

**MINUTES OF THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

**Eighty-first Session
March 10, 2021**

The Senate Committee on Education was called to order by Chair Moises Denis at 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, March 10, 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

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jen Sturm, Policy Analyst
Asher Killian, Counsel
Ian Gahner, Committee Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT:

Katie Dockweiler, Ed.D., Nevada Association of School Psychologists
Hawah Ahmad, Clark County Education Association
Chris Daly, Nevada State Education Association
Marie Neisess, President, Clark County Education Association
Erika Valdriz, Vegas Chamber
Jeff Horn, Deputy Executive Director, Clark County Association of School Administrators and Professional Technical Employees
Nicole Rourke, City of Henderson
Emily Espinosa, Nevada Association of School Administrators
Vinny Tarquinio, Clark County Education Association
Brenda Pearson, Clark County Education Association
Joanna Miller, Clark County Education Association
Lindsay Anderson, Washoe County School District

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Brad Keating, Clark County School District
Bruno Moya
Ross Bryant
Byron Brooks
Russell Rowe, Nevada System of Higher Education

CHAIR DENIS:
I will open the hearing on Senate Bill (S.B.) 151.

SENATE BILL 151: Revises provisions relating to education. (BDR 34-77)

SENATOR MARILYN DONDERO LOOP (Senatorial District No. 8):
Senate Bill 151 builds upon previous efforts to increase the number of certain specialized personnel in public schools. The personnel are behavioral and mental health professionals who work in our schools—counselors, psychologists and social workers. Last Session, we required the State Board of Education (NDE) to examine best practices for staffing and developing nonbinding recommendations for the ratio of pupils to each of these specialized personnel groups.

These professionals bring years of education and training. They are dedicated to ensuring students in Nevada have access to quality education and the support they need to grow, learn and feel safe. Yet, these professionals are often subject to working conditions that limit their opportunity to provide services to Nevada’s public school children.

For example, counselors are trained to assist students with academic and career planning as well as personal and social development. Due to staffing shortages, their duties are often focused on administering standardized tests, supervising lunchrooms, acting as substitute teachers and making attendance phone calls.

Similarly, school psychologists are experts in education and psychology. They are qualified mental health professionals who work with students in crisis and have specialized training to improve the school climate as a prevention measure. They develop prevention strategies in mental health, substance abuse, bullying and delinquency. However, school psychologists are most often assigned to assess children for special education services and develop individualized education plans.

School social workers are licensed by the Board of Examiners for Social Workers. They are trained to implement small group intervention strategies and identify more intensive interventions for individual students. They target multiple risk factors in home, school and community settings, and identify warning signs of violent behavior. They also work to provide support after a crisis.

What do these specialists have in common? They are qualified mental health professionals who are often underutilized for their primary purposes in our public schools. In addition, Nevada's public schools are understaffed in these professions. The United States Department of Education listed all three areas as experiencing shortages in personnel. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, even before Covid-19, approximately one in six children in the United States experience a mental health disorder each year. The National Association of School Psychologists estimates that up to 60 percent of students do not receive the treatment they need. Data shows it is critical to reach students when they are young since more than half of mental health challenges begin before age 14.

According to the Education Commission of the States, federal data suggests that school counselors, psychologists and social workers might confront overwhelming caseloads as the pandemic continues. The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly increased the demand for the services of these specialists. The impact of isolation due to remote learning has magnified the urgent concerns about student safety and well-being. We need these trained professionals now more than ever.

In its 2020 Statewide Plan for the Improvement of Pupils, the State Board of Education recommended the following nonbinding, best practice ratios: for school counselors, one per 250 pupils; for school psychologists, one per 500 to 700 pupils; and for school social workers, one per 250 pupils.

Nevada does not have the personnel needed to meet those staffing ratios. Most alarming, our current ratios of school-based mental health professionals to students are four to five times greater than the nationally recommended ratios. The data provided in the report by the NDE concludes that Statewide we would need an additional 819 counselors, 649 school psychologists and 1,395 social workers.

