

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

**Eighty-First Session
February 9, 2021**

The Committee on Education was called to order by Chair Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod at 1:35 p.m. on Tuesday, February 9, 2021, Online. Copies of the minutes, including the Agenda ([Exhibit A](#)), the Attendance Roster ([Exhibit B](#)), and other substantive exhibits, are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau and on the Nevada Legislature's website at www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/81st2021.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Assemblywoman Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod, Chair
Assemblywoman Brittney Miller, Vice Chair
Assemblywoman Bea Duran
Assemblyman Edgar Flores
Assemblywoman Michelle Gorelow
Assemblywoman Alexis Hansen
Assemblywoman Melissa Hardy
Assemblywoman Lisa Krasner
Assemblywoman Elaine Marzola
Assemblyman Richard McArthur
Assemblywoman Rochelle T. Nguyen
Assemblywoman Jill Tolles
Assemblywoman Selena Torres

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:

None

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Kristi Robusto, Committee Policy Analyst
Amanda Marincic, Committee Counsel
Nick Christie, Committee Manager
Sarah Baker, Committee Secretary
Melissa Loomis, Committee Assistant



OTHERS PRESENT:

Melody Rose, Ph.D., Chancellor, Nevada System of Higher Education
Marc J. Kahn, M.D., M.B.A., Dean, University of Nevada, Las Vegas School of
Medicine
Andrew Clinger, Chief Financial Officer, Nevada System of Higher Education

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

We will have two presentations today: one on the Nevada System of Higher Education from our new chancellor, Dr. Melody Rose, and another from the dean of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas School of Medicine, Dr. Marc Kahn, on their COVID-19 response and vaccination efforts.

At this time, I would like to open it up for our first public comment. [There was none.]

We have a bill draft request (BDR) introduction. We occasionally get bill draft requests that will come to the Committee and we need to move them on to the floor. I will need a motion. I want to let members know that voting to move it to the floor does not mean you are committed to vote yes on the bill. It simply allows this piece of legislation to be introduced, and then it will come back to the Committee for an actual Committee hearing.

BDR 34-529—Revises provisions relating to charter schools. (Later introduced as [Assembly Bill 109](#).)

This bill draft request is from the Interim Legislative Committee on Education. The summary is: an act relating to education; revising requirements for teachers who provide instruction at a charter school; and providing other matters properly relating thereto.

At this time, I will take a motion to formally introduce BDR 34-529.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MILLER MADE A MOTION FOR COMMITTEE
INTRODUCTION OF BILL DRAFT REQUEST 34-529.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN GORELOW SECONDED THE MOTION.

Do I have any discussion on the motion?

Assemblywoman Tolles:

Could we get a clarification on the process? I know we are doing things differently because of restrictions. Can we just walk through what we typically do when we have these introductions behind the bar or on the floor versus how we are doing it in this virtual environment? I think that might help clarify some questions that have arisen.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

I will refer to legal counsel if you want to discuss that.

Kristi Robusto, Committee Policy Analyst:

In general, you are going to have your BDR introductions occur on the floor. That is how it works in the pre-COVID-19 normal legislative session as well as the current session being conducted remotely. Every so often, when we get a BDR request from an interim legislative committee, it will come first to the committee it is associated with. This one is from the Interim Legislative Committee on Education and was proposed and voted on during their work session back in September of 2020.

What the members are currently voting on is to simply introduce the BDR so it can then go to the floor. Nobody is voting on whether or not they would like the measure to pass; it is simply a vote to introduce this piece of legislation so it can go to the floor to then be able to come back for a Committee hearing.

Assemblywoman Tolles:

That clarifies part of the process of this bill from the interim committee. I know I was on that interim committee, and we voted on the recommendations but have not seen the language. If I recall correctly, for the last two sessions, typically when we have a behind the bar meeting, we pass out hard copies so the members are able to briefly walk through not just the summary, but also actually see the language. At that time, we as a Committee vote to accept it as a Committee bill that we will be hearing.

I believe the purpose of that is for members to have a chance to see the language itself and agree this is a Committee bill. We are not agreeing that we are passing it or voting on the merit of the bill, but we agree that it reflects the Committee's work on the interim for that process. Since we have not yet seen the physical bill, I wonder if we could have that opportunity before taking this vote.

Kristi Robusto:

I am going to have to double-check on some of our processes and procedures for you. I will allow our legal counsel to jump in to clarify anything as well.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

Let us take a one-minute recess [at 1:44 p.m.].

[The meeting was reconvened at 1:48 p.m.]

It was confirmed that the BDR language is not public until it has been introduced on the floor. After we refer it from Committee, it will be introduced onto the floor and made public.

Do we have any other discussion on the bill?

Assemblywoman Hansen:

It is only my second session, and maybe my memory is not serving me well. I do not recall this process. Is this how we have done it before? I do not remember this.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

Yes. Any Committee bills that the Chair of the Committee brings forward are voted onto the floor and then are referred back to us.

Assemblywoman Hansen:

I just wanted to clarify because I am not seeing it. I have not done a vote on something I have not seen. I know it is not supposed to be public.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

These are the recommendations that came out of the interim committee. If you watch the interim committee, you understand what was discussed and what is in this bill.

Assemblywoman Hansen:

We do not get a hard copy?

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

Not until after it is introduced onto the floor.

Assemblywoman Torres:

Maybe it would be helpful for our colleagues if we sent out the link that has all the information so they can view the working document from the interim committee. It is about 90 pages long, but there are a lot of details about what is going into the BDR that I thought were helpful.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

That link is available. We will make sure to distribute it to the Committee members.

THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Next, we will move on to our first presentation.

Melody Rose, Ph.D., Chancellor, Nevada System of Higher Education:

Hopefully, you have received in your offices a packet from the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) that includes an accounting of all the students who live in your district as well as our accountability report and our citizen's guide to the NSHE budget. Both of those are additional sources of information for you as you move through this session.

Today I am delighted to be with you and provide you with an overview of NSHE. I know some of you know us very well, and for others this is an opportunity to introduce myself and what we have been working on since my arrival.

I am going to quickly share with you the five strategic goals adopted by the board in 2018 and our progress on those goals so far. I thought it would also be nice to spend a few moments sharing with you how we have been handling COVID-19 in our communities.

Then we will move to a conversation about our community colleges, and I will round it out with some thoughts about the initiatives I have kicked off since my arrival in August.

These five strategic goals should be familiar to those of you who have been paying attention to higher education for the past few years [page 3, [Exhibit C](#)]. The board adopted these with the assistance of my predecessor, and they are really focused on how to move higher education forward for all Nevadans. As you all know, I am a first-generation college student, so access, success, and closing the achievement gap are all very near and dear to my heart. We are also very committed to both workforce development and advancing research and bringing it home to Nevada so we can create a more diversified economy. Those remain our five strategic goals.

In the next slide [page 4, [Exhibit C](#)], I will be sharing with you some high-level data about how we are delivering on these goals. There is more data in the accountability report, which you should have in your offices, and if you really want to dig in, you can go to our website and view all the data cross-tabulated by demographics. Here you can see a bit of a bubble in enrollment following the Great Recession. Oftentimes, higher education is countercyclical to the economy. We definitely experienced that after the 2008 recession. Things then are fairly stable to slightly growing into this most recent recession. The last year for which we have official data from the Department of Education, 2018, is validated there. That is why the slide ends with 2018. We will be talking a little bit later about enrollment patterns and how COVID-19 has affected them.

One of the things I have shared with several of you when we met one-on-one is my passion for the diversity of this state. I was born in Los Angeles, and I am excited to be back in a culturally rich environment. That is very much demonstrated on this slide [page 5, [Exhibit C](#)]. In 2015, NSHE became a majority minority system. We are now conferring more degrees to students of color than to white students, which of course maps on to the demographics of our state, and ultimately will map onto the demographics of our nation. In many ways, Nevada is on the leading edge of demographic shifts, and as a result, we should be on the leading edge of policy to support these students.

Student success is really about outcomes, and one of the key ways higher education measures outcomes is how many students we matriculate, retain, and complete. This graph [page 6, [Exhibit C](#)] shows you where we were in 2014 and where we were most recently with graduation rates in 2019. This slide goes over the three four-year institutions, and you can see a steady progression of improvement with graduation rates in the aggregate, which I think is a very important directional change. These are largely on par with national median performance indicators for similar institutions. That does not mean we are going to rest where we are. We have a way to go, and I am happy to chat with you about the levers we need to pull to bump up these graduation rates.

For community colleges, you can see here [page 7, [Exhibit C](#)] that there is some significant variance across our community colleges. Again, this shows graduation rates for an associate's degree at our four community colleges. I know it is probably a point of interest

that the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) is sitting at 12 percent while Great Basin College is at 42 percent. There is a great deal of variance. I would say Truckee Meadows Community College and Western Nevada College are more around the national median. We have some work to do. I know Dr. Frederico Zaragoza, the president of CSN, is working very hard on this, and although it might not feel like it, a 3 percent improvement in five years' time is actually somewhat aggressive. I know that will not feel satisfying, but in terms of how and how quickly we can move the needle, that is not a bad rate of change. We can talk further about how to accelerate that change.

Our third strategic goal is to close the achievement gap. We should not be seeing differences in retention and completion rates based on race or ethnicity. It is a fact that this is a challenge nationwide. You can see here again [page 8, [Exhibit C](#)] across a four-year spread where we have been with students of color and white students at two- and four-year institutions, and this is a point of real interest to me because I believe very strongly that if we lean in and direct resources strategically, we can close these gaps and be a model for the nation. Many of you have heard that this is one of my aspirations. I think we can learn here, implement the right strategic initiatives, and then assist the rest of the nation with this very same objective.

Here, too [page 9, [Exhibit C](#)], is just another way of showing you how many more students of color are coming into NSHE institutions. This is a huge shift in demographics and a very important one for us to be paying attention to as we move forward. You can see white students are basically flat over this time period, but there is a major acceleration of attendance among our families of color. That is critical, and we need to focus on retention and completion efforts to get them over the finish line.

A word here on workforce: every time there is an economic downturn, there is a microscope on community colleges. They are first responders in terms of economic downturns, and I think of them as being the workhorses of our workforce. You can see here [page 10, [Exhibit C](#)] some of the skills certificates prevalent in our community colleges before the recession. We have not seen a whole lot of change in terms of areas of focus, but all four of our community colleges are doing creative things right now. For example, CSN is about to launch some weekend certificates for those displaced workers who maybe cannot focus on retraining during the week because they are taking care of children or watching over elders. It is very important we are agile, and we are shifting the way we reach displaced workers to support them during this economic calamity.

