

General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) Section 427 Nevada Department of Education

The Nevada Department of Education (NDE) provides leadership, resources, assistance, and oversight in partnership with school districts and others, to support student achievement and future success. The NDE is an equal opportunity / affirmative action agency. The NDE does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, political affiliation, disability, or sexual orientation. As such, no barriers will impede equitable access to the *Nevada Striving Readers* project for educational personnel or other parties. All potential beneficiaries will be provided equitable access to participate in grant project activities and services. The NDE conducts numerous activities to ensure compliance with GEPA requirements including, but not limited to, the following actions. BARRIERS and SOLUTIONS are described on pp. 3-4.

A. State and federally funded positions within the NDE have a primary function to ensure that equity requirements are met. These positions include an Indian Education Programs Professional (EPP), as well as EPPs within Title I and Title III whose job duties include providing services to special populations of students who would traditionally be considered potentially “at-risk.” Examples¹:

1. The NDE and Nevada Indian Commission (NIC) collaborated on the successful Indian Education Summit in March, 2008, and continue to collaborate on the Nevada Indian Education Advisory Committee Strategic Plan. The Indian EPP meets regularly with the NIC Executive Director and the Education Advisory Committee for Native American and Alaskan Natives (AI/AN) to work on innovative ways to increase the success rate of AI/AN students in Nevada.
2. The Indian EPP manages the publication of the Indian Education Newsletter developed to highlight successful programs throughout the state that focus on ways to increase the success rate for American Indian students. The newsletter is divided into five sections and is available free of charge via electronic email, but will be available in the future through the NDE website.

B. The NDE houses the Office of Special Education, ESEA, and School Improvement, whose function is to focus on the needs of traditionally underserved populations and to ensure that both State and federal funds are used to provide equitable services to all student populations in the state. These activities include providing professional development that is focused on the needs of the diverse learner. Examples (implemented in 2006-2007)²:

1. The NDE contracted with an expert in data analysis who provided trend data across the state in order to reinforce the linkages among lower identification rates, access to general education curriculum through higher rates of inclusive placements, and higher performance on statewide achievement tests.
2. District identification rates and placement data were analyzed for ages 3-5 and 6-21 and presented to special education directors during August 2006. Guiding questions ("probes") for use in analyzing these placement data were used with the special education directors and training was provided on how to use these questions in concert with the data, to determine areas of strength and concern from which to plan improvement efforts. Additional (previously developed) probes were revisited with districts to assist them in evaluating:

¹ 2007 Nevada State Improvement Plan and 2006 Report of Accomplishments. (2007, December). p. 5.

² Nevada Part B State Performance Plan Improvement Initiatives: Activities/Timelines/Resources. (2008, February). pp. 3-4.

- IEP justifications for removal from regular education environments.
 - IEP components establishing a foundation for access to general education curriculum, e.g., present levels of performance, goals/objectives, special education services, and supplementary aids and services.
 - Extent to which accommodations for participation in general education curriculum are individually determined and precise.
 - Extent to which general education teachers are aware of and fulfill IEP implementation responsibilities.
 - Extent to which general and special education teachers use methods for collaboration that maximize students' access to general education curriculum.
 - Any disproportionality in placement of race/ethnic groups in less inclusive settings.
 - Teacher competency in core academic subjects.
3. IDEA state set-aside funds were used to support improvement initiatives at the district level, when those initiatives were reflected in district or school improvement plans and designed to support improved results for students with disabilities as described in the February 2007 State Performance Plan. Several school districts applied for and received these District Improvement Grants (DIGs) to support inclusive school practices.
 4. In August 2006, and throughout the school year, district administrators and other stakeholders identified needs for training and technical assistance at the statewide level; NDE staff used these recommendations to set priorities and allocate limited resources.
 5. Training was provided to Special Education District Administrators (SEDA) to increase their knowledge and understanding of how a quality intervention system supports the provision of inclusive placements for students with disabilities; technical assistance resources including materials/models from other states were provided.
 6. Special education directors received training on how to address considerations for least restrictive environments within school and district improvement planning efforts, including information on explaining data to district- and site-based leaders.
 7. Significant training was provided in the instructional consultation model, which serves as a platform for collaboration/consultation in regular education environments (described in detail under the improvement initiative "*Intervention Systems for Academic and Behavior Supports*").
 8. Evaluation data from all trainings (site-level, district administrators, statewide training) were analyzed to redesign and improve future training.
 9. Necessary information and other support, as requested, was provided to the 2007 session of the Nevada State Legislature to enhance educational opportunities for students with disabilities.
 10. Data analyses were conducted for use by special education directors to support inclusive placements for students ages 6-21—these data demonstrated that high rates of inclusion in general education classes were correlated with high rates of achievement on statewide assessments.
 11. Information and resource materials were provided to special education directors to facilitate the effective inclusion of preschoolers with disabilities and to support developmentally appropriate practices within those settings.

12. Collaboration occurred at a state level to ensure that students with disabilities are considered in district and school improvement plans and activities.
13. Title I and non-Title I school support team leaders for schools in need of improvement for three years and beyond were trained on how to analyze proficiency data for students with disabilities, and how to interpret that data in light of other special education data.