Now that we know the scope of the problem, what are our next steps? Two major components are in S.B. 151 to address these next steps.

The first component is contained in section 1 of the bill. The boards of trustees in Nevada's largest school districts, Clark and Washoe, are required to develop a plan to accomplish two objectives. First, the plan should describe how the district will improve the ratio of pupils to this group of personnel to achieve the ratios recommended by the NDE. Second, the plan must also include strategies to recruit and retain counselors, psychologists and social workers, and establish annual targets to meet the recommended ratios for these workers.

The two districts must submit reports to the NDE concerning their plans to improve those ratios and the effectiveness of their efforts to recruit and retain these specialists. The report must also describe what each district plans to do during the next school year to meet the targeted ratios. The NDE is then required to compile this information and submit it to the Governor, the Legislature and the State Board of Education.

The second major component of S.B. 151 is found in section 2. The licensing board for our educators—the Commission on Professional Standards in Education—is required to establish continuing education requirements specific to school counselors, psychologists and social workers. Most of these professionals participate in continuing education opportunities as part of their commitment to their profession but receive no state-level credit. Section 2 will address that oversight.

KATIE DOCKWEILER, ED.D. (Nevada Association of School Psychologists):

I will provide historical context to the provisions outlined in this bill. The work to improving staff ratios for school-based mental health providers began in 2018 with the Statewide School Safety Task Force. I was a member of that group. We were tasked with finding systemic, long-term solutions to improving student well-being and safety in Nevada. Presentations were made by national and local experts. Statewide data was carefully reviewed, and high-impact, high-efficacy targets were chosen. We determined the two foundational targets to improve mental and behavioral health services for students was establishing staffing ratios for Nevada school-based mental health providers and developing a strategic plan for achieving those ratios. These provisions were passed in 2019 under S.B. No. 89 of the 80th Session.

Since then, a collaborative of stakeholder groups has been working closely to explore best practice ratios within each professional domain along with a variety of potential avenues for obtaining these ratios. This collaborative has included the Nevada Association of School Psychologists, Nevada School Counselor Association, National Association of Social Workers Nevada Chapter, the NDE and other related professional organizations. With the first foundational component now tasked and recommended ratios established, it is time for the second foundational component—the strategic plans—to be developed and carried out by districts to further support growth toward achieving these ratios.

Specific measurable targets for recruitment and retention will help districts determine if their efforts are having the desired impact. This will ultimately allow opportunity to shift efforts in a timely manner. If staffing goals are not set and progress not measured in regular intervals, we will never know if we are on track to achieving our goals. Now more than ever, our students need access to school-based mental health professionals, and this bill will help achieve that.

SENATOR BUCK:

Does this bill create another council or commission for the NDE?

SENATOR DONDERO LOOP:

No. We are asking for reports. The reports will be created by the school districts and sent to the NDE.

CHAIR DENIS:

I believe the question stems from language in section 2, subsection 2, which states "the Commission shall adopt regulations." I think Senator Buck is asking what that Commission is.

SENATOR DONDERO LOOP:

The Commission listed is the Commission on Professional Standards in Education, which is a standing committee already created.

HAWAH AHMAD (Clark County Education Association):

We support S.B. 151. This bill ensures every school district reflects upon progress made to achieve the long-term goal for nonbinding ratios for our social and behavioral support system in our K-12 education system. Our school psychologists, counselors and social workers have already dealt with high professional-to-student ratios over the years. With anticipated rises in mental

health issues due to Covid-19, it is important to have accountability measures in place to make sure our long-term goals can be met and we can be agile in our approach to creating pipelines for mental health professionals in education. It is clear a reduction in caseloads for our mental health professionals will lead to increased student success in academics and will develop the social and emotional growth factor linked to academic success. Though the ultimate goal of this bill projects us 15 years into the future, the reporting mechanism in this bill will ensure we keep our eye on the target.

