



# Ready for Life

# Statewide Action Plan for Nevada

## 2010 Progress Update

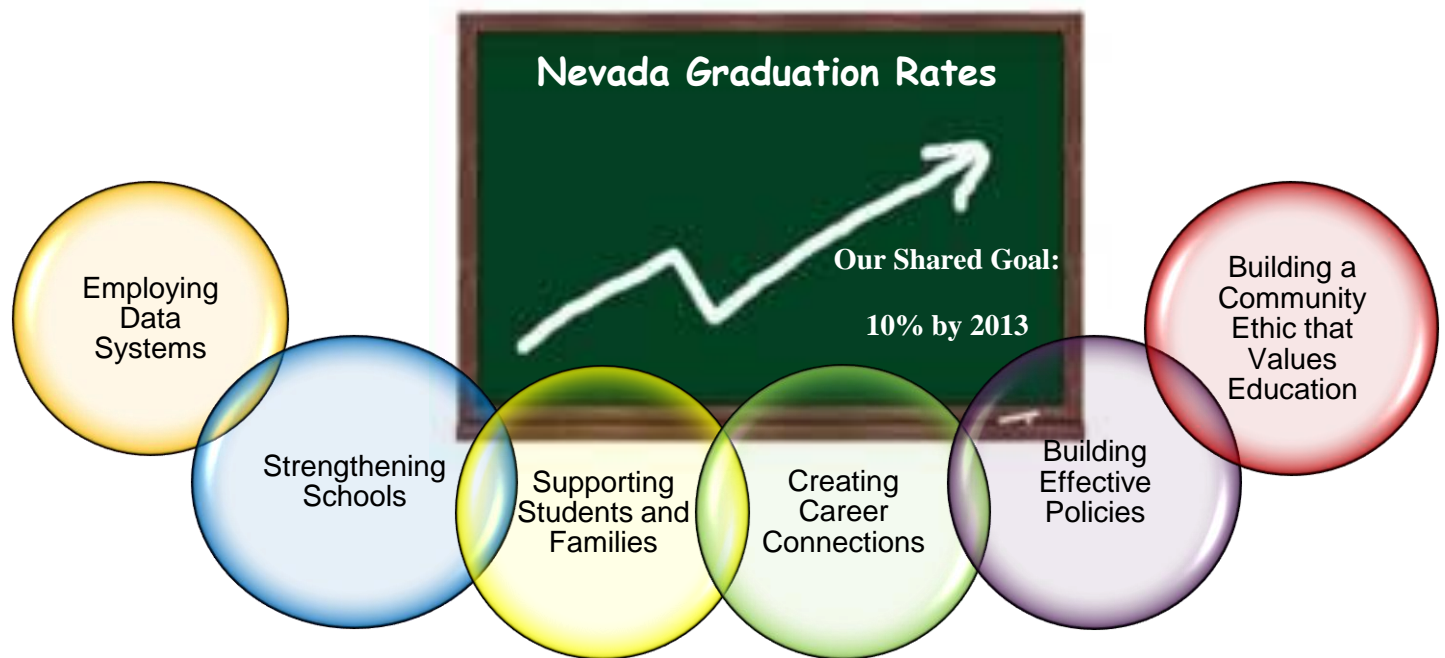
**We call on all Nevadans to join in the commitment to build a community ethic that values education.**

**We still have a steep climb to deliver on the promise that every student will have access to quality education and community support in order to be “ready for life.”**

**In the midst of that climb, however, we pause to celebrate unprecedented collaboration throughout our state, and take note of the exceptional efforts of highly committed individuals and organizations that are reflected in these pages.**

Prepared by the





## OVERVIEW

With the support of a national effort spearheaded by America’s Promise Alliance to increase graduation rates across the United States, NPEF hosted the **“Ready for Life Nevada Dropout Prevention Summit”** in Las Vegas on November 12, 2008. Approximately 300 leaders, educators, and youth advocates from across the state came together to identify priorities that should be included in a statewide dropout prevention action plan.

