
TO: SUPERINTENDENT EBERT

FROM: BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION FOR A GLOBALLY PREPARED NEVADA

SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATIONS TO CREATE PERSONALIZED PATHWAYS FOR LEARNING

The school building closures that began last spring have continued in some districts through to this school year and forced a rapid shift in instructional delivery models. District and school leaders, teachers, families, and students have persisted to continue teaching and learning during a difficult time and under less than ideal circumstances. The fast and complete shift to distance learning in all of Nevada's schools last spring created opportunities for innovation as well as exposed challenges in the policy infrastructure and system capacity to address the needs of every student in a non-traditional setting.

In response, the Nevada Department of Education formed the Blue Ribbon Commission for a Globally Prepared Nevada. The Commission's Charge is to make recommendations to adjust our current policy framework to meet today's learning conditions, while also leaving room for policies that will support innovation for the next 10 or 20 years.

The Commission has met three times and quickly agreed that the existing policy framework does not provide the flexibility needed to support schools during the current crisis or the space to innovate and develop more resilient systems. The pandemic has elevated issues long overdue for discussion and the Commission has been eager to dive in.

Two foundational agreements undergirded the Commission's discussions.

1. A commitment to prioritizing equity in the design of new processes and systems.
2. Full, adequate and stable funding is critical to address learning loss and support the development of new strategies.

There is an urgency and readiness to embark on an ambitious agenda to transform education in Nevada coupled with a request to extend or formalize existing guidance and flexibility while solutions are being developed.

The Commission respectfully offers the following recommendations.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

The myriad of programs once referred to as 'non-traditional' are rapidly becoming permanent fixtures of the everyday educational landscape in Nevada. Where non-traditional pathways were once

considered alternatives for students who struggled in more traditional programs, we now understand that a diverse set of program offerings is required to truly meet the needs of every student. Examples include distance learning, competency-based education, personalized learning, project-based learning, independent study, and work-based learning. **Rather than individual, unconnected program approval processes and requirements, Nevada schools need a unified method for determining how they will provide rich pathways for learning for every student.**

School districts in Nevada are required to prepare an annual report of accountability pursuant to NRS 385A.070 that must include information on curriculum and programs. There may be an opportunity to incorporate the development, reporting and approval of all instructional programs into the annual reports. If properly structured, the process should allow for educators, students and their families to plan for continuity of learning across any learning program.

Heightening the level of local accountability over these programs will allow for the development of more holistic district and school plans that can be easily amended. As already required, the Superintendent of Public Instruction will prescribe the forms to be used.

Just as the current reporting structure requires the inclusion and disaggregation of data by subgroup, program design and approval should require the use of Universal Design for Learning Principles. Statutory requirements for the reports also include information on stakeholder outreach and communication efforts. This language should be strengthened to ensure broad community support for all programs.

TIME, SCHEDULES, AND CALENDARS

The Nevada Constitution requires a uniform system of common schools that ‘shall be established and maintained in each school district at least six months in every year’. This has been historically interpreted as 180 days per school year. Further, ‘the legislature may pass such laws as will tend to secure a general attendance of the children in each school district upon said public schools.

The Commission’s top priority is to find every way possible to meet the needs of their students during this unprecedented time while creating systems that will be more resilient and nimble in the future. There is no desire to limit instructional time in any way. On the contrary there is a recognition of the imperative to develop strategies to abate learning loss. **The Commission seeks to formalize flexibility in how and where instruction is provided allowing educators the time to develop new measures of engagement.**

Time-based measures of attendance and existing scheduling models are no longer compatible with new, more flexible learning environments. Even in traditional settings, time-based attendance obscures a clear understanding of student learning by conflating compliance with engagement. Further, there will be a continued sense of urgency to address learning loss and schools must be able to maximize all opportunities including weekend and evening classes and out of school time. **Iterative schedules and calendars should no longer be considered ‘alternate’ or ‘alternative’ to be used in unique, pre-defined situations.**

Simultaneously, Nevada should begin the migration from traditional measures of attendance to measures of engagement or participation as well as demonstrated competencies. Through this Commission, the Superintendent can develop a plan for districts to explore and iterate measures to replace attendance with an eye toward scaling as effective measures emerge. Other means of encouraging sufficient teacher and student contact should also be explored. The current distance

education program requirement of teachers to contact students weekly continues the belief that measuring contact time equates to learning and growth.

Interim Recommendation. The transformative changes the Commission envisions will need time to develop. As the new system recommendations are being formulated, the Commission respectfully requests the extension of flexibility granted during the Pandemic. Specific recommendations include:

- Formalize in statute the options set forth in [guidance](#) for attendance requirements and reporting for distance education.
- Remove the requirement that a proposed alternative calendar will be used only to alleviate problems associated with a growth in enrollment or overcrowding.
- Review the restrictions placed on Washoe and Clark County regarding the application for an alternate calendar.
- Extend the delegation of authority to the Superintendent of Public Instruction to approve calendars that fail to comply with instructional time requirements.
- Review department [Guidance Memo #20-07](#) and extend new guidelines as appropriate for the approved methods for enrollment, attendance, and coding of “No-Show” students for the 2021-22 school year.
- Clarify that the requirement of a written agreement with a pupil and the pupil’s parent or legal guardian in NRS 388.866 can be satisfied through electronic means.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are additional issues that the Commission believes need to be addressed in the upcoming legislative session. There is an understanding that some may require an extension of authority granted to the Superintendent.

1. Incentivize new, more extensive areas for flexibility into the School Performance Plans and accountability systems. Simultaneously ensure School Performance Plans allow for innovative practices to be explored.
2. Broaden the definition of distance education to include the use of paper packets, synchronous, asynchronous, blended and hybrid models. The Commission recommends language that ensures there is a minimum and equitable level of access for all students.
3. Consider requesting the continuance of assessment waivers as allowed by the United States Department of Education.
4. Extend the current [graduation guidance](#) for the Class of 2021.
5. Extend the [guidance](#) that allowed students who move out of state to continue a distance education program in which that student was originally enrolled in a Nevada district of residence. If the student is a high school senior, that student would be allowed to earn a diploma if all graduation requirements are satisfied.
6. Consider new funding options for fourth and fifth year students who choose to access a partial program of study (defined as fewer than four courses in NAC 387.345).

Commission Members. Please note that some of the issues that were raised may be addressed in administrative code or department guidance such as the inclusion of wellness checks, cyber protection measures and other social emotional concerns into future discussions. These will be discussed after the New Year.