose, while other states choose on behalf of their districts. According to a research publication produced by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, twenty-one states have a statewide textbook adoption process, which is described by the report as a process "in which a central textbook committee or the state department of education reviews, amends, and selects the textbooks that schools may purchase with public monies for students across the state."

This process was originally intended to protect the districts from unscrupulous publishers. Nevada is classified as one of these statewide textbook adoption states, but its method of adoption differs from other adoption states so much, that at one time the Association of

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American Publishers questioned whether Nevada really should be considered an adoption state.\(^2\)

In 1895, the Nevada Textbook Commission was formed. At that time, the commission consisted of the Nevada State Board of Education (the governor, the state school superintendent, and four elected laymen) and four appointed teachers. Until 1981, when the commission was abolished, its sole purpose was to review and approve textbooks for use in Nevada’s schools. Since that time, Nevada has used a hybrid method for textbook adoption. This method employs selection committees at the district level with final approval at the state level by the Nevada State Board of Education.

In theory, the check and “re-check” method for adopting books should provide students with arguably the best textbooks, which in turn should result in a high quality education. However, Nevada is often being criticized for having one of the lowest ranking educational systems in the nation.\(^3\) While some may question whether funding plays a role, cost of books is not the issue, and is not considered during the selection process. Of all school district expenditures, spending on textbooks is one of the smallest. Nationwide, less than 1% of the money spent on education is allocated toward the purchase of textbooks.\(^4\)

Currently, the ten elected officials that comprise the Nevada State Board of Education have final authority over which textbooks will be approved for use in Nevada.\(^5\)

\(^4\) Derived from National Center for Education Statistics 2005 data.
\(^5\) "The State Board of Education is comprised of ten members and a non-voting student representative; seven of the ten members are elected from Clark, Lincoln and Nye Counties (District 1 through 7); one member is elected from Washoe County (District 8); and two members are elected from the remaining thirteen counties of the State (Districts 9 and 10). Members are elected on a non-partisan ballot for four-year terms and are limited to three consecutive terms." http://www.doe.nv.gov/edteam/boardofed.html
However, the board does not evaluate the books before adoption; neither do administrators within the Nevada Department of Education. The responsibility to review textbooks for selection falls on committees formed by the individual school districts. While state law dictates that authority to approve textbooks lies with the Board of Education, it also specifies that school districts are solely responsible for ensuring that textbooks meet state standards. In theory, the process is setup so that an adopted textbook could be reviewed many times by individuals and/or committees at both the district and state level before it goes before the Nevada State Board of Education for final approval. In reality, any evaluation of potential textbooks takes place at the school district level only. As school districts review and select textbooks, their recommendations are compiled by the Nevada Department of Education on behalf of the State Board. When the list of textbooks proposed for adoption is brought before the Nevada State Board of Education, it is typically approved with little or no discussion. Currently the Nevada State Board of Education and Nevada Department of Education follow the state’s overall educational philosophy of pushing responsibility and funding down to the local level, but this philosophy calls into question whether adequate oversight exists in the adoption process and the purpose for state approval of textbooks.

At the state level, there are three main groups responsible for student achievement. There are two policy-making groups, the legislature, including the appointed Council to Establish Academic Standards and the Nevada State Board of Education. The third group includes the administrators within the Nevada Department of Education. These three groups act independently of one another, but still influence the adoption process and each other. The Council to Establish Academic Standards, comprised of an eight-member

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6 Nevada Revised Statutes, Chapter 390 and Nevada Administrative Code, Chapter 390
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panel including two parents, two licensed educators, two legislators and two other members appointed by the legislature, sets the standards.7 The State Board of Education then reviews those standards, however, the board only has the ability to approve or reject the standards set by the council; they do not have the ability to modify the standards. The Nevada Department of Education, along with district personnel, aids in the revision of standards. As districts recommend textbooks for adoption, the Nevada Department of Education compiles the titles into a list for Nevada State Board of Education consideration and also maintains the list of textbooks approved for use in Nevada. The interplay of these groups along with those interactions with the majority of very small school districts and two large school districts makes for complex processes in Nevada, especially when it comes to the textbook adoption process.