*The vision that emerged was for all Nevada youth to be “ready for life” and supported by a community ethic that values education, links youth to workforce opportunities, and creates a safe learning environment for students.*

The 2008 Summit set the stage for these stakeholders to work together toward a shared goal of achieving a 10% increase in Nevada’s graduation rates by 2013 - with multiple stakeholders willing to be held publicly accountable for reaching the goal together, because graduation rates matter socially and economically, as well as academically. There is a well-documented earnings gap between high school graduates and dropouts—an annual difference of nearly \$10,000. There is also a growing challenge for individuals with only a high school diploma to find stable, well-paying jobs. The costs of dropping out are born not just by individuals, but by the communities in which they live, and the rest of society. The potential economic benefit of improving students’ academic outcomes should be a wake-up call to the importance of reforming America’s high schools. Dropouts from the class of 2008 will **cost Nevada almost \$1.3 billion** in lost wages over their lifetimes.

Overall, the event resulted in heightening the sense of urgency shared by participants to do something about improving Nevada’s dismal dropout statistics. Over 90% of participants came away from the Summit believing that it would positively impact work related to the dropout issue and lead to change in their communities.

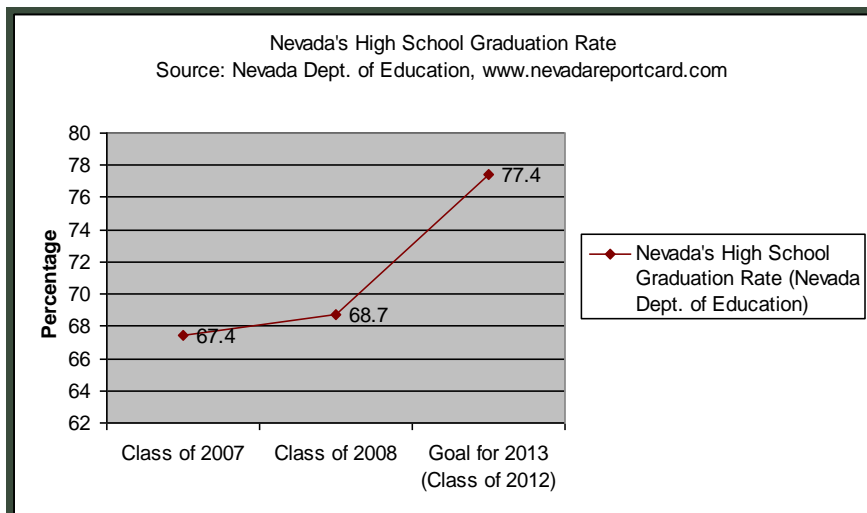
**THE COMMITMENT IS PALPABLE.**

This update summarizes the progress made to date by organizations (listed on the next page) that are working on the six priority areas established at the Summit:

- ◆ **Employing Data Systems**
- ◆ **Strengthening Schools**
- ◆ **Supporting Students and Families**
- ◆ **Creating Career Connection**
- ◆ **Building Effective Policies**
- ◆ **Creating a Community Ethic that Values Education**

## HOW ARE WE DOING?

When the Summit goal of a ten percent increase in graduation rates was established, the baseline was 67.4% for class of 2007, as published by the Nevada Department of Education. Since the original goal was defined, Nevada has made some measurable progress, with the state rate increasing from 67.4 to 68.7 percent (see chart to the right). This improvement is primarily due to a two-point increase in Clark County School District's graduation rate, from 63 to 65.1 percent, with Washoe County School District holding at 77 percent (77.9 to 77.3 percent).



## UNDERSTANDING GRADUATION RATES IN NEVADA

Graduation rates are a critical indicator of youth success, so it makes sense that they are used as a key marker by parents, policymakers, and other concerned community members to make decisions about resources and interventions with low-performing schools. Unfortunately, problematic calculations can make it difficult to use graduation rates this way.

Poor and often conflicting definitions have resulted in a range of confusing graduation rate calculations that do not provide accurate measurement. Over the last few years, independent researchers have confirmed that many more of the nation's youth are dropping out during high school than had been reported. This is certainly true for Nevada, where there is a 20% variation between state-reported, federally-reported, and independently-reported rates. (According to the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, about 47 percent of all students in Nevada graduate from high school with a regular diploma in four years.)

Recently announced federal regulations require that states implement a common formula by school year 2010–2011, and the current administration advocates for “*all* students to be college and career ready” by the time they graduate from high school. We are encouraged by this new direction, and will be challenging the organizations that are part of this effort in Nevada at the upcoming Summit planned for November 2010 to raise the bar even further, as we continue to implement the strategies in this action plan that will move our state further along.

## KEY STAKEHOLDERS

While this is not an exhaustive list of the organizations represented at the Summit or working on the statewide action plan, it does indicate those entities who committed to taking a lead role in making progress in one or more of the identified priority areas.