We have three research institutions—two R1-designated universities and our internationally recognized Desert Research Institute (DRI). This is a very important number for you all to see: grants and contracts were basically flat from 2012 to 2015, but we have seen an uptick since then [page 11, [Exhibit C](#)]. I know from speaking with the university presidents that since that time, these numbers have continued to grow. One of the things you are going to hear me talking a lot about is how to find grant opportunities where our three research institutions can be co-Principal Investigators and apply jointly. I have seen this happen in other states. In small states with small infrastructures like ours, we can be more competitive

for those big grants federally when we have multiple institutions applying jointly. Those three presidents are working on that objective and we are going to set some key performance indicators for them to make sure they are accountable to those goals.

Obviously, I cannot come chat with you about higher education at this moment without sharing some of what we have been doing since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. As many of you know, we went almost fully online about a year ago, and I want to give a shout-out to our faculty who had to move their courses online in an emergency setting. They deserve our thanks and support because that is not an easy thing to do.

Our students also hung with us. I know some of you are keen to talk about how COVID-19 has been affecting students. Our students are continuing their studies, some of them under really trying conditions. All the disparities that existed for our students around socioeconomic indicators have been exacerbated by this crisis. Differences in access to high-speed Internet and high-end technology, having a quiet space at home where you can focus and study without interruption from siblings or others: all these disparities have come under greater scrutiny. This crisis has really highlighted the preexisting strains on students. But they are hanging in.

You may have read that there are some systems across the country that have been slammed by enrollment declines in the double digits. We have been very fortunate, and we should be proud of our institutions because they have continued to serve our students so well that we have not seen that slide. Nationally, community colleges are at upwards of 15 to 30 percent losses in enrollment. In contrast, ours this past fall were about 8 percent down compared to the prior fall. Yes, we have seen some erosion at the community college level, but we expect those students to come back. Some of them simply made the decision that learning online was not great for them, and they wanted to sit it out and come back when things returned to normal. We are sitting in a pretty good spot.

In terms of student grades and completion, we are not seeing dropout rates change much on account of COVID-19. We are not even seeing grades change much because of COVID-19. One of the Assemblywomen asked me to talk about whether we are seeing more Fs and unsatisfactories. There is a slight uptick of unsatisfactories, but there is a bigger uptick in As that have been assigned to students. I think faculty are being very understanding of the conditions our students are living through.

The last thing I will say about this: we launched a mental health task force last Friday at NSHE, an internal working group with experts from all our campuses that I have asked to come together to study the mental health impacts to our students, staff, and faculty, and really try to identify some solutions and supports we can surface and scale. The impacts of COVID-19 are not going to go away anytime soon, and some of the mental health challenges are, of course, layered onto preexisting challenges. We need to be attentive to that.

There is so much conversation right now around our community colleges, and I wanted to discuss with the Committee some of the things that are important to know. Our community

colleges are what are referred to as "comprehensive community colleges," meaning they do offer certificate programs, the retraining and upskilling of displaced workers that usually comes in small-bite certificate programs. They are a very important aspect of what we do around workforce. For the most part, however, these community colleges are offering associate's degrees, and as you see from the slide here [page 13, [Exhibit C](#)], 92 percent of students who showed up on our community colleges' doorsteps this fall declared that they intended to get an associate's degree. That may be related to nursing, or heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning.

Most of those associate's degrees are workforce-related, but we do not just train at community colleges, we also transfer. It is important for all of you to know that, like the majority of states in the U.S. and almost all the western states, we also offer on our community college campuses select bachelor's degrees, technically called bachelors of applied sciences. We work very hard to make sure there is no duplication with the four-year institutions, and this allows, for the most part, underrepresented first-generation college students to take a bite at that four-year degree in a way that is more accessible and at a lower price point. That is a very important component of what we do.

About 51,000 of our students are at our four community colleges. Almost all of them are enrolled part-time. They are juggling work and families. These are students who have a lot going on, and they really need our support. About 57 percent are female, which is approximately the national average, and 58 percent are students of color.

Community colleges are often a pathway to a bachelor's degree. One of the things NSHE has really focused on is seamless transfer between two- and four-year institutions, which is something you can do when you are all in one system. I cannot take any credit for this because it happened before my arrival. Just last year, before I arrived, an audit was conducted to review how well our transfer pathways were working. I was so pleased when I arrived to learn that the audit produced a result of 95 percent. That means our students are not losing credits, time, and money when they transfer from two- to four-year institutions. You know how important that is to make sure students are moving along so they can get out into the workforce and take care of their families and their communities.

You have probably already seen this news, but we are very proud of CSN for pulling down a nearly \$7 million commerce grant to work with the City of Las Vegas to erect a workforce training facility. We are really excited about that, and when you see folks from CSN, please give them a big shout-out.

What is next for NSHE? One of the things I wanted to share with you is that while we began with those five strategic goals—and NSHE is very focused on them—I drew the presidents together for an all-day retreat in the fall and asked how we can accelerate our delivery of those promises. We have focused on establishing metrics and targets for each of those five strategic goals. The presidents are now working collaboratively with me to assign themselves targets for achieving those five strategic goals, because if you cannot measure it, you are never going to achieve it. That will also allow us to be clear about when things are

working and when we need to pivot and be accountable to all of you in presenting that data going forward. I am proud of that effort, which is already underway.

I am also working with the presidents to assign these strategic initiatives and partnerships that will accelerate our work. I want to pull out one example for you: I am passionate about dual credit. I supported it and was part of development of dual credit in Oregon. As you know, we have been offering dual credit to some of our high school students, but it is not working seamlessly or in an equitable fashion. In my view, your dual credit offerings and price points should not have any relationship to your ZIP Code. The Department of Education Superintendent of Public Instruction Jhone Ebert and I have put together a task force to identify the barriers to equitable dual credit access. We will be working with our board to move forward in terms of any policy changes that might be needed in order to reach truly accessible dual credit for all Nevada high schools.