Currently, Nevada law provides that both the State Board of Education and district Board of Trustees are both responsible for the textbook adoption process, but at different levels. NRS 390.140 reads:

Final selection by State Board, exception for charter schools; accurate portrayal of cultural and racial diversity of society. (1) The State Board shall make the final selection of all textbooks to be used in the public schools in this state, except for charter schools. If a textbook proposed for selection is in a subject area for which standards of content have been established by the Council to Establish Academic Standards for Public Schools, the State Board shall not select the textbook unless the State Board determines that the textbook adequately supports the standards for that subject area.

NRS 389.19 provides for:

Enforcement of standards and courses of study by trustees. Except as otherwise provided in NRS 389.180, boards of trustees of school districts in this state shall enforce in schools: (1) The standards of content and performance established by the Council to Establish Academic Standards for Public Schools and the courses of study related to those standards; and (2) The courses of study prescribed and adopted by the State Board.

7 Nevada Revised Statutes, 389.510
Therefore, there is a problem as to where standards are enforced. Currently, school districts are required to ensure the books are meeting the standards, but the Board is making the final selection as to which textbook is adopted. Furthermore, the State Board is required to not select a book if it does not adequately meet the standards set forth by the Council to Establish Academic Standards, but its responsibility is not to ensure the book meets standards. Therefore, the only reason it would ever not adopt a textbook is if a school district reviewed a textbook, determined the textbook did not meet state standards and informed the State Board of Education, but still continued to push the textbook for adoption. Disconnects such as these prompted further research into the policy.

This analysis looks at the current textbook adoption process in Nevada and seeks to evaluate it based on the principles of accountability and efficiency. This study will also present potential alternatives to the current policy and an evaluation of these alternatives. Lastly, the analysis concludes with a recommended course of action and an implementation plan for that recommendation.

SECTION TWO: Evaluation Criteria

To effectively evaluate the textbook adoption process at the state level, it is necessary to understand the various components to the process. First, there must be active participants to ensure the textbooks are being reviewed thoroughly for accuracy and completeness. Secondly, there must be a group or individual that is responsible for ensuring the books meet state standards. Finally, a group or individual must officially adopt the textbook for instructional use in the state of Nevada. In theory, all of these
requirements could effectively be met by one group. For example, a state textbook commission could review the textbooks, ensure they meet standards and adopt the textbooks on behalf of the State of Nevada and its school districts.

However, as stated previously, that is not how the current system functions. Instead, textbooks are reviewed by Nevada’s school districts and then formally adopted by the State Board of Education. In order to form sound policy recommendations concerning Nevada’s textbook adoption process, it is necessary to first analyze the current process as a baseline and then formulate recommendations based on that analysis. To this end, the analysis begins with evaluating the level of accountability that is built into the process as well as evaluating the process’ level of efficiency. Efficiency and accountability were chosen because they are both necessary for the process and have the means to be measured.

The level of accountability that exists within the system (at the state level) was measured using a variety of means. Interviews were conducted with officials within all three of the stakeholder groups including state legislators, Nevada State Board of Education members and Nevada Department of Education administrators. Interviewees’ opinions and knowledge/interest in the current process can be compared to determine the level of active oversight exercised by the different stakeholders.

A common belief, especially in government organizations, is that one can never have too much accountability. Some argue that increased levels of accountability improve efficiency and decision making. Although this analysis seeks to determine the levels of accountability, many schools of thought agree that too much accountability is not always a good thing. According to Jennifer Lerner, a social psychologist at Carnegie
Mellon University, there is "hard evidence showing it is sometimes a bad thing and you would be better off without any accountability at all."\(^8\) The principal flaw accountability corrects is laziness as people are more apt to work harder when they know they are watched. Lerner argues that there is a time and place for accountability, but often times government provides situations where it can backfire. This occurs when policy makers choose the middle of the road to appeal to the majority, but when it comes to actually making decisions, they are left with a broad policy without teeth. This leaves the policymaker with a public holding him accountable for a policy that he may actually personally oppose.