Clark County School District (CCSD)

CCSD School Community Partnership Program (CCSD SCPP)

College of Southern Nevada (CSN)

Communities in Schools (CIS)

Governor's Workforce Investment Board (GWIB)

Nevada Department of Education (NDE)

Nevada Department of Employment Training and Rehabilitation (DETR)

Nevada Public Education Foundation (NPEF)

NevadaWorks

Ready for Life: Shared Youth Vision (RFL: SYV)

Southern Nevada Regional Planning Coalition Committee on Youth (SNRPC CoY)

State Farm Insurance

Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC)

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE)

University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV)

University of Nevada Reno (UNR)

United Way of Northern Nevada and the Sierras (UWNNS)

United Way of Southern Nevada (UWSN)

Washoe County Ready for Life Collaborative (WCRFL)

Washoe County Education Alliance

Washoe County School District (WCSD)

workforceCONNECTIONS (wC - formerly Southern Nevada Workforce Investment Board SNWIB)

- ✓ New "graduation advocate" program launched in CCSD.
- ✓ Opportunities for earning college credit through Dual and Tech Prep credit in WCSD have been increased.
- ✓ Three institutions will expand learning opportunities for students in the areas of online learning, career and technical education and attendance at TMCC High School.
- ✓ WCSD's online learning school, WOLF, recently expanded to include students in grades 6-8, has added Advanced Placement courses, and became a diploma granting high school this year.
- ✓ The Academy for Arts Careers and Technology in Reno enrolled its first class of 100 students, the first phase of a 4-year evolution into a career and tech education high school with 700 full time students. A 40,000 square foot, \$11 million dollar expansion was recently completed.
- ✓ A WCSD-TMCC committee has been created to look at expanding TMCC High School to a 9-12th configuration.
- ✓ CCSD 21st Century Course of Study Expectations are aligned to meet the Nevada Millennium Scholarship requirements.
- ✓ CCSD and WCSD offer AP and Tech Prep courses for college credit; all 10th grade students take PSAT free of charge.
- ✓ Each CCSD 6th grader must have a 3-year academic plan and 9th graders in both CCSD and WCSD must have a 4-year plan, to be used to manage the student's development and course of study.

# SUMMARY OF GOALS

The following goals were established, with lead entities identified in parentheses, within each of the six priority areas. Progress made in these areas is captured in the sidebars throughout this report, and is followed by a summary of highlights and a graphic on page 7 depicting the developments made to date.

## 1. STRENGTHENING SCHOOLS

- **Establish early warning systems to support struggling students. (CCSD)**
- **Ensure that all high school students have equal access to advanced courses and post-secondary learning opportunities. (CCSD)**
- **Support implementation of state requirement for individualized graduation plans for students entering 9th grade statewide and 6th grade implementation in Clark County. (WCSD & CCSD)**

## 2. SUPPORTING STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- **Conduct gap analysis to identify additional services needed. (CCSD, UNCE)**
- **Identify and gather data for dropout prevention programs currently serving youth in CCSD by July 31, 2010. (CCSD)**
- **Have community support students in meeting rigorous expectations (including providing more adult advocates, tutors, mentors, etc.). (CCSD & WRFL)**
- **Increase community partnerships for at risk school and stay in school programs in CCSD by 5%. (CCSD)**
- **Engage businesses to provide mentors and other supports for student and family engagement. (State Farm)**
- **Conduct targeted outreach to the most disconnected youth and families, and increase leadership and life skills opportunities for all youth and families. (CCSD)**
- **Increase parent engagement and develop parent outreach strategies and action plan in CCSD schools. (CCSD)**

- ✓ UNCE conducted research and focus groups to assess needs, school experiences and learn about what can be done to increase student and family engagement and involvement.
- ✓ CCSD-SCPP gathered existing data from dropout prevention programs, updated program inventory, and gathered information on dropout risk factors to work closely with CIS in targeted schools.
- ✓ Funds raised through WCSD's annual Run for Education provide 50% fee waivers for over 2000 needy students who attend summer school classes.
- ✓ State Farm contributed input on messaging to business owners to garner support for the dropout prevention initiative. State Farm associates are involved in weekly mentoring, and conduct outreach to inform local schools about the State Farm Es Para Mi grant program which promotes high school graduation.
- ✓ 128 Focus Schools in CCSD have business and community partners. SCPP is recruiting for the additional 17 Focus Schools.
- ✓ 133 students received services from mentors through the CCSD Stay in School Mentoring program during 08-09 school year, and 254 PAYBAC speakers gave "stay in school" messages at 26 schools, impacting 21, 978 students.
- ✓ UNCE launched the Anahuac Life Skills: School and Community Engagement Program, a curriculum to increase positive ethnic identity and school/community engagement among Latino students.

