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Testimony on A.B. 426 before the Assembly Education Committee
March 31, 2003
Anne K. Loring representing The Education Collaborative of Washoe County

Chairman Williams and Members of the Committee:

For the record, I am Anne Loring representing The Education Collaborative of Washoe County. Please let me take just a moment to describe what the Collaborative is and the work it is doing relating to this issue of students enrolling in remedial college classes.

The Collaborative was formed several years ago as a result of the merger of two previously existing partnership organizations – the Washoe K-16 Council and Partners in Education. The Collaborative's board of directors must be composed of a 51% majority of private sector members representing businesses, community organizations, and parents. The remaining 49% of the directors include the Washoe superintendent and the presidents of UNR and TMCC as well as others representing K-12 and higher education.

One of the Collaborative's projects is the annual publication of a report called "The Data Profile Report," which provides data about graduating classes of the Washoe County School District and their continuation into UNR and TMCC. Data on the need for remediation by our students has been a key component of the Data Profile for the past 5 years. Because we noticed an increase in the percentage of WCSD students needing remediation at UNR and TMCC from 1999 through 2001, this year's report is focusing on more detailed information about who is taking remedial classes and characteristics of their high school performance. I have provided for you a draft outline of the 2003 Data Profile Report, which is expected to be published this fall.

The Collaborative shares the concern of the bill's sponsors about this issue. What we have learned so far is that the issue of students taking remedial classes in college is more complex than it first appears and is related to a number of policy issues at various levels. Please let me list just a few for you that we have identified, and then I would like to suggest an alternative strategy for this bill.

➤ Here are two **higher education** issues:

1. Policies on placement of students into remedial math or English classes vary among some of the institutions in the UCCSN system – particularly among the community colleges. There may very well be good reasons for differences in policies between the two universities and the community colleges. The various community colleges use different placement tests and cut scores, vary in how strictly they enforce the taking of placement tests, and vary in whether they really require a student who fails to make the cut score to take a remedial class. Given this situation, the same student might have to take a remedial class at one Nevada college but not another. So how

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ASSEMBLY EDUCATION
DATE: 3/31/03 ROOM: 3143 EXHIBIT L
SUBMITTED BY: ANNE K. LORING

can we hold the student's K-12 district financially responsible for varying college placement policies?

2. The mission of our community colleges is dramatically different from that of our universities. Community colleges currently serve as a safety net or second chance for a high school graduate who did not successfully complete a college-prep curriculum but then decides to enter college. Community colleges offer a second chance to the student who never took second-year Algebra but now wants to become an engineer or who failed second-year Algebra but is now more motivated to try again. That is one reason why the need for remediation by students at TMCC is almost twice that of students at UNR. That is an important and valuable mission, but should school districts have to pay for those students' remediation?

➤ Here are two **issues** relating to our terrific **Millennium Scholarship** program:

1. The GPA required for the Millennium Scholarship is based on every subject a student takes in high school, not just the core academic subjects. So a graduate could have received A's and B's in occupational education classes, art, music, or even weight training but received very low grades in math or English and yet qualify for a Millennium Scholarship. That student will need remedial math or English, yet why should a school district pay when the Millennium Scholarship may have inadvertently encouraged that ill-prepared student to go on to college?
2. The Millennium Scholarship was designed and has encouraged students to go on to college, but it does not require that the student have completed a college-prep curriculum as a condition for the scholarship. Should a school district pick up the tab for that student to take remedial college classes that the student chose not to take in high school?

➤ Here is an **issue** for our state's **business community** to consider:

1. Some in the business community support this bill as a measure of accountability for our school districts. Yet when school boards or the state board discuss:
 - increasing the number of math or science credits required for graduation, or
 - requiring students to take higher level math classes, or
 - not permitting occupational education classes to count as math or science or English classes,it is often the business community who objects – saying “Not everyone is going to college.” But do they then want the school districts to pay when those students who didn't take college prep classes decide to go to college and need remedial math or English?

➤ Are there **issues** for **K-12 policy-makers**, too? Of course, and here are some:

1. Are counselors and teachers challenging all students to take high-level classes with a view toward college preparation?

2. Are course content and expected outcomes in K-12 math and English classes aligned with expectations for college and university math and English?
- ❖ How many students taking remedial math or English in our colleges self-selected those classes even though they could have been successful in college classes?
- ❖ How many remedial students did not want to take college prep classes in high school, or decided not to take math in their senior year, or goofed off or cut class and passed their classes but just barely?
- ❖ Should school districts be required to pay for remedial classes for those students?

This issue of college remedial classes is a serious one as you have noted. But there are also questions to answer and policy issues that impact this situation. We understand that the Board of Regents has just instituted new policies relating to this issue, including working with K-12 to reduce the need for remediation and eliminating state funding for remedial education classes at the universities beginning in 2006. We applaud their action.

The Education Collaborative of Washoe County respectfully suggests that you consider making this bill a resolution and directing our newly formed Nevada P-16 Council to research this issue during the interim. The Council includes legislators, the Governor's office, higher education, the state Board of Education, the Nevada Association of School Boards, K-12 educators, and the business community. The Council is currently directing Nevada's participation in the American Diploma Project. They are in an excellent position to pursue this issue on your behalf and report back to you in the next session.

Thank you for your time.

Anne K. Loring
The Education Collaborative of Washoe County