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**State of Nevada**  
**Assembly**  
**Seventy-Second Session**

March 7, 2003

RE: SMART Program

Committee of Ways and Means Members  
401 South Carson Street  
Carson City, NV 89701-4747

Dear Committee of Ways and Means Members,

I have grave concerns with the SMART Program that I feel need to be addressed. After conducting extensive research I have come to the conclusion that to continue with this program in its current format would simply mean throwing more money away. I feel that this program needs to be killed, and I'm sure when you have had the opportunity to study the materials I've enclosed you will all agree with me. I appreciate this Committee's time and attention to this very important subject.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bob McCleary".

Assemblyman Bob McCleary

BM/tb

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 11, 2003  
TO: Assemblyman Bob McCleary  
FROM: H. Pepper Sturm, Chief Principal Research Analyst  
Research Division  
SUBJECT: SMART

This memorandum responds to your request for certain information with regard to Nevada's SMART program. It is my understanding that you had serious concerns about the program's ability to support current and future accountability requirements and you asked for information in support of that position.

SUMMARY

Significant concerns exist with regard to the ability of the Statewide Management of Automated Record Transfer (SMART) system to fully address the reporting and school improvement needs required under the new Federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLBA). This memorandum recommends that the data stored in the SMART data warehouse be maintained, if it is linkable to statewide assessments. In addition, the Department should plan for the future demands imposed by NCLBA to replace SMART with a more flexible, comprehensive system that will serve the needs of schools, districts, and the state. I would also recommend that you coordinate your efforts with the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means.

BACKGROUND

As you know, SMART was designed to be a joint project between the state and the districts. In 1995, the school districts and the Nevada Department of Education came to the Legislature with a proposal - the Legislature was asked for funds to purchase equipment and software for

the school district's local student information systems, and the state was to receive information "uploaded" into the statewide system (SMART) for its own state reporting and information needs. The project was supposed to have progressed in a series of phases, from pilot program to a statewide system since that time. The legislature has appropriated nearly \$25 million in state funds; the districts have used local funds for a portion of the total cost. By the beginning of 2003, the districts have their systems in place, but at the state level, the system is not yet fully operational. The Department is now asking for an additional \$2.8 million over the next biennium to maintain the system.

At the January 13, 2003, meeting of the Legislative Committee on Education, the chairman Senator William J. Raggio, expressed concerns about the program and asked that the Department of Education make certain decisions and provide information to Legislative Counsel Bureau staff. According to an excerpt from Senator Raggio's remarks:

No Child Left Behind will be imposing substantial requirements for timely information that classroom teachers, school principals, local school boards, and state policymakers will need to meet student achievement targets. The system that is currently in place does not seem to be comprehensive enough or flexible enough to address all these needs. The Department needs to make definitive decisions regarding what adjustments to the system are needed to make it useful to classroom teachers, as well as district and state-level staff. These decisions along with costs need to be provided to staff by the start of session — so that decisions regarding funding for SMART can be made. I would ask that the Nevada Department of Education work with LeBEAPE and other LCB staff to reevaluate this project, and, if necessary, plan and design any needed changes.

Similar directions were given to the Department during the Legislative Commission's Budget Subcommittee hearing on January 24, 2003.

#### OUTSTANDING CONCERNS

There are numerous technical concerns involved with this program. Additionally, certain commitments were made that appear to have been overlooked or ignored. Finally, school districts have expressed concerns about the viability of the program.

##### *Technical Considerations*

Since the reporting requirements for NCLBA are very specific, it appears that more needs to be done to ensure that the data systems in place at the school, district, and state level are uniform and compatible, especially the student information systems. This implies two alternatives: (1) Continue to utilize the existing SMART system, adding components as needed and creating "fixes" to address needs it was not designed for; or (2) Take an independent look at future needs and designing a new system meeting those needs. While either approach can

make use of existing hardware, if the existing system is maintained, it appears that districts will need to purchase new software or upgrades to address additional school reporting and school improvement requirements.

Further, there are aspects of No Child Left Behind that the existing SMART will not address. Essentially, SMART is a student information system. No Child Left Behind contains non-student information needs that schools, districts, and the state need to address for school improvement and NCLBA reporting requirements. Data concerning teacher qualifications (currently a separate system maintained by the Nevada Department of Education), school facility safety issues, and miscellaneous specialized data, including certain information about Limited English Proficient (LEP) pupils, and disabled students are a necessity. Should another accountability information system replace SMART, access to those features will be needed.