### 3. BUILDING EFFECTIVE POLICIES

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- Streamline and align the assessment system and high school standards so that the assessments taken in high school are also able to serve as readiness assessments for college and work. (NPEF and Summit policy committee)
- Identify policies that affect students' opportunities to succeed, including flexible options for credit and flexible demonstration of high school proficiency. (NPEF, Summit Policy Committee)
- Review attendance policies. (WCSD, WRFL, NDE)

### 4. EMPLOYING DATA SYSTEMS

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- Create a statewide central data warehouse for information sharing across systems (school, juvenile justice, social service, public health and non-profit), including longitudinal tracking that follows youth exiting the education system. (NDE)

### 5. CREATING CAREER CONNECTIONS

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- Increase coordination among education and workforce development goals and activities related to disadvantaged youth. (RFL:SYV, SNRPC COY, wC, WCRFL, CCSD)
- Encourage businesses to support employee/family education, through strategies such as student internships. (CCSD CTE)

### 6. BUILDING A COMMUNITY ETHIC THAT VALUES EDUCATION

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- Develop a communications plan and media campaign to build a community ethic that values education and promotes the importance of a HS diploma. (NPEF, Summit Planning Team)
- Increase awareness of community resources available to families and youth. (NPEF)
- Create/support local collaborative infrastructures (such as Ready for Life committees) as needed, via ongoing convening/facilitating of statewide and community efforts. (NPEF)
- Develop accountability plan that includes tracking progress on graduation rates from NDE and reporting annually to stakeholders. (NPEF/Summit Planning Team)

- ✓ A "College Journey" pamphlet is mailed to homes in Spanish and English that provides graduation and financial aid information to WCSD parents.
- ✓ An interactive, web-based tutoring system, Smarthinking.com, has been implemented at WCSD middle and high schools. Privately funded, it has provided over 20,000 tutoring sessions and training for staff and parents.
- ✓ Parents in Washoe and Clark counties have online access to student grade and attendance information.
- ✓ Transitional Planning Guides assist CCSD parents and students with preparation for middle school, high school, and college/career transitions.
- ✓ The Nevada State Parent and Information Resource Center (PIRC) at the Education Alliance, partners with CCSD, WCSD and other agencies to increase family engagement statewide.
- ✓ Conducted Family Enrichment Day at College of Southern Nevada. (CCSD SPPP)
- ✓ CCSD has 5 Career Technical Academies. Each has a Local Advisory Committee inclusive of local businesses, municipalities, and trade unions to support academy programs.
- ✓ CCSD established Joint Technical Skills Committees with CSN, local businesses, municipalities, and trade unions.
- ✓ CCSD works with local colleges, businesses and trade unions to develop career pathways curriculum.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2009

### READY FOR LIFE NEVADA: OUR SHARED YOUTH VISION

Recognizing common goals and collaborative processes, Nevada Public Education Foundation was excited to unite the Ready for Life movement with the Nevada Department of Employment Training and Rehabilitation's federal Shared Youth Vision partnership in January 2009. This partnership builds on the momentum in local communities, providing a strong, united voice for Nevada youth. It will foster public and private coordination at the state level, and recognizes that multiple systems contribute to youth success. State-level planning and progress toward measurable goals to help youth become "ready for life" will be facilitated by cross-agency communication so that federal, state and local work can leverage resources, remove barriers, and share successes and lessons learned.

### EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE COLLABORATION

The Governors Workforce Investment Board Youth Council adopted the goal to increase graduation rate 10% by 2013 and incorporated it into the current strategic plan.

Partners have engaged in unprecedented collaboration to provide summer employment and academic experiences for more than 1,500 youth in Clark County through workforceCONNECTIONS, increasing opportunities for both academic credit and job training.

Washoe County Ready for Life conducted an employer survey of 1,500 businesses, which indicates that the most important worker characteristics to employers are honesty, communication skills, and dependability (2-3 times more important than other skills including computer, read/write, and following instructions).