The next few slides show some of the strategic initiatives we are working on [pages 18-21, [Exhibit C](#)]. I already mentioned the mental health task force. This fall, all first-year students across NSHE will be enrolled in college-level math and English with or without corequisite support. We are moving away from that antiquated remedial model that was really challenging for students and has carried some stigma in favor of moving all our students forward while giving them whatever level of support they need to succeed.

The advising initiative, also something initiated before my arrival, is trying to get our student-to-advisor ratios to the best national practices, which is a ratio of 350 to 1. All our institutions are moving very carefully in that direction. We will also be working to advance online instruction. As you might imagine, having gone online abruptly a year ago has revealed some strengths and some places where we need to do some additional work.

I am working very carefully with all the campus chief diversity officers. I am a big believer that if you can see it, you can be it, and one of the best ways to move the needle on student achievement and close the achievement gap is to have professors, advisors, and other support people on campus who look like our students. In the coming weeks, you are going to hear more from my office about moving forward in equity initiatives around hiring and maintaining representative faculty and staff.

We are also going to continue our workforce development efforts and building support for our two R1 research institutions in bringing knowledge to the state of Nevada and beyond.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

I am very impressed with your background and the diversity you bring. You mentioned it very quickly, but if you would just give a quick background on yourself, I would appreciate that.

Melody Rose:

That is very kind. You all know that I have spent 25 years in higher education in Oregon. I ran the Oregon university system there and was a campus president, but I always like to say

that the most important things about me are not on my résumé, although this group may be interested to know that my Ph.D. is in American government and my expertise is women in politics. It is nice to be speaking to a majority-female legislature.

My personal background does equip me for this job in an important way. I was born in Los Angeles to a very young mom and a family filled with generations of addiction challenges. As a result, my little brother and I got dragged around the state of California. You can name a city in California, and I have probably lived there. The important thing is that at my third high school, a guidance counselor pulled me aside in the hall and stuck a college application in my hands and said, "I think you are a smart kid and you can break these cycles of poverty and addiction if you go to college."

The rest is history, because I have never left, and my North Star is making sure policymakers like you understand the transformational power of higher education. I know it because I lived it, and in this job, I am trying to advance it through the state of Nevada.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

I did want my Committee and the public to know your background, because I do think it is unique and will really bring something to NSHE. I look forward to working with you in the future. I have questions, but I will open it up to questions from my Committee members first.

Assemblywoman Gorelow:

Going back to page 6 [[Exhibit C](#)], which talks about graduation rates for the four-year institutions, I was wondering how those rates compared nationally, and also what barriers you see preventing higher rates, specifically with the Nevada state colleges.

Melody Rose:

Graduation rates are not where any of us want them to be. We want them to be at 100 percent, and I can tell you that for the R1 institutions, the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) is right around the national average, and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) is slightly below the national average. With our new UNLV president, Dr. Keith Whitfield, you are going to see a laser-like focus on moving that needle. One thing that helps with our completion rate is our low price point. In my budget presentation a few weeks ago, I thanked the money committees for being generous and investing in our higher education systems. That allows us not to pass too much of the price along to students, which is contributing to our success.

The challenging things, which show up in graduation rates for all institutions, are a whole mix of variables: What kind of preparation are students bringing with them? What competing demands on their time are students bringing with them? How much have we invested in advising? How much have we invested in culturally specific services? If you saw Dr. Whitfield's State of the University speech just last week, you would have heard him talk about this focus around culturally specific, equitable services for our students. That becomes very important when you are talking about first-generation students.

I will give you a quick example from my own experience: obviously, I am a white woman, but as a first-generation college student, I got to campus and my dad dropped me off on the corner. He did not even know he was supposed to take me up to my dorm room and help me unpack. He literally dropped me off on the corner, and I did not know who to talk to or what the protocols were; I was lost. Often with first-generation students, we think about the challenges as being financial, but they are also about not having the social capital or the social know-how to navigate a system your parents never went through. I believe very firmly that Dr. Whitfield will move that needle on changing those outcomes.

In terms of Nevada State College (NSC), which you asked about specifically, I am pleased to see those numbers are rising, and rising quickly in terms of completion. Part of what you are seeing there is that you have a very young institution, and institutions that are growing in double digits every year will very frequently have the trouble of being on a hamster wheel trying to keep up with the student population. I think that is one of the things contributing to NSC's graduation rate. But again, the margin of increase year over year is what we want to see. I have faith these are all moving in the right direction. I have seen places around the country moving backward in completion, so Nevada should be proud.

Assemblywoman Gorelow:

These rates are for students who have completed a degree in four years. Do we have any data showing students who may have taken an extra year, especially since you mentioned the time constraints students might have? Do we have information on students who might finish one or two years afterward?

Melody Rose:

We absolutely do. Traditionally, we measure in six-year increments for that very reason. Even at the four-year institutions, you are going to see a fair number of part-time students, and they take longer to finish. That is another variable pulling on the completion rate: you have students who are juggling an awful lot. If you would like, we can certainly supply you the six-year graduation rates for all our degree-granting institutions.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

If you could have that sent to the Committee, we will get it sent out to our members. I think we would all be interested in that.

