

**MINUTES OF THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

**Eighty-first Session
March 1, 2021**

The Senate Committee on Education was called to order by Chair Moises Denis at 1:02 p.m. on Monday, March 1, 2021, Online. [Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda. All exhibits are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Moises Denis, Chair
Senator Marilyn Dondero Loop, Vice Chair
Senator Roberta Lange
Senator Fabian Donate
Senator Joseph P. Hardy
Senator Scott Hammond
Senator Carrie A. Buck

GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:

Senator Heidi Seevers Gansert, Senatorial District No. 15

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jen Sturm, Policy Analyst
Asher Killian, Counsel
Michael Guss, Committee Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT:

Sarah Nick, Management Analyst, Legislative Liaison, Department of Education
Brad Keating, Director of Government Relations, Clark County School District
Brian Mitchell, Director, Office of Science, Innovation and Technology, Office of the Governor
Donald Easton-Brooks, Ph.D., Dean, College of Education and Human Development, University of Nevada, Reno
Mariluz Garcia, Ph.D., Director, Dean's Future Scholars, University of Nevada, Reno

Senate Committee on Education
March 1, 2021
Page 2

Kent Ervin, Nevada Faculty Alliance
Victor Salcido, Director, Charter School Association of Nevada
Dylan Keith, Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce
Ben Salkowe, Principal, Equipo Academy
Sabra Newby, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Manuel Ortiz
Michael Flores, University of Nevada, Reno
Sione Lavaka
Matthew Aguirre, Ph.D., Director, Postdoctoral Affairs, Graduate Recruitment
and Diversity Initiative, University of Nevada, Reno
Brenda Pearson, Clark County Education Association
Noah Sullivan, Clark County School District

CHAIR DENIS:

We will open the meeting with the work session on Senate Bill (S.B.) 66.

SENATE BILL 66: Creates the Nevada K-16 Connectivity and Innovation
Advisory Commission. (BDR 34-430)

JEN STURM (Policy Analyst):

I will provide a brief overview of S.B. 66 as contained in the work session
document ([Exhibit B](#)).

During the bill hearing, the Clark County School District (CCSD) and the Office
of Science, Innovation and Technology (OSIT) proposed substantial changes to
S.B. 66 resulting in Proposed Amendment 3124, [Exhibit B](#), page 2.

The fiscal note, [Exhibit B](#), page 9, applies to the bill as introduced.

CHAIR DENIS:

The fiscal note is from the Department of Education. Is that based on the
original bill or on the amendment?

Ms. STURM:

The fiscal note is based on the original language of the bill.

CHAIR DENIS:

Can the Department of Education clarify how the fiscal note would change with
the amendment?

SARAH NICK (Department of Education):

The fiscal note was related to the additional reporting requirements and administrative support in the original bill's proposal for an annual report and for convening a K-16 Connectivity and Innovation Advisory Commission. Since administrative support for the Commission and the compilation of the annual report was removed by the amendment, the fiscal note is no longer necessary.

SENATOR BUCK:

As we share student information, I want to make sure we are cognizant of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). What safeguards are in place to protect individual data as required by federal law? I want assurance this is done carefully and correctly.

BRAD KEATING (Clark County School District):

The language of the bill ensures that all data is FERPA-compliant, follows federal guidelines and that no information is released. One of the difficulties was determining what information could be provided as we delivered internet access and Mifi devices to students. We will continue to follow all FERPA rules and regulations when providing any student data.

BRIAN MITCHELL (Director, Office of Science, Innovation and Technology, Office of the Governor):

Everything we do will be in compliance with FERPA. In Proposed Amendment 3124, [Exhibit B](#), page 5, on line 6 and line 23, the language requires OSIT to carry out its duties in accordance with FERPA. That language continues on line 21, page 7, [Exhibit B](#). The report we produce would also be in accordance with FERPA. We became familiar with these requirements when we were connecting students this past summer. We will continue to take this seriously.

CHAIR DENIS:

One of our Committee members had talked about doing a separate report for higher education. Would that be a separate report?

MR. MITCHELL:

Senate Bill 66 is a K-12-focused bill for a K-12 problem with a K-12 solution. Higher education has a similar problem which requires a different solution. I am open to working with the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) to produce a similar survey. A big difference is that NSHE is a single system. It can survey students and ask for information from the colleges and universities under

Senate Committee on Education
March 1, 2021
Page 4

their purview. This bill is necessary because we are working with 18 different, independent subdivisions.

