

September 9, 2016

Dr. David Jensen, Superintendent  
Humboldt County School District

Commission on Professional Standards  
9890 S. Maryland Pkwy  
Las Vegas, NV 89183

To the Members of the Commission on Professional Standards:

The approximately 439,000 school-aged children who call Nevada home deserve a great education and in order to have a great education our students need bold school leaders who will provide a rigorous and inspiring education. As we have seen in Nevada and across the country, leadership can often be the limiting factor of any major education initiative. We must ensure that we have the leadership necessary to reinvent, renew and reinvigorate our schools, which is why **we urge you to consider expanding leadership pathways for school leaders so that they may complete licensure requirements through high-quality alternative route to licensure programs.**

For our students, the odds of obtaining an excellent public education are currently among the worst in the nation.<sup>1</sup> The statistics are dire. More than two thirds of our 4<sup>th</sup> graders and more than 70 percent of our 8<sup>th</sup> graders score below proficient levels in math and/or reading throughout the state. Across our state, high school graduation rates are among the worst in the nation with 54 percent of African-American students and 29 percent of students with limited proficiency in English receiving a high school diploma.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that 19 percent of young Nevadans ages 16-24 are currently not working or attending school.<sup>3</sup>

Our schools are struggling to adequately educate the vast majority of our students and currently rank last of all 50 states on the quality of our education system<sup>4</sup>. For young Nevadans with the most to gain from an excellent public education-poor students, minority students and English learners-great schooling is most elusive. We know that there are many solutions to improve our schools, but we also know that great school leaders are the lynchpin. Through my experience, I know that as part of a solution, Nevada urgently needs a steady stream of high-quality school leaders from various pipelines who understand the unique contexts of our schools-high-quality ARL programs will allow us to accomplish this.

ARL programs for school leaders will allow us to train individuals who are ready to be leaders in the schools that the new Nevada aspires to. Research tells us that highly effective principals raise the achievement of a typical student in their schools by between two and seven months of learning in a single school year and that ineffective principals lower achievement by the same amount.<sup>5</sup> This means that all our school leader preparation programs must train aspiring Nevada leaders who will be able to do the following:

- Develop and articulate a multi-faceted, school-wide vision to increase student achievement
- Partner with the community he or she serves by involving them in the execution of their vision for their school
- Establish meaningful goals at a range of levels (e.g., school, classroom, grade/subject) to drive towards the vision and short- and long-term

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<sup>1</sup> US. Department of Education. NCES, *Common Core of Data Database*, October 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Nevada Department of Education (2013-14).

<sup>3</sup> Measure of America calculations using US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Quality Counts Report Card (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Brach, Hanushek and Rivkin (2013).

- Utilize and connect varying initiatives to meet the needs of his or her local context
- Attract and retain talent in their buildings, creating multiple opportunities for development and growth
- Manage and support staff toward the change they want to see in their schools
- Create a supportive and positive school environment where students are set up to learn

Through the decision on whether to allow alternative route to licensure programs to recommend school leaders for a Nevada administrator's license, this Commission has the opportunity to take action and provide multiple pathways to build our bench of this new type of school leader from our very own ranks of Nevada educators. We need to start building this steady talent stream now or the road to school improvement in Nevada will be a long and difficult one.

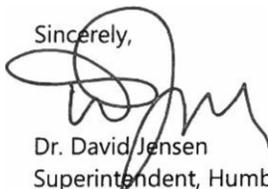
ARL programs for school leaders will also create an additional career pathway for high-potential educators in our districts to further their career within our districts. From the perspective of a rural district, this is incredibly important where many of our educators have limited options in institutions of higher education that provide a school leadership program that are specifically tailored to our context. ARL programs would allow our educators to have a variety of choices in the program they choose, opening up another career pathway. This is an important to Humboldt's retention strategy as we would like to keep our educators, who have deep familiarity with our context, working in our district.

To be clear, my advocacy for this Commission to approve alternative route to licensure programs to contribute to the school leader pipeline in Nevada is contingent on these programs being of the highest-quality and this Commission provides the necessary oversight. Specifically, I believe that it is essential for these programs to have the following attributes in order to be positioned to produce the new Nevada school leader. We know from the research that high-quality principal preparation programs must have the following characteristics:

- **Practice-Based Experience:** The new Nevada leader must have hands-on experience in the real work of our schools versus a sole focus on the theoretical or aspirational view of school leadership. This means that leaders must spend time in schools with teachers and students practicing skills such as providing teachers feedback that is aligned to their development areas; collaborating with parents or other members of the community; or determining their instructional and operational strategy with their leadership team and monitoring progress towards successful execution.
- **Focused learning:** There is now a body of research that establishes that effective leaders develop and articulate a multi-faceted, school-wide vision to increase student achievement, establish meaningful goals at a range of levels (e.g., school, classroom, grade/subject) to drive towards the vision and short and long-term improvement, and invest stakeholders the vision, goals and systems and motivate them to action among other things. Training the new Nevada leader requires zeroing in on these core set of standards that are at the heart of what Nevada principals need to know most.
- **Attending to Instructional Leadership:** The new Nevada leader must have a strong vision of excellent instruction and must know how to lead the adults in their buildings to execute on that vision. This means that our leaders must have a deep understanding of what the Nevada Academic Content Standards require of every student in their building and the instructional steps that need to be taken to provide students the appropriate instruction to meet those expectations.

I urge this Commission to consider approving only those alternative route to licensure programs who meet the state's rigorous quality requirements to provide administrator licenses. I believe that this will allow the state to have a steady stream of high-quality leadership pipeline that is prepared to take on the school leadership role in the new Nevada.

Sincerely,



Dr. David Jensen  
Superintendent, Humboldt County School District