CHRIS DALY (Nevada State Education Association):

The Nevada State Education Association (NSEA) supports the goal of S.B. 151 to reduce the caseloads of licensed educators, such as school counselors, psychologists and social workers, and provide meaningful professional development. The NSEA offers an amendment ([Exhibit B](#)) to extend a 5 percent salary advancement to these individuals who have successfully completed a national certification program to develop the high standards of practice for students.

Reasonable caseloads for education professionals are significant in helping students succeed. This is why NSEA has been supportive of efforts across Legislative Sessions to address the issue of unreasonable caseloads for specialized instructional support personnel. In 2019, S.B. No. 89 of the 80th Session directed the NDE to develop recommendations for the ratio of students to specialized instructional support personnel. Based on national best practices, the NDE recommended 1 school counselor and 1 school social worker per 250 pupils and 1 school psychologist per 500 pupils. Present caseloads are far from these recommended numbers. As of 2020, the ratios were 1 per 463 for counselors, 1 per 1,174 for social workers and 1 per 1,843 for psychologists.

While this work grows out of school safety concerns, the Covid-19 pandemic impact on schools and kids has further elevated the importance of these individuals in schools. Students returning to school buildings this year are finding the systems to support their mental health and social and emotional needs totally overburdened. Nevada schools are in desperate need for more counselors, psychologists and social workers.

With starting pay and benefits averaging \$62,000 to \$77,000 per year, recruitment and retention within these fields is difficult. That is why NSEA is

proposing we treat these occupations similarly to teachers who have become nationally board certified with a 5 percent salary enhancement. This will help with recruitment and retention while also incentivizing these professions to achieve the highest standard of practice. We know this amendment would put a fiscal note on the bill. With the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Nevada will have funds for public education. We believe this amendment would be a worthy use of some of these funds.

MARIE NEISESS (President, Clark County Education Association):

I am here to speak on behalf of two social workers, Tonya Jones and Amanda Simons. I present their supporting testimony ([Exhibit C](#)).

ERICA VALDRIZ (Vegas Chamber):

We support S.B. 151. The Chamber supports having a high-quality, comprehensive school counseling program in our State. We believe this bill creates accountability for our State to ensure student success is personalized in each district which will support our student's accomplishments and physical and mental well-being. We believe in the importance of recruiting and retaining our essential workforce of school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers in Nevada. The Chamber cares about this program because it supports student achievement which will increase Nevada's graduation rates. With the necessary support in place, school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers are uniquely equipped to promote academic success and help Nevada's students become college-ready or career-ready.

JEFF HORN (Deputy Executive Director, Clark County Association of School Administrators and Professional Technical Employees):

We support S.B. 151. The challenges of educating our students during this pandemic have been well documented. Increasing numbers of depression, substance abuse and suicide have become all too common. The Clark County School District has recently reported 22 student suicides just over the past year. A lack of resources and behavioral and mental health professionals to help address these needs is dramatically insufficient. Senate Bill 151 is a step in the right direction that will finally shine a light on the lack of resources available at our schools.

As a former high school principal, I am well aware of the value of behavioral and mental health workers on campus who can identify and address struggling students. There is no better tool available to the principal than the ability to

connect a student in crisis to a social worker, counselor or psychologist who can provide a pathway toward healing. The current ratio of site-based counselors, psychologists and social workers is nowhere close to the need of effectively addressing the fragile emotional states of a growing number of students. Adding more behavioral and mental health professionals to our schools will have the potential to save lives and allow vulnerable students to receive the support they need to lead healthy and productive lives.

NICOLE ROURKE (City of Henderson):

The City of Henderson supports S.B. 151. Supporting the mental health and wellness of children in Nevada is of critical importance. This pandemic shines an even brighter light on this issue, highlighting the negative impact of stress, isolation and disappointment in our children's lives. It is a critical time to ensure we are supporting efforts to recognize warning signs and direct students to resources to help them. Since 2015, the City of Henderson has invested more than \$6 million in our schools with revenues from marijuana sales and redevelopment set-aside funds. These investments have directed funding specifically for mental health support, including the Impact Program, Henderson Hope Squad and sponsorship with the Nevada Association of School Counselors annual conference this year.

