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Education Policy Experts Release New Independent Analysis of Nevada’s ESSA Accountability Plan

*Nevada Lauded for Its Ideas on Exiting Improvement Status
“Check State Plans” Website Highlights Best Practices in State ESSA Plans

WASHINGTON – Today, Bellwether Education Partners, in partnership with the Collaborative for Student Success, released an independent, non-federal peer review of the 17 state accountability plans submitted to the U.S. Department of Education in April and May 2017 as required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The Collaborative breaks down that analysis on Check State Plans, an interactive website that spotlights—by category and by state—the best elements of ESSA plans and those that fall short.

In December 2015, Congress passed and the President signed ESSA. This new law redirected responsibility for education policy back to states, giving them more flexibility on key decisions. Since Congress passed ESSA, states have been busy writing their own accountability plans for approval from the U.S. Department of Education.

To encourage states to use this opportunity to submit accountability plans that go beyond mere compliance with federal law, we solicited the expertise of more than 30 bipartisan state and national experts to capture the strengths and weaknesses of each state’s plan. The reviews highlight promising policies that work towards increasing achievement and promoting equity, and provide feedback to parents, educators, state policymakers, and advocates.

Read more about the qualifications of the peer reviewers and the process.

Of 9 categories evaluated by peer reviewers, Nevada received the highest mark (5 checks) in the Exiting Improvement Status category. The state also received 4 check marks in 4 of the 9 categories – Goals, Standards and Assessments, Academic Progress, and Supporting Schools.

“Nevada has submitted a very solid plan for which they should be proud,” said Jim Cowen, executive director of the Collaborative for Student Success. “Their ideas are especially exemplary for ensuring that previously troubled schools have improved and will continue to
demonstrate progress. We hope that other states will look for ways to incorporate this best practice.”

To achieve this purpose, the Collaborative for Student Success also launched a website, Check State Plans, to provide states and advocates with additional feedback and guidance on the results of the extensive peer review. The site highlights strong plan components across the states while also shining a light on how each state’s plan can be even stronger.

“Our goal is to provide constructive, straightforward information to the public so that parents and advocates are better informed to engage with their state policymakers,” concluded Cowen.

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**Nevada’s Analysis:**

Excerpts below are taken from the Bellwether peer review analysis of Nevada’s plan.

To read the entire Bellwether review for Nevada, click here.

To read the Bellwether executive summary of all seventeen states, click here.

**Best Practices:**

**Exiting Improvement Status:** Nevada’s exit criteria are, for the most part, strong and clear. Reaching a three-star rating to exit comprehensive support status is rigorous. However, the state may want to consider ongoing monitoring of these schools to ensure that they do not immediately fall back into one- or two-star status. Similarly, the exit criteria for targeted support and improvement schools is clear and strong. It requires schools to meet their interim targets or reduce nonproficiency rates of the specific low-performing subgroup by 10 percent for two consecutive years. These targets are specific, tailored to individual schools, and linked directly to the reason the school was identified for improvement in the first place.

**Where the Plan Can Improve:**

- **Indicators:** Nevada’s use of its long-term goals and interim targets within the achievement and graduation rate indicators clearly links the targets to a school’s overall rating. Nevada’s use of chronic absenteeism, school climate, and the completion of individual learning plans to measure student engagement broadens the accountability system while still employing rigorous, student-focused measures. However, Nevada’s plan does not always provide detailed information on the definition of each indicator and how each indicator is calculated. Several of the indicators include subcomponents with no guidance on the way they will be combined into one larger indicator. The state could also strengthen its plan by assigning greater weight to the four-year graduation rate, while still recognizing the value of an extended-year graduation rate.
• **All Students:** Nevada does not include specific weights for student subgroups in the state’s five-star school-rating system. However, the state has created a back-end check to identify schools with consistently underperforming subgroups. Nevada also keeps its minimum threshold for including subgroups in its star rating system at 10 students. But when the state identifies targeted support schools based on subgroup performance, it plans to instead use an n-size of 25. This inconsistency is problematic and could result in students in smaller schools—where the n-size is less than 25—not receiving the resources and support they need. More data would be helpful to understand the implications of Nevada’s proposals.

• **Identifying Schools:** Nevada plans to identify all of its one-star schools and all downward-trending two-star schools, as well as the bottom 5 percent of schools, as schools in need of comprehensive support—aligning its star-rating and school-identification systems. However, the plan does not have similar alignment for schools with low-performing subgroups, and there’s uncertainty about the state’s proposed rules to identify schools in need of targeted support. Similarly, the state could provide greater clarity around its definition for schools identified for “additional targeted support.” Nevada will also give a label of “not rated” to any school that exclusively serves students with disabilities, which could create incentives for students with disabilities to be sent out of traditional schools. Nevada emphasizes the importance of state assessments by including a school’s participation rate in its accountability system. However, the state could strengthen its plan by imposing consequences for missing this target sooner than in the proposed timeline of three consecutive years.

• **Continuous Improvement:** Nevada could strengthen its plan by articulating how it intends to continuously evaluate and update its plan and modify its improvement strategies over time. Nevada could also explain how it will evaluate ongoing implementation efforts of its plan, as well as how it will consult with key stakeholders as the state revises its improvement strategies.

**About the Collaborative for Student Success**

The Collaborative for Student Success is a non-profit organization working to improve public education through a commitment to high standards for all students. The Collaborative believes that state, district, and local efforts to implement rigorous, comparable education standards and meaningful assessments are an important and necessary step to ensure all students are prepared to succeed in life after high school – whether that be college or a career.