Assemblywoman Torres:

Could you talk a little bit about the work the different institutions have done to help with our teacher pipeline? I think it is critical when we talk about ensuring we have enough teachers in the classroom that we also consider what we are doing to grow our own teachers.

Melody Rose:

I am glad you asked me that question. I have a partnership emerging with Superintendent Ebert. We are already delivering on the dual credit task force, but she and I convened a meeting about two weeks ago with our deans of education and some of her policy experts to analyze the gap and begin the conversation. While we are producing about 800 teachers a

year, the state needs 2,400 a year. There is a significant gap, and even though NSC's teacher preparation program is growing quickly, it is not growing fast enough to collapse that gap. We have had one meeting with that team, and she and I then followed up and agreed that we need a joint task force charged by us both to identify the challenges and barriers and come back to us with recommendations for change.

This one will eventually need an investment. Obviously, to get from 800 to 2,400 is a big delta. The problem is not just having enough teachers, it is which teachers we cultivate. It is so important that instructors look like the kids in their classrooms, and in order to get that right, we must be intentional about growing our own teacher corps. I am grateful to Superintendent Ebert for working with me. I come from a state that views education as cradle to career, so every time we can join forces, I think we will pinpoint the right solutions, and with our board's approval be able to bring them to you.

Assemblywoman Tolles:

That last conversation was so valuable. It got me thinking about how in your story it was teachers who reached out to you who changed the course of your future, and teachers now could reach out to students who could be part of that teacher pipeline. Recognizing that talent and mentoring up into those roles—I think that is a beautiful vision. Having taught in NSHE for 16 years, I have seen the transition of our student population toward more first-generation students and more diversity. Through increased graduation rates, those successes are seen and realized. We still have much further to go, but I think it is good to acknowledge that success, because that came from setting those goals. I remember when we first had that conversation ten years ago about the need for more diversity and inclusion as well as better credit transfers, so it is encouraging to see the results of that.

On page 11 [[Exhibit C](#)], you talk about research and investment dollars. I personally would like to learn more about this, and I think it would benefit our Committee to understand the impact on our state. How significant is it to have research expanded and recognized at our universities? What is the economic impact on our state? How does that translate to jobs and overall goals of economic diversification?

Melody Rose:

Research is the aspect of our mission that is least understood and feels a bit amorphous. Frequently, for example—and it is the case at DRI—there is a huge multiplier effect to the economics of research. Let us talk about the money part first and then we will talk about the lives involved in this.

Very frequently, the multiplier effect of the state's investment is a one to three ratio; if you invest a dollar, DRI turns that into three dollars. The way research multiplies like that is severalfold. One is that sometimes, basic research going on at our research institutions will translate into technology transfer, so it spins out into a new corporation that pays taxes, hires Nevadans, and moves our economy forward.

There is a very clear economic impact to research investment. But I would also say there is a very clear impact of research investments on quality of life. I think about some of the research going on in some of our medical schools, in your basic chemistry lab, and what DRI does around water and other natural resources research that will improve the lives of Nevadans. Much of this research is directly contributing to the enhancement of our communities and our quality of life.

I think the easiest one to understand is obviously medical breakthroughs. If we have not personally benefitted from a medical breakthrough, someone in our families have. The other easy one is anything related to the environment. We have recently heard from U.S. President Joe Biden that he will try to move our economy from a coal-based to a solar-based energy development system. We are sitting in a really great place for that opportunity, and we have scholars on these three campuses who are experts in that field. It will be very impactful to the quality of our lives moving forward. There are positive economic and quality of life outcomes.

I think we would be remiss if we did not link research to instruction. Sometimes, we think about these as being isolated activities. As a scholar myself, I have done a lot of research and written multiple books, and I always had students on my research teams. Participating in a research activity as an undergraduate is considered a high-impact practice. When you get a student involved on a research team, they are much more likely to complete their degree and move into the workforce. There is a very important nexus between student success initiatives and research investments. Too often, I think we overlook that component.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

I have a couple of questions I wanted to ask. I, too, am very excited about the opportunities that the three research institutions will have working together for the research dollars. I was excited when I saw that UNLV has the first room temperature superconductor. That was very exciting.

You mentioned an audit was done right before you came where you looked at the transfers and were able to see that people were not losing credit. Was that internal or external, and did they look at anything else?

Melody Rose:

That was an internal audit we conducted for ourselves. We have traditional audits going on all the time, auditing all kinds of functions on all our campuses, as well as external audits. That was a separate activity to demonstrate to ourselves if our policies of linking two- and four-year institutions were working.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

You mentioned that CSN has weekend certificates. What other public-private partnerships are going on within NSHE? I do believe the key to our workforce diversification is to get the great jobs of the future to people right where they need them.

Melody Rose:

I would be remiss if I did not point out what is going on at UNLV. This morning I shared at Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance, the Harry Reid Research and Technology Park is a great example. It is filled with the top industries working alongside our researchers for advancement and expansion of economic diversity. The Nevada System of Higher Education took the lead in creating a partnership specifically with MGM Resorts International to be able to offer them just-in-time degrees so their employees could advance through the corporation more quickly. Given what the last year has looked like for them, we have not had as many of their employees move through as we hoped in our first year, but I know that number is going to climb. The list of public-private partnerships, or what we call P3s, is actually quite long.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

If we do not have any more pressing questions, we will move on to our next presentation, which I am very excited about.