MR. KEATING:

The NSHE is one singular unit that can work with all of their universities. The school districts all operate independently. Senate Bill 66 enables OSIT to compile information across school districts.

SENATOR DONDERO LOOP MOVED TO AMEND AND DO PASS AS AMENDED S.B. 66.

SENATOR HARDY SECONDED THE MOTION.

THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

* * * * *

CHAIR DENIS:

I will now open the hearing on S.B. 118.

SENATE BILL 118: Establishes provisions relating to education. (BDR 34-155)

SENATOR HEIDI SEEVERS GANSERT (Senatorial District No. 15):

The intent of S.B. 118 is to set a framework around a program modeled after the Dean's Future Scholars (DFS) program at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). This program offers support and reduces barriers.

This bill is about a program, not a scholarship. It is for Nevadans who are scholars. No money goes to students. The DFS program is funded through grants and donations. Placing this in statute allows for the possibility of additional funding.

The primary goals of S.B. 118, the Nevada First Scholars Program (NFSP), are to reduce generational poverty and enhance our workforce as noted on Slide 2, ([Exhibit C](#)).

Slide 3, [Exhibit C](#), shows that the NFSP is modeled after the DFS program at UNR. That program was started in 2000, has had over 1,350 graduates and can

be expanded across the State. This data is based on a 2018-2019 DFS stewardship report ([Exhibit D](#)).

Slide 4, [Exhibit C](#), states the purpose of the DFS program. Slide 5, [Exhibit C](#) explains current enrollment and who participates in the DFS program. Low-income, first-generation students are identified in the sixth grade by teachers, counselors and principals. This is a long-term commitment from sixth grade through high school and beyond.

Slide 6, [Exhibit C](#), shows data from the DFS stewardship report, [Exhibit D](#). A total of 467 students were in the 2018-2019 school year. That is because the cohorts are for six years. They start with 80 students per year for 6 years. Slide 6, [Exhibit C](#), also shows student percentages in certain categories. This program is about students who could potentially move on to higher education. This starts in the sixth grade.

As shown on Slide 7, [Exhibit C](#), there are three main components to the program, mentoring, summer programs and the Youth College Internship Program (YCI).

Slide 8, [Exhibit C](#), explains who and what is involved in mentoring. Slide 9, [Exhibit C](#), outlines what occurs during summer enrichment programs. These programs occur every summer. After graduation from high school—student graduation rates are much higher than average—they participate in the YCI program.

The YCI program is described on Slide 10, [Exhibit C](#). This program begins on campus with leading and bonding opportunities. The students take a few courses and then they work on campus for about 100 hours during the summer.

During this process, the exposure of being on campus and being comfortable in a campus setting is important. These are students whose families have not attended college and many have parents who have not finished high school.

You can see the difference in high school graduation rates over the last five-year or six-year period on Slide 11, [Exhibit C](#). Based on the 2019 data, graduation rates between students who qualify for free or reduced lunch (FRL) and students in the DFS is about 16 percent. That is significantly higher. On average it is about nine points higher.

The chart on Slide 12, [Exhibit C](#), indicates that 70 percent of DFS high school graduates go on to higher education.

The proven success of the program is demonstrated on Slide 13, [Exhibit C](#). The one current Ph.D. student has completed his or her degree.

As stated on Slide 14, [Exhibit C](#), the average cost of the program is \$1,000 per student per year. In total, during the span of the program, the average cost per student is approximately \$16,500. Summer programs constitute a large portion of the cost. For the students in sixth grade who may never attend college, this small investment changes the trajectory of their lives and their family's lives.

The graph on Slide 15, [Exhibit C](#), shows weekly earnings and unemployment rates by college degree type. This data is from the 2019 report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Earnings increase by 60 percent to 100 percent by obtaining a degree from an institution of higher education.

The chart on Slide 16, [Exhibit C](#), is about the issue of critical absenteeism. The Washoe County School District (WCSD) published a report on critical absenteeism last week. When I first sponsored this bill, the Covid-19 crisis was ongoing but not as severe as it is today. We did not have figures on absenteeism at that time. Our students are having a difficult time. Many are chronically absent. While this bill has no funding for the program, it could be a model that could be eligible for Covid-19-related federal dollars. The program will help students stay in school and earn a degree from institutions of higher education.