### IMPROVING POLICY TO HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED


Elected officials at local and state levels in Nevada are displaying committed, active leadership like never before. Policy changes have been instituted that make a real difference to youth facing certain barriers, such as: allowing excused absences for teen mothers, expanding dual credit options, offering more tech prep credits, and making it possible for female inmates to obtain an adult high school education.


Collaborative grant applications have been submitted in greater numbers than ever, and pilot efforts toward data sharing and longitudinal tracking systems have been launched with the expectation that successful efforts will be brought to scale as targeted outcomes are achieved. As Ready for Life™ has gained traction and credibility, NPEF has fielded numerous requests for presentations and interpretation of national research from the legislature, local school boards, and municipalities; and providing recommendations for congressional action in reauthorizing the youth portion of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).


### RESOURCE EXPANSION BENEFITING YOUNG PEOPLE STATEWIDE


The increased statewide collaboration occurring via Ready for Life™ has had a positive impact on resource development in communities throughout Nevada, even in the face of economic downturn. Reno was selected as one of twelve cities nationwide to receive technical assistance grant from National League of Cities for collaborative work on behalf of disconnected youth. United Way organizations in both Northern and Southern Nevada received two of only fifteen United Way Worldwide grants to support school district parent engagement efforts. State Farm provided grant support for service learning that correlates to academic achievement. Expansion of career & technical education (CTE), online learning opportunities, and career pathway partnerships also occurred statewide.


 United Way Southern Nevada and Clark County School District working on longitudinal tracking of students in 18 early childhood centers linked to school district data system.


 Statewide data sharing identified as a priority by the Governor's Youth Council.


 Annual tracking of graduation rates from Nevada Department of Education.


 National League of Cities grant awarded to coordinate data sharing about at-risk youth among WCSD, the City of Reno and TMCC.


 The Academy for Arts Careers and Technology (AACT) enrolled its first freshman class, the beginning of a four year phase in that will turn the school into career and technical education high school with 700 full time students.


 Project 5000 kids launched by workforceConnections in Clark County, with the goal of providing 5000 youth with summer jobs in 2010.


 Employers surveyed in Washoe County, in partnership with the Reno-Sparks Chamber of Commerce, to assess interest and needs related to youth employment.


 CCSD established Joint Technical Skills Committees with College of Southern Nevada, local businesses, municipalities, and trade unions.


 CCSD coordinating with local college, businesses and trade unions to develop career pathways curriculum.


 Monthly orientation held by Washoe County Ready for Life for interested community members to support disconnected youth and help improve graduation rate.


 Mentoring/tutoring opportunities including statewide and local resource directories.


 Washoe County RFL increased community participation, and obtained formal commitment of support from City and County representatives.


 Ready for Life Nevada and Our Shared Youth Vision aligned public and private leadership of statewide efforts.


 Funding for Smart Thinking.com secured.


 Increased numbers and frequency of Parents and Schools Partnerships.


 University of Nevada Cooperative Extension created publications to promote awareness and support increased graduation rates, and published program outcomes in peer reviewed journals to augment knowledge base of school dropout prevention efforts.


 Clark County School District held agency fair to raise awareness of resources for counselors and psychologists and provide staff development opportunities.


 A committee in Washoe County has been created to look at expanding Truckee Meadows Community College High School to a 9-12th configuration.


 CCSD launched "graduation advocate" positions and program in January 2010.


 WCSD's online learning school, WOLF, recently expanded to students in grades 6-8, added AP courses and it became a diploma granting high school.


 Washoe County's Run for Education provides 50% fee waivers for over 2000 needy students to attend summer school.


 University of Nevada Cooperative Extension conducted focus groups and research to assess parent and student needs and school experiences to learn what can be done to improve family engagement.


 CCSD supported various Communities in Schools programs for meeting basic needs, including medical/dental services, weekend backpacks of food (5,000 per week).

 United Way Worldwide funded United Way in both Northern and Southern Nevada (2 of only 15 granted globally) to support school districts to increase parent engagement in targeted at-risk schools.

 Expanded options due to SB312 to obtain credit, including additional summer school sessions in Clark County in 2009.

 WCSD attendance policy now allows teen parents an excused absence to care for sick children.

 CCSD now offers some credit by exam and concurrent credit options.

 In Washoe County, students can now receive dual credit beginning in 9<sup>th</sup> grade rather than 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and can earn up to 21 Tech Prep credits (used to be 15 credits max).