Marc J. Kahn, M.D., M.B.A., Dean, University of Nevada, Las Vegas School of Medicine:

I will talk about our COVID-19 response, but I want to give a brief background on the Las Vegas School of Medicine itself. We began planning for a school of medicine at UNLV in 2014. Our founding dean was hired a year later, and we recruited our first class in 2017. This year, we will have our first Match Day, where our medical students learn where they will do their residencies, and our first graduation.

Our mission is simple: we care for the community through education, patient care, research, and, importantly, community engagement. Running through this are two themes. One is people, planning, and process. The other is diversity, equity, and inclusion. This is what we are about at the School of Medicine. We want to care for our community, and COVID-19 provides a nice example of how a school of medicine and an academic health center can do just that.

We have treated more than 52,000 patients in general, performed over 50,000 surgeries, and delivered over 5,000 babies. We have done research on stem cells to repair damaged hearts and on motor vehicle accidents. All our students are involved in the community, and with COVID-19, they have been answering phones while our more senior students have been on the front lines taking care of patients.

We are about to start a free clinic in Nevada for our most vulnerable populations alongside the other health science schools, including dental medicine, nursing, and integrative health, and we are working with schools to not only provide after-school education, but also after-school health care to needy populations.

Importantly, construction is well underway for our new 130,000-square-foot medical education building, which is a public-private partnership with a private development corporation that has been very generous in their donation to the university and NSHE.

Here is an artist's rendering of what our new building will look like [page 5, [Exhibit D](#)]. This is in the Las Vegas Medical District, so not only will this be the front place for our school of medicine, but it will also be an impetus for economic development in the Medical District itself. We anticipate housing, restaurants, gyms, etc., to come into the area because of the medical education building and the medical school itself.

We have some new initiatives. We are going to start our Doctor of Medicine/Master of Business Administration program. We are going to have a combined Doctor of Medicine/Master of Public Health, our degree in public health, and a Doctor of Philosophy. We are working on an early acceptance program with our honors college so we can take the best and the brightest students in and around Las Vegas and convince them to stay here at UNLV and eventually practice medicine in the state of Nevada.

I have talked about our community-based clinics and we have talked about economic diversification. At my previous job, I developed a technology commercialization program, and we are working with Black Fire Innovation, the Harry Reid Center, and other schools and units in the university to bring that sort of program here as well.

We also have some other things in the works. We are awaiting notification on our final accreditation. We do provide a lot of uncompensated care, and even though we have done a lot of things in three and a half years, we are still very much a start-up.

This is my leadership team [page 8, [Exhibit D](#)]. I am not going to go through it in any detail, but I include it just to bring up the point that we are a team at the School of Medicine, with our community partners, with other schools in the university, with NSHE, and with our community.

Now, let me talk about COVID-19. At the very beginning of the pandemic, we were out in front offering curbside testing. We were one of the first people to do COVID-19 testing. We did it irrespective of a patient's ability to pay, and we performed testing during the week. We performed somewhere near 30,000-plus tests during the early days of COVID-19.

I am a hematologist by background, so I have expertise in blood disease, and when I started April 1, one of the things I wanted to bring to our community was a process for convalescent plasma. Once a patient is sick with COVID-19 and recovers, their plasma—the liquid part of their blood—contains antibodies that can be useful for very sick patients. That required a partnership with the University Medical Center (UMC), our partner hospital, with Vitalant Blood Services, and with the intensive care unit (ICU). We were the first in the state to offer convalescent plasma as a treatment for patients suffering with COVID-19. Again, our medical students contacted patients to see if they would be willing to donate plasma. We also had cooperation with the nursing school and Schools of Public Health at UNLV.

Finally, since the first vaccines became available from Pfizer, we have been vaccinating frontline workers including health care providers, police, fire, and are now actively involved in getting the NSHE community and Clark County School District vaccinated. We have

already vaccinated around 24,000 people. We expect that to continue well into the summer. Our goal is to be involved in vaccination until each and every eligible person in southern Nevada is vaccinated for this potentially fatal disease.

Let me talk a little bit now about the virus itself and some things that are up and coming in the virus, and then I will be available for questions. Right now, we have two vaccines approved under emergency use. One is the Pfizer vaccine, a two-dose vaccine given three weeks apart, which requires really cold temperatures. That vaccine requires -80°C storage. At UNLV, we have two freezers that can accommodate such cold storage, and we are a storage site for the Southern Nevada Health District for administration and deployment of the Pfizer vaccine. In the United States and in Nevada, we also have the Moderna vaccine, given in two doses four weeks apart, which does not require temperatures quite as cold.

Within the next week to ten days, it is expected the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will grant emergency use authorization to a vaccine developed by Johnson and Johnson. That is a different type of vaccine; it is not an mRNA [messenger RNA] vaccine, and therefore does not require the super-cold temperatures. The other advantage of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine is it only requires one dose. As soon as those vaccines are available, we plan to administer that vaccine as well. It is a bit more efficient, and the Johnson and Johnson vaccine is going to be easier to get into the community because it only requires one dose, so you do not have to track people to make sure they come in for their second dose, and it does not require the ultra-cold storage in special freezers.

The FDA has also approved under emergency use monoclonal antibodies. Those are antibodies made in the lab that are targeted for the COVID-19 virus. Our partner hospital at UMC and our ICU doctors are giving these monoclonal antibodies to patients who qualify. In the patient populations who are eligible to receive these antibodies, the national outcomes are surprisingly positive.