I have a short video, "DFS, Dean's Future Scholars, University of Nevada, Reno, 20 Years and Counting," I would like to share summarizing the achievements of the DFS program.

DONALD EASTON-BROOKS, PH.D. (Dean, College of Education and Human Development, University of Nevada, Reno):

I often hear conversations about achievement gaps. Achievement gaps are really opportunity gaps. When we use the term achievement gap, we suggest there is a difference in knowledge between groups of people. I do not agree there is a difference in knowledge. There is a difference in opportunities for people to demonstrate and share their knowledge. The DFS program shows us that by

providing or substituting those opportunities for students, they show what they can do.

I have worked in higher education for 25 years. Over the last seven years, I worked in two different states creating pathway programs for impoverished and first-generation students. Approximately 400 students from these programs have enrolled in college.

The DFS program is unique, different and valuable because it starts in the sixth grade. Data shows that the drop-off rate in middle school, especially among seventh grade and eighth grade males in the Black, Latinx and Native American populations, is higher in those grades. The drop-off rate is caused by how they identify and a lack of opportunities. The program gives students access to opportunities and decreases the gap.

Investing in students yields a return on investment. However, in some populations with more stress factors, the return on investment occurs over a longer period of time. For example, in Nevada we spend about \$70,000 on a student from kindergarten through 12th grade. If a student wants to get a bachelor's degree in this State, he or she could repay that investment in less than a year and a half. For those who do not graduate, it takes almost two and one-half years to see that return on investment, assuming no other risk factors are involved. Even if a student goes to a tech school or a two-year school, the return on investment is less than two years. By investing in this program and in students, we are determining how to return that investment to the community, how to reduce generational poverty and diversify our workforce.

We have found that students in this program go into the fields of health, business, education and technology at different levels. We have people who are exploring high-skilled jobs. Higher-skilled jobs pay higher salaries. Higher salaries lead to a greater impact on our economic community.

When we talk about this program as it is presented, we are really talking about how to invest in our program, how to reduce generational poverty and how to continue to enhance the State's economic footprint.

MARILUZ GARCIA, PH.D. (Director, Dean's Future Scholars, University of Nevada, Reno):

I am proud of this work because of my own upbringing and experiences. I am the daughter of immigrants. My mother came to the United States from Mexico when she was young. My father came to Nevada from the Basque country when he was 19. Former Assemblyman John Carpenter recruited my father to come to Nevada and work as a shepherd. I was born and raised in Elko. I came to Reno for college in 1998. I stayed in college for 22 years earning a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in school counseling and a doctorate in equity and diversity. I am an advocate for education. I am involved with the Washoe County School District (WCSD) and UNR, particularly in supporting diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. All of my work has centered on working with Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title I schools and students from high-poverty neighborhoods.

I witnessed the power of college access. My older sister was the first in our family to attend college. She paved the way for the rest of our family, including our mother. My father used to joke about how he had to help pay for five college tuitions. He had the equivalent of an eighth-grade education. The only reason he was able to help us financially was because he built our house and therefore did not have a house payment. College was expensive then, and is even more expensive today.

Higher education was the secret to my family's social mobility. As a family unit, we have contributed to the economy in a positive way. For example, my sister is one of the few bilingual librarians in Washoe County. My older brother works for the City of South Lake Tahoe, California. My younger brother works for Washoe County. My mother earned a degree, became an English as a second language teacher and is retired from the Elko County School District.

I know that no two stories are the same, but I feel that my family's story aligns with many families in Nevada. Promoting a diverse workforce and increasing social mobility should be a priority for all Nevadans.

For 20 years, the DFS program has been helping underrepresented students become the first in their families to attend college. The program changes the trajectory of life for families. This work needs to be intentional. We cannot just hope a well-qualified, diverse workforce into existence. Developing a

well-qualified, diverse workforce takes time, energy and effort and is a collaboration between everyone.

I wanted to share my story to give the Committee a sense of the path that many of us face and what is possible if students are given opportunities.

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT:

On the thought of intentional work, we can talk about what we want to be, but if we do not actually make a plan and do the work, we will not achieve our goals.