Much like accountability, the degree of efficiency can also be measured using interview techniques. Efficiency is a key component to a successful implementation process; an inefficient process can often be heavy with burdensome paperwork, administered by individuals disinterested in whether the process actually works and not useful for those it is working for (students with textbooks). As the criterion relates to the textbook adoption process, the degree to which the process is efficient can determine how quickly textbooks are adopted, shorten administrative time to allow more time for review of texts and ultimately put less strain on a state's finite resources.

The preliminary goals for the analysis were to determine mainly two things: 1) Who (or what groups) were involved in the process at the state level, and 2) What their respective responsibilities were. After meeting these goals through conducting online research, comparing other state processes and conducting interviews, sound conclusions could be drawn about the process. When doing initial research into the textbook adoption process in Nevada, it became clear that there was further study needed that would require

obtaining additional opinions from those parties involved in the process. Conducting interviews allowed for a more detailed perspective of the process to take shape that could not have been obtained otherwise.

Because the bulk of the research rested on interviews, it was necessary that they be conducted with people knowledgeable of the process or those tied directly to some aspect of the process. For example, legislators, who do not directly influence the adoption process but set broader education policies for the state, offered a variety of opinions related to the process. Although better informed legislators would have yielded interviews that contained opinions regarding the process' efficiency and accountability, it was equally desirable to explore what the legislators actually understood about the current system.

The decision to measure the levels of accountability and efficiency was made in an effort to yield better recommendations. The most useful research would reveal both disconnects between various interviewee responses and differences in their understanding of the degree of accountability and efficiency in the process. These disconnects would become the foundation for determining adoption process alternatives and recommended actions.

SECTION THREE: Identify Alternative Policies

A range of policy alternatives exists to address the problem of increasing accountability and efficiency within the textbook adoption process in Nevada. The alternatives addressed in this section mainly involve shifting authority and responsibility to different stakeholders within the process. This section identifies and describes the
possible policy alternatives, while section four provides a more thorough assessment of each alternative.

**Status Quo Alternative**

The first alternative is to make no change at all to the process. While current processes are not following the spirit of the law, the letter of the law is being followed. The process functions to provide schools with textbooks, and the district processes that are in place seem to ensure that those books meet state standards, although that may not be true in all cases. Also, of the administrators and policy makers that were interviewed most seemed to be indifferent to the current process and the need to make changes. This alternative, however, does not address the issues of accountability and efficiency as identified earlier.

**Larger, Stronger State Administration Alternative**

This policy alternative would place more responsibility for the review and approval of textbooks at the state level. Currently, school districts do all the leg work when it comes to selecting and reviewing textbooks. The state only plays a role in compiling the textbook requests for adoption and approving those titles for use in Nevada. With this alternative, the Nevada Department of Education would play a more significant role in proposing and reviewing textbooks for the state. The state would then make an approved list of textbooks available to the districts for use within Nevada’s schools. This could be accomplished, for each subject, as soon as the standards are approved, and
periodically as publishers revise the textbooks. This policy alternative greatly increases accountability in the process and improves efficiency.

School District Approval Alternative

This alternative would allow individual school districts to certify and approve textbooks by removing the requirement for Nevada State Board of Education approval of textbooks. With this alternative, neither the Board of Education nor the Nevada Department of Education would have a role in the adoption process, other than perhaps maintaining a list of those texts approved by Nevada school districts. As stated previously, state approval seems to be more of a formality than actually providing any real substance to the adoption process. This alternative would place the authority for approving textbooks where state law currently places the responsibility for ensuring that books meet state standards, which is at the district level. As with the previous alternative, this alternative also improves issues of accountability and efficiency.