#### *Concerns About Previous Commitments*

While most of the student information requirements under the current accountability system will be met by a fully operational system, other promises were made with regard to SMART that have not been fulfilled. Among these are:

- That early testimony led legislators to believe that the SMART system itself would provide the classroom data needed by teachers to inform instruction (see attached SMART document distributed to the 1997 legislature);
- That the SMART system would produce the state data tables each year, eliminating the need for the Legislative Counsel Bureau to compile these by reentering data from other reports;
- That the SMART system would produce the school and district level report cards in a user-friendly fashion (i.e., not requiring the school districts to download data into separate spreadsheets); and
- Timely student information exchange could occur between school districts, as appropriate (i.e., transcripts).

#### *School District Concerns*

In informal conversations between school district representatives and LCB staff, there is a perception that the local student information systems that are the foundation of SMART are not flexible enough to meet current accountability reporting requirements, let alone what will be needed under NCLBA. Staff has observed school personnel struggling with the current system in order to prepare currently required school-level accountability reports. Current local systems do not appear to be sufficiently flexible to address school and district-level needs for the increased level of sophistication required under the No Child Left Behind Act.

### ALTERNATIVES

There seems to be a lack of understanding between staff and the Department with regard to SMART. Whatever the case, the needs for the various constituencies involved in educational accountability from the classroom teacher to the state legislator can be defined; systems can be put into place to gather the data that is not currently being collected; software systems can be purchased or adapted to ensure that separate databases can "talk" to each other; and a "transparent" method of accessing the information can be designed to produce useful reports at all levels. The Department seems to be narrowly focused upon the old system and whether it meets specifications. It might be advisable to look at future needs and let those desired outcomes define a new state educational accountability system.

You may wish to consider the following alternatives with regard to the SMART program:

- Shifting system operation and maintenance to the UCCSN – both the Department and the UCCSN have informally expressed interest in this step;
- Requiring that any student information linked to a complete year of statewide testing be maintained during this transition period for inclusion in any future system;
- Establishing certain technical considerations for any future system, including common software packages, flexible inquiry and reporting systems, and longitudinal tracking capacity; and
- Requiring that the future statewide school improvement / student data system be Web-based for easy access at the classroom, school, district, and state level, depending upon the level of information authorized for the parties at each of those levels.

With regard to the last item, one alternative would be to adopt a Web-based system such as that employed by the State of Connecticut. In a cooperative program through Harcourt Educational Measurement and a company called eMetrics, student answer sheets provide both the demographic and testing information needed to meet most of the system requirements. However, a key component should include pre-coding of assessment documents with student information as one of the basic requirements for both data quality and time reduction in the reporting cycle. If you wish to pursue this option, I would recommend bringing eMetrics and Harcourt in to demonstrate the Connecticut system.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

You asked for staff recommendations for actions based upon concerns about the future usefulness of the system and the information contained in this memorandum. Based upon the information we currently have, the Department should be directed to do the following:

1. Define what will be needed in the way of student, school, and teacher information that will be useful for teachers, principals, districts, and state policymakers for school improvement and NCLBA purposes;
2. Identify the best structure for a data information system that will reflect the needs defined under item No. 1, including components useful to each level;
3. The Department should then cost out the future system and each relevant component;
4. Based upon the previous three items, determine the program needs and specific use of the \$2.8 million recommended by Governor Kenny C. Guinn for the 2003-2005 biennium. The Department needs to use the transition period between March 31, 2003, (targeted SMART operational date), and the 2005 school year (full implementation of testing requirements under NCLBA), to make changes to the system in order to meet future needs defined in the earlier items; and
5. Based upon the previous four items, the Department should specify the policy changes and statutory changes that need to be made to achieve the desired outcome.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

I would urge you to coordinate your concerns with Assemblyman Morse Arberry, Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means with regard to this program, since this committee has fiscal oversight for the Department of Education and the SMART program. As noted in a previous communication, Mark W. Stevens, the Assembly Fiscal Analyst, Fiscal Analysis Division, has offered to assist you with some of the process issues involved with this matter.

I hope this information will be helpful. Please let me know if I may be of any further assistance in this matter.

HPS/rd:W31324

Enc.

c. Mark W. Steven, Assembly Fiscal Analyst