CHAIR DENIS:

This bill would create a program similar to the DFS at UNR. It does not ask for any funding from the State but asks to create the program within the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) and allows NSHE to accept grants and donations to fund the program. Even though the program would be in statute, it would not be implemented until funding is raised. Is that correct?

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT:

Senate Bill 118 creates the framework of a program that is the Dean's Future Scholars program. This program should be expanded Statewide. There is no funding in the bill; however, if we set up a framework, the program will be eligible for more grants, donations and gifts as well as potentially qualifying for federal dollars passed down to the State. The bill tries to help students at an early age to aspire and to be able to attend higher education and be comfortable and confident that they can earn a degree or more.

SENATOR DONDERO LOOP:

What would prevent any of our community colleges or the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) from creating their own DFS program?

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT:

There is nothing to prevent them from doing this. I have been interested in this program for eight years. I discussed the potential of expanding the program with NSHE because I realized its value. But, funds are always short so the expansion never happened.

We have a model that works well. Sometimes duplication does not work but you must have the culture, the spirit and the willingness to do the hard work. It

can be set up at other institutions. The bill provides the framework to be able to do that.

MR. EASTON-BROOKS:

What has been said is very true. I want to stress that program does not encourage students to come to just UNR. We do not insist they must get a four-year degree. The main goal is to get them through high school. Whatever their goal is moving forward, we help them achieve that also.

Nothing will keep others from doing this. Because of my experience doing this work and the research I have done over the last two years, states constantly ask me about creating pathway programs. The challenge is intentionality, understanding the work and understanding what has to happen in this work.

What is valuable to the State and the extension of this program is that the framework is already there and no money is needed for overhead to create a new program. How do we extend the work that already exists?

SENATOR BUCK:

How does this align to the federal grant program, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) that the Department of Education operates? Is there communication or a use of funding through that program?

DR. GARCIA:

The GEAR UP grant has provided support to DFS for over 15 years in the form of a subgrant through a relationship with Nevada's GEAR UP. We are closely aligned with Nevada GEAR UP, and it has recognized the success of our model. It refers to us as a school site. That is how we qualified as a GEAR UP school site. We are not technically a school because we serve students throughout the WCSD. However, our goals align with Nevada GEAR UP.

Nevada GEAR UP recently looked at the DFS program model to shape their own ASPIRE Scholars Program just created at UNLV.

SENATOR BUCK:

I would like to mirror what Senator Dondero Loop said. It would be great to see this replicated in southern Nevada. I see this as a light to the future for students.

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT:

I used the title "Nevada First Scholars Program," because I want the program to be Statewide. I want our students to go to all institutions across the State.

SENATOR LANGE:

What is the total cost to run the program for a year?

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT:

The information I have is limited. My understanding is that it costs \$1,000 per student to run program. In the end, it is about \$16,500 per student because of some of the summer programs.

DR. GARCIA:

Mentoring at school sites during the school year is relatively inexpensive, and there are many gains in sending mentors to schools. The summer program is the expensive portion of the program. We bus students to the UNR and feed them. That is where we spend the majority of our budget. However, we operate on a lean budget, and we offer a lot for about \$550,000 a year. It is difficult being a self-funded program, but we make it work with different foundations, private donations and collaboration with programs like Nevada GEAR UP.

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT:

Is it correct that it is \$550,000 for about 500 students?

DR. GARCIA:

Yes, that is correct.

SENATOR LANGE:

Does that include staff?

DR. GARCIA:

We only have two full-time employees, myself and an administrative assistant. We make it work even though our funding levels are not ideal. The bare minimum need is a director and an administrative assistant. Our employees are two graduate students who serve as program coordinators and a team of 25 UNR college students who serve as DFS mentors. This is a grow-your-own model. After students graduate from the program and are attending UNR or a community college, they can return to DFS and give back to the program.

SENATOR LANGE:

If a school started a program, it would need a staff person, an assistant and an office. What assistance would UNR provide as a mentor to a newly created program?

DR. GARCIA:

Direct communication and collaboration must happen between the school district and the higher education institution. This would never have happened if we had not worked closely with WCSD or if UNR had not embraced the program.

Funding is funneled through the UNR Foundation. All our grants and proposals come through the UNR Foundation. The WCSD does not provide funding for the program. However, it is a joint effort between the UNR Foundation and WCSD.