I just met with the CEO at UMC. We meet regularly and I am happy to report that the outcomes of our patients with COVID-19 are better than the national average. That is really a tribute to the nurses, respiratory technicians, pharmacists, and the doctors, all of whom are taking care of this very unique and sick population. The rates in Nevada have begun to decline, which is very good news. As of today, our primary teaching hospital has 30 COVID-19 patients. Although that seems like a lot, that is almost half the maximum we have seen during the pandemic.

Moving forward, we intend to continue to be one of the primary sources for vaccination for the virus. As an academic health center, we intend to be on the front lines with the most modern treatments including newer drugs, monoclonal antibodies, et cetera, to treat patients suffering with the disease. In conclusion, we want to be a major part in helping southern Nevada get through this dire pandemic. With that, I am open to questions.

Assemblyman Flores:

I do not have a question; it is more of a comment. I know the UNLV School of Medicine has stepped up in so many different ways. I think you were being humble and not necessarily highlighting how much amazing work you have done. We have worked closely with Dr. Laura Culley, and I wanted to highlight Dr. Culley because I know the Nevada Hispanic Legislative Caucus, the Black Legislative Caucus, and the nonprofits Mi Familia Vota and Puentes. I know you were instrumental in running that patient support program and still are involved in all that. For those of you who do not know, UNLV stepped up in such an amazing way, and I just want to say kudos to you. I do not know that I had an opportunity to say it, but I want to say thank you for all the amazing work you are doing.

Marc Kahn:

I really appreciate the kudos. It is our mission, it is what we do, and we all know this virus has disproportionately affected at-risk populations. Moving forward, I hope this is a message to all of us to really address disparities in health care, which are real. I thank you for the kind comments.

Assemblyman Flores:

It is the Nevada way. We come together in the middle of crisis. Thank you for being an example.

Assemblywoman Torres:

I do not want to belabor the point but thank you so much to the UNLV School of Medicine for stepping up throughout the pandemic and continuing to step up every day. I know Dr. Culley. We worked together closely throughout the last several months and her students worked with us to deliver medicine, gloves, masks, and cleaning supplies to COVID-19 patients. I think the UNLV School of Medicine went above and beyond to make sure we kept Nevada safe. Please express our gratitude as a legislative body to your students and staff.

Marc Kahn:

Becoming a new medical school at the beginning of the pandemic last April has been challenging, but it has not been a challenge to message why we are here. I thank all our partners for working together during this crisis. There is nothing like a crisis to break down silos, and that is clear here in Nevada.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

Do we have any other questions?

Assemblywoman Tolles:

Some of your students who started a food delivery program inspired my class at UNR. We had transitioned to online and were all feeling a little depressed about it all, but we were inspired by that story, and it led to an end-of-semester project to challenge them to find a way to give back to their community that was modeled after the way your students started a program to respond to COVID-19. Thank you for sharing that inspiration with our state, and

I want you to know the ways those ripple effects worked their way through our student body into the community.

I saw on your leadership team on the last page [page 8, [Exhibit D](#)] that we have two associate deans for diversity, equity, and inclusion. We had this same conversation with the chancellor of NSHE about how incredibly important it is to see continued advancement, not only in school, but also in those higher paying jobs. I wonder if you could supply this Committee some data about where we are statistically in terms of the demographics of students enrolled at UNLV School of Medicine and how that compares nationally. What goals have you set out in order to increase that demographic participation?

Marc Kahn:

When we talk about a diverse workforce in health care, it really is essential. The moral issues of disparities in health care are real, and the fact that one can predict disease outcome based on a ZIP Code is troubling at best. In addition, we all know diverse teams are better able to solve problems, and for that reason, diversity is one of our critical missions. Diversity, equity, and inclusion run through everything we do.

At the School of Medicine, 62 percent of our student body are in a group that is otherwise underrepresented in medicine. Most of those students are first-generation college students, but we also have a large Latinx student population. When you look at the population of Las Vegas, we do fall short on African Americans. We have targeted outreach programs to get into our community.

I want a medical school class and faculty whose demographics parallel the population we serve. Diversity is critical for eradicating disparities in health care and becoming effective problem solvers.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

I have a couple of questions. What is the completion date for the new building?

Marc Kahn:

We are expected to have occupancy of the building somewhere in late summer or early fall of 2022. The building is about two years ahead of schedule. We broke ground about four months ahead of schedule, and because of availability of workers and supplies, the building construction is also ahead of schedule.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

Great. I am very excited to see that in 2021, we will have our first graduation and students moving on to their residencies. I know that the UNLV School of Medicine would interview students to make sure they had a connection to Nevada and to Las Vegas in particular to ensure we grow our own and keep our own, an issue we are dealing with in many different industries. Where do we anticipate these residencies taking place? Are the students staying in state? What do you think that matriculation will look like, in your opinion?

Marc Kahn:

Certainly, our mission is to increase the number of physicians in Nevada. We are a very mission-based school. Because of that, nearly all our students are from Nevada. The few who are not have distinct and defined connections to Nevada. We would like our students to come back and practice here. We will not know where our students are doing their residencies until the third Friday in March, Match Day, and I hope many of them stay here.

Part of the reality is that we as a region and a state do not have as many spots for residency training as other states. We must work together to change that. For some of the specialties our students might want to go into, we do not even have a training program for those specialties in the state. I know some students are going to leave the state for their residency; my goal moving forward is to get those students to come back here to practice.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

Let us continue to have those conversations, because I think this is an important issue. We are worried we will send our students away and for whatever reason not get them back.