C. The NDE has established a bias review process which is used during all stages of test development so that statewide assessments are free of bias that would negatively impact diverse learners. Bias review is overseen by the NDE Office of Assessment, Program Accountability, and Curriculum (APAC) under the leadership of Carol Crothers, APAC Director. Cynthia Sharp oversees the bias review process and is the point of contact for questions.

Bias review is conducted on the following assessments:

- Writing (Grades 5, 8)
- Criterion-Referenced Tests (Grades 3-8) in Reading, Mathematics, and Science
- High School Proficiency Examination in Reading, Writing, Mathematics, and Science

Bias Review is conducted on

- Writing Prompts
- Reading Passages
- Test Items for Reading Passages, Mathematics, and Science

From 20 to 25 educators and various stakeholders representing Nevada's diverse populations (i.e. gender, ethnicity, students with disabilities, ELL, poverty) are brought together to review and discuss passages, items, and prompts in an attempt to identify bias for or against a particular group of students. Bias is defined in Nevada from three points of view:

1. **Protecting Privacy and Avoiding Offensive Content** The content of the text or test item(s) will not intrude on the privacy of the values and beliefs of students or their families, or offend students, parents, or the public of Nevada.
2. **Opportunity and Access** The content of the text or test item(s) will provide students with a fair opportunity to demonstrate what they know, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, socioeconomic status, or region in which they live.
3. **Portrayal of Groups Represented** Although text or test item(s) may focus on one group of Nevada's diverse population, issues and/or themes are approached in a manner that do not demean, offend, or inaccurately portray any religious, ethnic, cultural, gender, social group or disability. A "statistical" bias review is performed on field test items to identify items for which a particular group of students outperform or underperform the general population. Items that are determined to be potentially biased are removed from the NDE item pool and not used on live assessments.

EXAMPLES of BARRIERS & SOLUTIONS to be addressed in Nevada Striving Readers

Solutions are based on the 2011 Nevada State Literacy Plan (NSLP) Essential Elements 1-6.

1. **Barrier:** School level decision-making and instructional practice often lack a data-driven, collaborative, coordinated framework to accurately determine LEA and schoolwide student literacy needs.

Solution: Essential Element 1, Effective Leadership (NSLP, pp. 5-6) lists 17 actions to be initiated to provide LEA and school level literacy leaders, teachers, school administrators, school librarians, and other education personnel with professional development, communication systems, and statewide Pre-K through post-secondary collaboration networks to ". . . build capacity within school districts and schools,

examine research, align classroom instruction with [Common Core State Standards], and use formative and summative assessment . . ." (p. 5) to design and implement comprehensive, data-driven literacy programs.

2. **Barrier:** Teachers who lack knowledge about how to interpret, analyze, and use data to guide instructional practice do not adequately address literacy needs of students at the classroom and individual level.

Solution: Essential Element 2, Effective Instruction (NSLP, pp. 6-7) lists 13 actions to be initiated so that *all* teachers in Nevada will be prepared to use "Summative and formative assessment data, ongoing progress monitoring data, and other relevant data . . ." (p. 6) to design and implement differentiated instruction at the classroom and individual student level.

3. **Barrier:** Nevada institutions of higher education teacher preparation programs do not graduate an adequate number of new teacher candidates who are solidly prepared to teach in rural and urban high-poverty schools with a large number of disadvantaged students.

Solution: Essential Element 3, Teacher Preparation Programs (NSLP p. 7) lists strategies that must be implemented to remove this barrier. Strategies include increased collaboration with Pre-K-12 educators, monitoring effectiveness of teacher preparation programs, increasing opportunities for future teachers to interact with current teachers, and developing professional learning communities.

4. **Barrier:** Parents, family members, business/industry, and communities are often unable or reluctant to participate in comprehensive literacy programs due to a myriad of reasons including, but not limited to, lack of English language skills, poor communication from schools to community stakeholders, lack of support and communication about student progress, and a general perception of separation of schools and community stakeholders.

Solution: Essential Element 4, Family and Community Partnerships (NSLP, p. 8) describes the actions necessary to more effectively engage families, business/industry, and communities to become literate and support statewide literacy efforts. Actions include, but are not limited to, family education and support; support of public and school library programs; welcoming families and other stakeholders into the schools; and establishing information dissemination and communication networks.

5. **Barrier:** A significant number of children entering kindergarten perform below proficiency levels expected for their age, maturity, and developmental stages.

Solution: Essential Element 5, Early Childhood Literacy Instruction, (NSLP, p. 9) provides steps that must be initiated to support the emerging literacy development of children birth through age five. Research-based strategies include the coordination of instructional efforts between pre-schools and elementary schools, ongoing monitoring of student progress, and support for families of young children.

6. **Barrier:** An unacceptably low number of Nevada secondary students fail to succeed at potential and/or graduate high school, due to lack of intensive support for students experiencing failure, lack of motivation, socio-economic problems, and other barriers to success.

Solution: Essential Element 6, Intermediate and Adolescent Literacy Instruction (NSLP, pp. 9-10), provides a broad scope of strategies to coordinate instructional and assessment efforts in grades 6-12. Strategies include, but are not limited to, data-based monitoring of student growth and achievement, emphasis on cross-discipline literacy, support of families, strategic tutoring, ongoing professional development for teachers, and more effective direct and explicit instruction for all students with a focus on disadvantaged and special needs students.