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT:

This can be duplicated. I use the term "duplicated" carefully. I had conversations with Dr. Easton-Brooks, and he made me aware that in other states it does not always work because it takes leadership. You must have the right person with the passion to do the work. As you have seen, Doctor Garcia has that passion.

Someone in Las Vegas at Nevada State College or UNLV could work with Dr. Garcia in a mentorship situation to get the program started. It does not take that much money. Over this 20-year period, DFS has been able to grow its own model. That is part of the reason the expenses are low. Eighty-four percent of the mentors went through the program starting in sixth grade. It takes passion and leadership. The program can be expanded or duplicated. It makes a difference in changing the trajectory of the family and reduces the generational poverty that exists in so many families.

DR. EASTON-BROOKS:

Things happen in the summer program that could be expanded rather than duplicated which would save money. Students in the summer program take dual-credit courses in which they earn both high school credits and college credits. We have faculty already set up, so all we need to do is connect students from other universities or community colleges. We do not have to worry about additional cost.

The City of Denver, Colorado, had a pathway program centered on teacher education. It took Denver five years to get to the point where it could duplicate the program within Denver Public Schools. All the coordinators had to do was expand what was going on at the University of Colorado, Denver. The program directors then started looking at other universities and other communities in Denver to make the program work.

How do we expand what we are doing? Even if we expanded what we are doing, there could be framework to why this work is successful. Cultural pieces could take place in Clark County, Las Vegas and Henderson or other places that might make it strong. Even as we think about communities, how do we expand to the point where we can share and use resources to keep the cost down while still having a reliable and valid model that we know works? If we repeat this model over and over, how do we know that it works effectively? If we are going to keep costs down, we need to find more scholarships for students who are going to be a part of this program.

SENATOR DONATE:

I am a proud first-generation college graduate. I am glad to see S.B. 118 come forward and to be able to make suggestions.

How we phrase certain bills or statutes can make or break who gets to participate in the programs we establish. In the bill, we refer to FRL or someone who identifies as a prospective first-generation college student. Are there any other socioeconomic or demographic factors that you would consider besides FRL? A student only qualifies for FRL if it is applied for. If parents do not fill out the form, then the student does not qualify for it. How else can social needs be determined outside the barrier being presented?

DR. GARCIA:

We have always used FRL as the metric for high poverty. One of the key factors for access is that we have only worked with feeder schools which are Title I-eligible. To give you an idea of how this has changed over the last 20 years, when Dr. William Sparkman started DFS there were ten Title I schools in the WCSD. Today, there are more than 25 Title I elementary schools in the WCSD. We have to think about what the population of the State looks like and what our school districts are comprised of.

We still use FRL in the WCSD because it is commonly used. At the higher education level, we use Pell Grant-eligible students. It is one of those things you cannot get around regarding income-qualified students.

I agree with you on how important language is. One of the things that is often misunderstood or misinterpreted is the definition of first-generation. The DFS adheres to the general definition that someone is a first-generation student if neither parent earned a bachelor's degree. There are many other definitions, but that is the one DFS uses.

DR. EASTON-BROOKS:

Senator Donate is correct. We should not use the term free or reduced-price lunch. We should use the term free or reduced-price eligible. There are families who are eligible, but have not filled out the paperwork. That is a good point.

Free or reduced-price lunch is also referred to as school poverty. We tend to use that which is different and is measured differently than when we use family poverty or even low income. That takes into account a different metric. Free or reduced-price lunch eligibility is probably the best way to look at it, but we have to put in that disclaimer. We know from research that families, especially families of color, will not apply for free or reduced-price lunch because of pride and the stigma, but we still have to find a way to serve them.

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT:

Senator Donate, your point is well made. In S.B. 118, under section 1, subsection 3, paragraph (a) we use the term "eligible". When putting bills together, pointing to a clear definition is helpful. We do have "eligible", and not necessarily in the FRL program, in S.B. 118.

CHAIR DENIS:

When you are looking at the FRL, are you looking at whether students attend a Title I school, or are you looking at the individual student meeting that criteria? Many times the entire school qualifies as a Title I school and all students qualify for FRL once they get past a certain threshold.