SECTION FOUR: Assess alternative policies

This section assesses the current textbook adoption policy, and each of the policy alternatives identified in section three based on the criteria of accountability and efficiency. The policy alternatives are also measured on the basis of what outcomes, effects, and impacts might be expected should the alternative be implemented. While this section focuses on the assessment of the policy alternatives, section five will summarize the policy recommendation.
Assessment: Status Quo Alternative

The textbook adoption process at the state level consists of the Nevada Department of Education submitting to the Nevada State Board of Education a compiled list of all school district selected textbooks since the last board meeting. The list typically is placed as a consent item on the board’s agenda, which is usually approved without discussion. In fact, when questioned, policy makers could only recall a few times when individual books had been discussed and that typically was for some ancillary reason, such as a one of the authors of a proposed textbook being an acquaintance of a board member.9

When using the criterion of accountability, the current policy falls well short of the intended goals. After a textbook is selected by a school district, there is no accountability by the state actors to verify that the school districts followed the rules and laws when selecting the textbook. The school districts complete the required forms, but no verification or audit is done to ensure the veracity or accuracy of the documents. The reason for this is simple; the Nevada Department of Education lacks the funding to properly staff this function. Currently one staffer oversees the process for the entire state, and it is only a small part of his job. This occurs even though the current list of approved textbooks includes approximately 4,000 books.10 As identified by an audit conducted by Nevada’s Legislative Counsel Bureau, this contributes to the potential for unapproved textbooks to be purchased and used in Nevada’s schools. One such case occurred when a

9 State Board of Education Meeting, 6/29/07.
10 State Board of Education Meeting, 6/29/07.
school district purchased a textbook on the representation of a publisher that the book had been approved for use in Nevada when it in fact had not been.\footnote{Legislative Counsel Bureau Audit, 2000.}

The current policy also demonstrates certain aspects that contribute to a lack of efficiency. One such aspect involves the processes used by school districts to evaluate the textbooks and the accompanying paperwork. School districts use their own evaluation forms and tools to assess the proposed textbooks and then must fill out additional documentation to submit to the state. While this study did not look directly at school districts and the methods they use to evaluate textbooks, one of the interviewees was a representative of the Clark County School District who provided a copy of these evaluation forms. The school district’s forms were a much more comprehensive tool in assessing textbooks’ compliance with state standards than those used by the state. However, once a school district completes its evaluation and decides upon a book, they then must duplicate some effort to fill out the requisite forms for the state. Unfortunately, it appears that this effort simply serves as a record and possible defense for some undefined, potential scrutiny of the process, since neither the Nevada Department of Education nor the Nevada State Board of Education have the time or resources to review the paperwork submitted by the districts.

Continued use of the current policy allows textbooks to be adopted without any meaningful oversight from state administrators or policy makers who are charged with the selection of textbooks for Nevada. Representatives from the Nevada Department of Education and the Nevada State Board of Education said that they are working on a new evaluation tool that all school districts would have to complete for each proposed textbook. The tool would use a rubric to demonstrate the degree at which the proposed
textbook meets state standards. According to one board member, "We will have a way to say that we believe the textbooks are in line with the standards at some point in the near future." However, given the current staffing limitations at the Department of Education and accompanying funding levels, it is unlikely that this new tool will change the current process in any significant way. School districts already fill out a form where they indicate whether the proposed textbook meets standards. Without adequate staff or time on the part of the State Board of Education, this new form will simply replace the old form, but little will have changed in regards to actual review and oversight provided by the state. The Nevada State Board of Education, a critical link between the school districts and the legislature, will continue to lack important information about the process, and legislators will continue to complain about textbooks. The legislature will continue to lack relevant information about the adoption process, and thus, will continue to base decisions on anecdotal situations.

Assessment: Larger, Stronger State Administration Alternative

Nevada law dictates that the State Board of Education shall select textbooks that meet state educational standards for use in Nevada’s schools. However, administrative code sets forth the practice of requiring school districts to convene evaluation committees to review textbooks and holds school district board of trustees responsible for ensuring that books meet standards. If this requirement was removed from administrative code, the state could, under the current system undertake to review and select textbooks for Nevada.