The Impact Program is an integrated service delivery program in four Henderson schools supporting high-need students with dynamic professional teams to assess and treat significant behavioral issues stemming from a high number of adverse childhood experiences. This reduces the amount of time students are outside the classroom due to disruptive behavior and leads to improved academic achievement.

School counselors, psychologists and social workers have critical roles to play in identifying and reducing self-destructive behaviors in children. Improving the ratio of pupils to these specialized personnel is essential to providing the care our students need. The City of Henderson supports efforts to recruit and retain people to fill these essential roles, and provisions exist to ensure their continuing education. We support the work of the Clark County School District to reopen schools.

EMILY ESPINOSA (Nevada Association of School Administrators):

Our first primary function is to promote legislation that improves education within the State. We believe that S.B. 151 does exactly that.

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VINNY TARQUINIO (Clark County Education Association):

I am reading supporting testimony ([Exhibit D](#)) on behalf of Brandi Cuti.

BRENDA PEARSON (Clark County Education Association):

I am reading supporting testimony ([Exhibit E](#)) on behalf of Paige Myers.

JOANNA MILLER (Clark County Education Association):

I am reading supporting testimony ([Exhibit F](#)) on behalf of Velynda Kimes.

LINDSAY ANDERSON (Washoe County School District):

We are neutral on S.B. 151. Our district shares a strong commitment to supporting the whole child, including the mental and emotional needs of our students. Our school counselors, psychologists and social workers are a critical part of the team and no doubt carry caseloads that are too large. This is the case of many areas in public education in Nevada. We have the largest class sizes in the Country.

It is difficult to expect school districts to reach or move toward national best practice ratios while being funded at the lowest levels in the Country. With additional funds, hiring additional staff, including school-based mental health professionals, would be a priority. We are confident in our ability to recruit and retain these professionals in a systemic way, but without additional funds we will not be able to make progress toward our shared goals.

BRAD KEATING (Clark County School District):

The Clark County School District supports the intention of S.B. 151. We are neutral to S.B. 151 for the same reasons as Ms. Anderson's statement. We look forward to complying with new requests in this bill but want to make sure everyone understands a cost exists. Difficult decisions have to be made on teachers, class sizes, and social workers and school counselors. There is only so much money to go around.

SENATOR LANGE:

I am interested in the proposed amendment from NSEA. Can we get a cost of what the 5 percent salary enhancement would be? If we give the enhancement to teachers who have the national certification, giving it to counselors, psychologists and social workers would be appropriate.

SENATOR DONDERO LOOP:

I will be addressing that question in my closing remarks. I will not be able to bring up the actual cost, but I will discuss the amendment.

SENATOR BUCK:

There is an extra stipend that school counselors get. Can this be looked into? Section 2 discusses regulations establishing continuing education credits. Are there any details on what those requirements look like? Is there a timeline when those regulations would be adopted?

SENATOR DONDERO LOOP:

Doctor Dockweiler, can you address the continuing education classes you take for which you do not get stipends?

DR. DOCKWEILER:

There are certain requirements already set up by the State we need to maintain to keep our licensure. There are also national requirements we need to maintain to keep our national certification. Ideally, those activities should be counted toward the professional development activities we are required to do. This way there is an alignment between national best practice and what is required in the State.

CHAIR DENIS:

In regard to the regulation portion of Senator Buck's question, as section 2 states, the Commission on Professional Standards in Education would create the regulations. This is done with a process everyone else has to go through when creating regulations. The Commission would have to hold hearings, take public comment and take into consideration anything that is required for licensure. Then the regulations would come to the Legislative Commission.