DR. GARCIA:

Our sixth-grade packet does not include anything that asks parents to provide proof of income. Some programs are required to do that by federal law. Many of our schools are so high-poverty in high-poverty neighborhoods and zip codes

that the entire school is lumped under Title I-eligibility. Some of our feeder schools have that eligibility. I was looking at which are the highest poverty middle schools because all of our sixth graders who left elementary school are now in middle school. You have to evolve with it and determine where the highest need is by zip code. It is not a perfect science.

We have students self-identify. Obviously, the intake paperwork has parents share their level of education and whether their children qualify for FRL. The secondary level of verification is at the school level when names come to us from school counselors, principals and teachers. As a school counselor, I know that FRL eligibility criteria is highly confidential data. Historically, over 90 percent are students of color. Most of our students are both first-generation college students and eligible for FRL.

SENATOR DONATE:

The bill's language states mentorship, tutoring programs and activities including without limitation summer programs. Could this program be expanded to also include research programs for students who are interested in getting involved with research labs before they enter college?

DR. GARCIA:

The beauty of the model is that it can be adjusted. I have collaborated with professors in engineering to use DFS program participants for a research study on climate change. We have had people doing robotics with our students. Many different collaborations can take place within an institution of higher education.

Research shows that the highest level of mathematics that a student achieves in the K-12 experience is a huge indicator for college enrollment and college completion. The DFS embraced that as a best practice 15 years ago. That is why we push an emphasis on earning mathematics credits during the summer months. Our students earn a year of mathematics credits in six weeks. They are taught by WCSD teachers on the UNR campus. The classes fill up every year. The interest and sense of urgency for students to get ahead is phenomenal.

As Dr. Easton-Brooks mentioned, dual credit has been a game changer for the DFS. I am always keeping my ears open at the State level to determine what we can do to promote dual credit opportunities for all students. Dual-credit learning is a tremendous opportunity to help bridge the gap between the K-12 system and higher education.

DR. EASTON-BROOKS:

One of the challenges we have in serving students of color or even our communities in which there are a number of risk factors is the belief that the curriculum must be reduced. Research shows that the more robust, engaging and challenging the curriculum is, the better these students do. Any opportunity to engage them in research and higher-level thinking goes back to my point about the achievement gap. It is not a gap in knowledge. It is a gap in opportunity. As we provide students opportunities, their ability to show their knowledge is incredible. There are a number of deans who frequently contact me and ask, how can I get students involved in research? Students come with a framework and lens of confidence that enables them to move that work forward.

We have a number of programs on campus in which our students are engaged. In one of the programs, students presented their research on health. The level of research done by high school students was incredible. Their research was focused on health as it related to their community. The research was better than the research of some master's students. The quality and level of rigor is important.

We should always hold our communities to that standard. Let us stop thinking about it as an achievement gap but as an opportunity gap. We want students involved in research because often research is done on communities of color rather than communities of color being involved in research. If we are involved in research and conversations, we can better serve and understand our communities of color, especially as it relates to education and health.

SENATOR LANGE:

This is something we want to put into law, there is no funding attached to it, and people can do it if they want. Is that correct?

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT:

Yes, that is correct. The Knowledge Fund was added to statute in 2011, but it was not funded until 2013. Given the budget shortfall we are experiencing now, there would be no room to fund something like this. The return on investment is huge, so this is worthwhile. But because of what has happened with federal dollars, this is actually a good program to put into statute. Maybe there will not be an opportunity for State General Fund monies but perhaps for federal funds. I found in the past that if it is in statute, more opportunities arise to fund

something like this. The program is inexpensive for the result of helping families rise out of generational poverty while strengthening and diversifying our workforce.

KENT ERVIN (Nevada Faculty Alliance):

We support S.B. 118. The Dean's Future Scholars is a wonderful model. It only needs funding to be extended Statewide. In a budget year like this one, this is probably not the time, but it is a wonderful program which we support.

VICTOR SALCIDO (Director, Charter School Association of Nevada):

I strongly support S.B. 118. Thousands of students in Nevada's Title I public charter schools would benefit from this program.

Like many of the students targeted by this program, I am a first-generation college student. My dad has less than a high school education. He stopped going to school when he was 12 years old to go to work. My mom attended high school, but that was as far as her formal education went. I check many of the boxes that this bill targets.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of mentorship and how it affected my life. Mentorship helped me learn how to navigate the college application process, standardized testing and everything else which goes along with knowing how to navigate the system. We agree with anything we can do to help and support mentorship, especially for Title I and first-generation students.