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12 State Board of Education Meeting, 6/29/07.
Twenty other states, such as California, Texas, and Florida, select textbooks at the state level. Due to their large pupil populations, they greatly affect the content of textbooks as publishers vie for their business. Seven of these states create a list of approved textbooks from which the school districts can choose the textbook that best meets their needs. This allows school districts to still have some flexibility in choosing books, but by having the state narrow the field and pre-approve textbooks, schools do not need to use precious time and resources on their own evaluation processes. The other thirteen states select the primary textbook for each subject for use by their school districts. However some states, such as Florida, allow their school districts to spend up to 50% of their textbook budget on non-approved textbooks.\textsuperscript{13}

Having the same entity review and select the textbooks greatly improves the accountability of the current process. Those closest to the process are the ones approving the books. Centralizing the process removes potential points of failure, creates a more open and equitable process and reduces the risk of approving textbooks that might not meet state standards. This alternative would allow state legislators who provide funding for education to go to the one entity, the State Board of Education, and hold them accountable for those textbooks adopted in Nevada.

This alternative also greatly improves the efficiency of the textbook adoption process. States that create approval lists for their school districts, save those districts from possibly duplicating work and prevent the repeated consideration of sub-standard textbooks. Also, one entity could become quite professional in its ability to review textbooks and measure them against the state’s standards. When the current time that each school district expends on the adoption process is taken into account, it would save

\textsuperscript{13} Interview with Charlie Carraway, Florida Textbook Coordinator, 06/22/07.
the state collectively significant time and effort to employ one central group to evaluate books.

This alternative mimics Texas adoption process. Publishers jump at the opportunity to be chosen as a textbook provider in textbook because one contract translates into millions of dollars. The committee responsible for reviewing textbooks in Texas is referred to as the Textbook Review Panel who ultimately deliver their recommendations to the commissioner of education who prepares a preliminary report that places each recommendation on a conforming list, nonconforming list or to be rejected. Much like Nevada, the State Board is ultimately responsible for the final selection, but school districts are responsible for determining appropriate local policy for selecting new instructional materials.

Implementation of this policy alternative is not without its challenges. Currently the school districts own this process. Also, it has been Nevada’s state policy to push funding and decision making power down to the local level. It would take a major shift in thinking in the legislature and changes in state administration to fund this alternative at the state level. While these changes in power and funding may seem small, they are extremely significant and may reduce the viability of this alternative.

Other implementation issues however would be fairly simple to resolve. If funding and staffing were provided to the Department of Education to create a textbook division, this new division could perform this function of reviewing and certifying textbooks on behalf of the state. The Nevada State Board of Education could still adopt the Nevada Department of Education list of textbooks, as provided by the new textbook division, either using the present process or by using a more enhanced alternative that
provided the board with more information to consider. Furthermore, ideal qualifications of this stronger administration would need to be identified and met. Most likely, qualifications would include a long tenure as a teacher with comprehensive knowledge about textbooks. Although this new textbook review committee would reduce the burden of evaluating instructional materials from teachers, it should be cautioned that these administrators could be "lay people" with "so many books to review that they don’t have the time to do it thoroughly." With greater manpower and funding, and only a small amount of coordination done by the Nevada Department of Education, this policy is a viable option.

In addition, states with similar processes currently face challenges and public scrutiny for their "it works for all students" methods. As Key Curriculum Press president Steven Rasmussen told the California State Assembly Committee on Education, "California’s textbook adoption requirements and processes are the most restrictive and political in the nation." During California’s last math adoption, only two algebra textbooks were adopted for the entire state, which could explain why California schools are now failing massive numbers of students in 8th grade algebra. It could be argued that larger state administration could be responsible for declining student performance due to its inability to meet all its population’s needs.

Assessment: School District Approval Alternative

By removing the requirement for Nevada State Board of Education to approve textbooks, the Nevada Department of Education would no longer be required to process paperwork, and compile a list for consent approval by the state board. This process would be more efficient as the school districts could customize their processes to allow each school district to select the most appropriate textbook. The amount of paperwork required would be significantly reduced.

To increase efficiency by eliminating re-work, the school districts should submit all textbooks that meet state standards for approval and disclose any textbooks that were reviewed that did not meet state standards. No loss of efficiency would occur within the school district, they could still choose to use only one or two textbooks, but the work done to verify that a textbook meets state standards would not be wasted just because only one textbook was chosen for that school district. Although this added step would require some additional work as each selection process could result in three lists, one of disqualified textbooks, one of qualified textbooks, and one of selected textbooks, subsequent selections by other school districts would reap the benefit of these comprehensive lists. Textbooks already judged to meet state standards could be selected with little or no additional evaluation, and those that failed to meet standards would not need to be reviewed again.