Assemblywoman Miller has a question for Dr. Rose. I am not sure if she is able to come back on, but I do have Andrew Clinger here, and I think you will suffice for now.

Assemblywoman Miller:

I was actually very impressed, and I want to salute the work being done by NSHE to reduce the number of remedial courses. We know this has a huge impact on graduation rates, specifically for students of color. I think it was just last year when a professor from California called me panicking because of laws their legislature was trying to add around remedial courses that were, as Chancellor Rose said, going in the wrong direction. I am glad to see that, but with that, we know students will still need some supports, because the original intent of remedial was to bring our students up to the level of where they need to be, so just eliminating that classification does not mean we still do not have students who need some of those supports. If we do not have the remedial classes, what types of supports or interventions will be available to the students to make sure they can be successful in college-level courses?

Andrew Clinger, Chief Financial Officer, Nevada System of Higher Education:

This is definitely not my area of expertise, so if it is okay with you, I would prefer to get back to you on that answer.

Assemblywoman Miller:

Sure. If you could submit it to the Committee, that would be great.

Andrew Clinger:

I would be happy to do that.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

I know that was not ideal, and I do apologize.

Assemblywoman Miller:

Wait, I see someone popping back in. Chancellor, did you hear the question?

Melody Rose:

No, I did not.

Assemblywoman Miller:

I acknowledged and commended you all for your work around reducing remedial courses, because of the impact we know it has on graduation rates and particularly on students of color. I even mentioned, because I know you are from California, that a dean had called me last year concerned about some legislation going in the wrong direction about remedial courses. The original intent or goal of remedial courses was to bring students up to the level so they can be successful. Sometimes students are still behind, maybe lacking some skills. Removing remedial courses does not change the fact that we still have students who need some supports and interventions. My question is, what types of supports and interventions will be available to those students?

Melody Rose:

You are exactly right. There is a national trend of moving away from so-called "remedial" classes that were in place when I went to college. Those, of course, always had a stigma around them and, for the reasons you are suggesting, oftentimes biases filtered into the assignment of particular students to remedial courses. It is an equity agenda as much as anything else. The trend has been to move away from remedial. We know it does not work, instead it serves to reinforce preexisting stereotypes.

The replacement is what we call corequisite. An example: I have two daughters in college right now. If my daughter Chloe went into the university behind in her writing, she would move into the writing course that all other freshman would move into—so she is not pulled out and segregated into a remedial course, she is in the same course—with wraparound services added on top to support her catching up. In other words, those services called corequisites, the assignment of an adjacent coach or class, are invisible to the rest of the people in that class. My daughter Chloe gets what she needs without announcing it to everyone in Writing 101. It is a very different way to meet our students where they are, without bias and without stigma.

Assemblywoman Miller:

I appreciate that, because it sounds much closer to the K-12 model, in which sometimes students receive services without everyone knowing, and certainly in college, without your taking a semester and spending money on classes that ultimately count toward graduation. Are there some data right now about where this has been successful? Have we done it long enough here in Nevada to have some indication of the success rate compared to traditional remedial classes?

Melody Rose:

Great question. We do not have data for Nevada because we are not launching until the fall. This has been an all-system effort that has gone on for almost two years to align this practice across every institution, so it is seamless for all our students. It is based on national models, so we could certainly provide you some of the national data and models we are implementing in the fall if that would be helpful.

Assemblywoman Miller:

It would be, Chancellor. One final question: is the onus for these services on the student or on the school? Obviously, in grades K-12, it is on the school and the educators. Is that the same model with the colleges where we as counselors would identify and reach out to students?

Melody Rose:

Yes, and it is also a matter of shifting internal resources at the institution. As you might imagine, during budgetary times like these, for example, I recently got a request from one of the institutions that is gearing up for this new practice in the fall, and it needs to shift some of its internal resources in order to support this agenda. Yes, it is up to the institutions to staff it and make it work.

It is a change in mindset and one I have always been an advocate of, because for too long in higher education, when students have struggled, we have wondered why they are failing. What I have been trying to do in my career is flip that narrative and ask ourselves instead how we are failing these students. With this shift from remedial to corequisite courses, I think that is exactly what we are doing. We are saying we need to meet students where they are and provide them with what they need to be successful at their institution. I am very happy they did all this great work before I got here, and I get to see it roll out.

Assemblywoman Miller:

We are happy you are here to manage that.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

Dr. Kahn, are you still on?

Marc Kahn:

I am.

Chair Bilbray-Axelrod:

I wanted to make sure it was clear that I would like to continue to have this conversation about residencies. If you could send over data on that, I would appreciate it, and if there is something we can do during this session to facilitate increased residencies here in Nevada, or at least get the conversation started, I think that is an important conversation to have.

This was fascinating and quite frankly uplifting, and I think we all need that in this time, to hear what great things are going on.

We will move on to public comment. [There was none.] Are there any comments from our members before we adjourn? [There were none.]

This meeting is adjourned [at 3:12 p.m.].

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Sarah Baker
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

Assemblywoman Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod, Chair

DATE: _____

EXHIBITS

[Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda.

[Exhibit B](#) is the Attendance Roster.

[Exhibit C](#) is a PowerPoint presentation titled "Nevada System of Higher Education Overview," dated February 9, 2021, presented by Melody Rose, Ph.D., Chancellor, Nevada System of Higher Education.

[Exhibit D](#) is a PowerPoint presentation titled "UNLV School of Medicine," presented by Marc J. Kahn, M.D., M.B.A., Dean, University of Nevada, Las Vegas School of Medicine.