DYLAN KEITH (Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce):

The Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce supports S.B. 118. The DFS program has a proven success record over the past 20 years. It has been removing barriers so students who normally would not have the opportunity to attend school are able to do so. It provides the mentorship and tutoring needed to keep them involved from sixth grade until they graduate from a university or four-year college.

The opportunity to expand such a program is good for the State. It increases economic development, workforce diversity and improvements, and increases our chances of bringing new businesses to the State.

BEN SALKOWE (Principal, Equipo Academy):

The Equipo Academy is a sixth-grade through twelfth-grade public college preparatory school in southern Nevada. We are fortunate to have developed a close working relationship with UNR and its admissions office. While our students do not directly participate in the DFS program, our students do participate in UNR's TRIO First in the Pack program. The admission staff at UNR conducted college preorientation programs at our school with our juniors to get them to apply and with our incoming seniors to make sure they start out strong.

The majority of students at our school are going to be first-generation college students. We prioritize getting every student accepted into college. Our partnership with UNR helped us achieve our goals. The UNR's belief in outreach to middle school students and early high school students helped make our students successful at UNR and able to continue their education beyond high school.

We strongly support S.B. 118. We hope this can be a model for programs in southern Nevada to increase the educational outcomes for students attending UNLV, the College of Southern Nevada and Nevada State College.

SABRA NEWBY (University of Nevada, Las Vegas):

We support S.B. 118. According to the National Information Center for Higher Education, Policymaking and Analysis, Nevada ranks fortieth in the Nation for college-going rate as of 2018 and forty-ninth in the percentage of 25-year-olds to 34-year-olds with college degrees, ahead of only New Mexico.

The UNLV Center of Academic Enrichment and Outreach has two programs with services similar to those outlined in S.B. 118. The Educational Talent Search program identifies and assists middle school and high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to succeed in higher education. The program provides academic, career and financial counseling to its participants and encourages them to graduate from high school and continue on to complete their postsecondary education.

The GEAR UP is another discretionary grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. The GEAR UP partnerships provide services at high-poverty middle schools and high schools. The program serves an entire

cohort of students beginning no later than seventh grade and follows the cohort through high school.

The UNLV multicultural programs like science, technology, education and mathematics (STEM), and the health sciences are kicking off the GEAR UP ASPIRE Scholars Program this year. It is a grant-funded pipeline initiative that supports students interested in STEM and health sciences careers starting in seventh grade and continuing throughout their first year of college. The target audience for this program are students in Title I middle schools and high schools in the CCSD.

While we provide many of these services, we recognize that it is important to gather together these services and boost them in the hopes of increasing the college readiness and completion rate of our students in Nevada.

MANUEL ORTIZ:

I support S.B. 118. I am a former DFS student and current employee of the WCSD. I cannot emphasize enough the impact that a program like DFS has had in my life. While I was growing up, my mom was granted political asylum. She dabbled in education but did not know how to navigate the educational system in a foreign country.

Having mentors come into the schools and provide support at many different levels helped me. Being a first-generation, low-income student at UNR, there were many new things I had to learn and many new spaces I had to navigate. The help of mentors gave me a sense of belonging, which helped me achieve my goal of receiving my bachelor's degree and master's degree.

There were still many struggles. There were times when I stopped going to school, but programs such as DFS continued to help me. When I think about what a program like this can do, it reminds me that we need more programs like this to support more students who have similar experiences. We need to determine ways to be intentional with this work and how to better provide the resources necessary to help students who may identify as first-generation students.

MICHAEL FLORES (University of Nevada, Reno):

We are proud of the DFS and the outcomes we have seen from it. We support S.B. 118.

SIONE LAVAKA:

I support S.B. 118. I too am a DFS alumnus. I joined the DFS in 2001. I was part of the second cohort from sixth grade. I have been a part of the DFS program for two-thirds of my life. I have been blessed and fortunate because of it.

I am a first-generation American and a first-generation college student. I went to Title I schools in Reno. Statistically speaking, I would not have considered myself college material. Because of the emotional, financial and mental support provided by the DFS program, I was able to reach my educational goals. I graduated with a bachelor's of criminal justice degree with a minor in psychology. Later, I returned to UNR for a master's degree in educational leadership. I work in higher education in Reno. My father is the youngest of 11 children, and my mother is one of 7 children. Out of my hundreds of cousins, I was the first to graduate from college. I am grateful to be in a position where I am able to help those who attend the institution I work for and help my close family and friends obtain their educational goals. I can do all of this because of the DFS program.