Using the criterion of accountability, this policy holds the group that is performing the work accountable for its outcome. The Nevada Department of Education does not currently possess the proper staffing to become accountable for the adoption of textbooks. They provide little oversight or verification. By removing the Nevada
Department of Education and the State Board from the role of oversight, the process becomes very streamlined.

Whereas the public knows very little about the State Board of Education or Department of Education, most parents and members of the public are much more familiar with their local school administrators and school board. Making school districts responsible for reviewing textbooks and giving them the authority to approve them provides for better opportunities for public involvement. The people would then be more equipped to hold local decision makers accountable for the textbooks selected for use in their schools.

Because the review process is currently held at the district level, adverse impacts of implementing this policy alternative would be minimal or non-existent. As long as school districts were allowed to use the work performed by other school districts within the state, this process should not be seen as shifting the burden. For instance if a smaller district like Battle Mountain wanted to use the evaluations performed by Washoe County, the law should accommodate that practice as to not overwhelm the smaller districts of the state. As for state government, this alternative would remove a burdensome task from the Nevada Department of Education staff. Also, since the Nevada State Board of Education’s purpose in the textbook adoption process is not understood, even by the board members, there is little chance of an adverse reaction from them.

**SECTION FIVE: Recommended alternative**

If individual school districts were given the authority to certify and approve textbooks for use within their districts, the process would increase in accountability and
efficiency. Whereas currently school districts are responsible for ensuring that textbooks meet state standards, they can not truly be held accountable since their recommendations are only forwarded to the Nevada State Board of Education for final approval. Likewise, it is difficult for the board to be held accountable for approving the texts because they are not involved in the review processes nor do they currently receive any evaluations of the books for their own review. While an evaluation tool is currently being developed by the Nevada Department of Education that would provide more information to the Nevada State Board of Education for consideration in approving textbooks, it is unlikely that the tool would be able to be used for its intent. The Nevada Department of Education simply does not have the staff to compile the individual evaluations and the Nevada State Board of Education is often occupied with more general education policy considerations. By having school districts approve textbooks, the authority is placed at the same level as the responsibility for ensuring that the books meet standards.

By authorizing school districts to approve textbooks for their schools, the process increases in efficiency as well. Currently, the individual school districts go through a series of evaluations by committee and use various tools to compare books to the district curriculum and state standards. Once the school districts have decided to recommend a book or books, they then must fill out different state forms for submittal to the Nevada Department of Education. The department then compiles the recommended textbooks into a list that goes before the Nevada State Board of Education for approval. Once a book is recommended by a school district, very little if any evaluation takes place. The titles simply navigate a bureaucratic course toward approval so state law can be satisfied. By contrast, if school districts were given the authority to approve their own textbooks,
the process would most likely take less time and would stay in the hands of the school district.

SECTION SIX: Implement, monitor and evaluate the policy

Designing a plan for implementation requires little effort, given that the recommendation consists of simply removing unnecessary steps from the current process. Currently, Nevada school districts already own the process of textbook adoption, but the formality of “adopting” the policy still remains with the state. Implementation, however, would require changes to Nevada law, which would require serious buy-in from Nevada’s state legislators and the Nevada State Board of Education members.

Ultimately, the decision to change the verbiage of Nevada law lies with the legislature. For them to be comfortable to change the text, they would need both a reason to change the law and support from the Nevada State Board of Education. When interviewed, a few legislators pointed to the board as being the group ultimately responsible for the textbook approval. As stated earlier, the current Nevada State Board of Education does little to review the textbooks and does nothing to ensure the textbooks meet state standards. Although the board’s role in the approval process is merely a bureaucratic formality, it may prove difficult to convince the board that removing their authority from the process would lead to a more efficient process and greater accountability.