MATTHEW AGUIRRE, PH.D. (Director, Postdoctoral Affairs, Graduate Recruitment and Diversity Initiatives, University of Nevada, Reno):

I am in full support of S.B. 118. I am a first-generation student. No one else in my family has earned a degree as of yet. I hope that will change soon.

I am also a DFS alumnus. I have been with the DFS program since it started in 2000. I am part of the original cohort. I would not be where I am today without the DFS program. In one of Senator Seevers Gansert's slides there was a doctoral student who earned a doctorate degree, Slide 13, [Exhibit C](#); that is me. I would not have earned a doctorate degree, let alone a bachelor's degree, if it were not for DFS. I had a mentor in high school who pushed me to go to UNR.

I had no ambition to go anywhere past high school. My goal was to graduate with my high school diploma. Who knows where I would be now if I had stopped my education after high school. Fortunately, mentorship was the strongest component of the program for me. My mentors were there for me throughout graduate school. I attribute many of my successes to the program.

Even with my career trajectory now, all I want to do is help people. I work at UNR in graduate recruitment. My goal is to get more DFS alumni into graduate

education. I want to give back to the program as much as I can because it did so much for me.

BRENDA PEARSON (Clark County Education Association):

The Clark County Education Association supports S.B. 118. The Statewide expansion of the DFS program will help bridge the equity divide of students who transition into postsecondary education. In 2019, there was a 12 percent difference between the graduation rates of Caucasian and minority students in the NSHE system. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, enrollment statistics in postsecondary institutions are dropping. Enrollment of first-generation college students will drop significantly in academic year 2021-2022. Research has shown that mentorship, tutoring and support services provided to first-generation college students increases retention and academic success.

Senate Bill 118 will provide much needed support and services for our first-generation college students through the Statewide expansion of an already successful program. Language authorizing the use of gifts, donations, bequests, grants and other sources of money will help to ensure accessibility to funding the program.

Grant and scholarship opportunities for first-generation college students should be readily accessible and publicized to address the equity issues related to higher education. Building a stronger and more diverse economy in Nevada means ensuring equitable access and support for those seeking postsecondary education. We look forward to doing all we can to support postsecondary educational opportunities in Nevada.

NOAH SULLIVAN (Clark County School District):

As a part of CCSD's Focus: 2024 program, the top priority within the District is ensuring equity for all students. That means ensuring access for first-generation and low-income students who may struggle because of external factors in their lives.

Senate Bill 118 aligns with our goals of ensuring equity, improving graduation rates, college preparation, career readiness and completing advanced course work.

Our team has been in contact with UNLV voicing our support for S.B. 118 and the goals it sets out. We value any program that will improve outcomes in such

a focused effort. The UNLV runs a number of similar programs. We can vouch for the effectiveness of a hands-on approach to reaching students who would not otherwise have resources. As we move back to in-person instruction, programs like these will improve outcomes for students who have been most negatively impacted by the challenges of remote learning.

SENATOR SEEVERS GANSERT:

I want to thank Dr. Garcia and Dr. Easton-Brooks for helping present S.B. 118. We heard the words equity, access, opportunity and workforce today. We want to help lift students up. If we can put this framework into statute, we can potentially add funds to this program at a later date or obtain additional grants and gifts.

Remainder of page intentionally left blank; signature page to follow.

Senate Committee on Education
March 1, 2021
Page 23

CHAIR DENIS:

I will close the hearing on S.B. 118. Having no further business to come before the Senate Committee on Education, we are adjourned at 2:35 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Suzanne Efford,
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

Senator Moises Denis, Chair

DATE: _____

EXHIBIT SUMMARY				
Bill	Exhibit Letter	Begins on Page	Witness / Entity	Description
	A	1		Agenda
S.B. 66	B	1	Jen Sturm	Work Session Document
S.B. 118	C	2	Senator Seevers Gansert	Nevada's First Scholars Program
S.B. 118	D	1	Senator Seevers Gansert	2018-2019 Dean's Future Scholars Program Stewardship Report