Ultimately, the authority to remove the textbook approval from the Nevada State Board of Education rests with the legislature as provided in Nevada Revised Statutes
If consent from the Nevada State Board of Education was achieved, the legislature would be more likely to change the language of Nevada Revised Statutes. After analyzing the current statutes, the current law would need to be amended with the following changes to remove the final selection process from the Nevada State Board of Education and give it to the local school districts:

**Final selection by State Board of Trustees of school districts, exception for charter schools; accurate portrayal of cultural and racial diversity of society.**

1. The State Board of Trustees of school districts shall make the final section of all textbooks to be used in the public schools in this state, except for charter schools. If a textbook proposed for selection is in a subject area for which standards of content have been established by the Council to Establish Academic Standards for Public Schools pursuant to NRS 389.520, the State Board of Trustees shall not select the textbook unless the Board of Trustees determines that the textbook adequately supports the standards for that subject area.

2. A textbook must not be selected by the State Board pursuant to subsection 1 for use in the public schools in classes in literature, history or social sciences unless it accurately portrays the cultural and racial diversity of our society in classes in lessons on the contributions made to our society by men and women from various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Changing the party responsible for the final selection of textbooks eliminates the need for the Nevada State Board of Education's approval process. Ultimately, the Nevada State Board of Education should be responsible for larger state policy issues and not for textbook approval. The ten members of the Nevada State Board of Education can not feasibly review every potential textbook in Nevada and ensure that the textbooks meet the standards of content established by the Council to Establish Academic Standards. In addition to the time constraints, the Nevada State Board of Education may not be qualified as a whole to review textbooks. Because the individuals who serve on the State Board of Education are not necessarily trained in the field of education, they may not be qualified to make informed decisions about the content of textbooks. Additionally, the Board lacks the expertise to evaluate the quality and accuracy of the information presented in textbooks.

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17 NRS 390.140 reads "Final selection by State Board; exception for charter schools; accurate portrayal of cultural and racial diversity of society. The State Board shall make the final selection of all textbooks to be used in the public schools in this state, except for charter schools."
Board are elected officials, there are no safeguards in place that ensure that they are qualified to review textbooks and make such pivotal curriculum decisions. They may not have been principals, teachers or school administrators throughout their professional careers, which could beg the question as to why the Nevada State Board of Education currently has final authority. The board should concern themselves with broader education policy issues and not be burdened with tasks that are clearly replete with red tape and rubber stamping, such as the textbook adoption process.

The current process works the same as the proposed process but without waiting for the final approval from the Nevada State Board of Education. Eliminating the final approval from the Nevada State Board of Education allows the recommended process to get approved books into the hands of students faster.

Because the present board currently provides no level of oversight, the recommended policy option improves the level of accountability. School districts would have the control of textbook selection and therefore would be accountable for student achievement. The school districts remain the authority on the process as they must ensure that textbooks meet the standards of content established by the Council to Establish Academic Standards. If ever an entity questioned a school district’s textbook choice, the Nevada State Legislature has the authority to request an audit of the process.

In the event where a discrepancy between textbooks and the standards occurs, the legislature may need to alter the process by implementing an accountability standard. Since school board officials would have the last say in approving the texts, they could put more pressure on school district staff and the review committees to ensure that the very best books were selected. Teachers and parents are intrinsically motivated to select
quality texts. If teachers are accountable for student achievement, they definitely are motivated to select textbooks that meet the standards. Likewise, school board officials clearly yearn for high achievement and will also have a vested interest in ensuring a similar outcome. If textbooks were still found to be inadequate or deficient, ultimately the public has the ability to elect alternate school board officials.

CONCLUSION

Nevada’s textbook adoption process includes many stakeholders with undefined responsibilities and unclear purposes. While this process functions in the sense that schools have books, the study presented in this paper demonstrates that the process could be so much more. There are significant opportunities to improve the adoption process by increasing decision maker accountability to their represented constituents, in this case parents and students. This study also shows that much of the process exists without a clear purpose. Increasing the efficiency of the process by reducing unneeded steps would make better use of Nevada’s finite resources, which would again better serve the students of the state. While this study did not exhaust the potential alternatives to the current textbook adoption policy, viable policy alternatives were presented and should be considered for implementation in Nevada.