SENATOR DONDERO LOOP:

In closing, it is clear our K-12 students are facing many social and emotional pressures that affect their school performance. The Covid-19 pandemic has amplified those pressures. School safety concerns will not magically disappear when those students return to our classrooms. We have available mental health professionals in our schools who can work individually and collectively to create school environments that encourage growth and enable children to feel school is a safe place. The essential support service provided by these professional groups all support and contribute to this environment.

We need to do better to ensure we help meet the needs of our students. The proposed amendment, [Exhibit B](#), should be considered as funds are available. This bill provides the next step to fostering an environment for the children and professionals our schools need.

CHAIR DENIS:

I will close the hearing on [S.B. 151](#) and open the hearing on [S.B. 193](#).

[SENATE BILL 193](#): Revises provisions relating to the education of veterans and their spouses and dependents. (BDR 34-382)

SENATOR JOSEPH P. HARDY (Senatorial District No. 12):

During the Interim, the Legislative Committee on Senior Citizens, Veterans and Adults with Special Needs reviewed the programs and services offered for veterans and their families at Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) institutions. In addition, the Committee received written recommendations to maximize the educational benefits for veterans and eligible family members. These two items are the genesis of [S.B. 193](#).

What occurred in the Interim is the Board of Regents suggested to continue to track, monitor and analyze the participation of students who are veterans in the NSHE system and submit a report to the Legislature. The provisions to track these data was set to expire July 1, 2020. [Senate Bill 193](#) removes this expiration date and reinstitutes this requirement.

Second, [S.B. 193](#) creates an enrollment preference for applicants of a nursing or teaching program for veterans at a community college, State college or university of NSHE. This preference applies to veterans of the armed forces who are honorably discharged. The intent is to give those individuals preferences so we can involve them in their ongoing success.

Third, [S.B. 193](#) removes the five-year limitation on assessing tuition charges against honorably discharged veterans. On January 5, a federal bill passed under the sponsorship of Senator Johnny Isakson and Representative David P. Roe. This bill removes the federal three-year limitation for in-state tuition eligibility for GI Bill students. [Senate Bill 193](#) would mimic the new federal law.

Fourth, this bill proposes prohibiting a tuition change from being assessed against veterans, their spouses and dependents for using benefits under the

Post-9/11 Educational Assistance per the bill. This benefit came after 9/11, and a person became eligible on or after January 1, 2013. This provision in S.B. 193 is similar to federal law enacted in 2017, which established the Forever GI Bill and removed the "use it or lose it" rule.

Our veterans and their families deserve our continued support. Although some of these provisions of S.B. 193 are now in federal law, we need to send a strong message we concur with those laws in our State.

BRUNO MOYA:

This bill enhances veteran education in our State, but more importantly, it will continue the service veterans want to produce in our State. Many student veterans who attend a college or university go on to attend nursing school, medical school, or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields that are critical to the needs of our State.

To give background on what Nevada has accomplished, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), has roughly 750 student veterans attending. There are over 1,500 student veteran chapters Nationwide. One of those chapters at UNLV has been twice awarded the Student Veteran of the Year Award because of the work a student in that chapter had done in the community. Those winners were competing against 750,000 students across the Nation.

As Senator Hardy stated, S.B. 193 is broken into several sections. The first section is a report given annually to the Department of Veteran Services which then publishes it to the Interagency Council of Veterans Affairs. This requirement was set to expire last year. Section 1 ensures the report would continue to be created. This report is published so not only the Legislative Council can review it, but the Nevada community can understand the benefits offered to veterans.

This bill also enhances the admission of nursing and teaching programs. These two areas are experiencing critical shortages in our State. My wife is a nurse and speaks to me about the shortages in the medical fields in Nevada. This is especially apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic. Nurses are heavily worked right now and need further assistance. This bill would allow veterans exiting service to continue to serve the State in a different manner.

ROSS BRYANT:

I am a retired army veteran after 25 years, and I have been working in the veteran community for over 10 years by helping veterans go to NSHE schools. Senate Bill 193 reinforces what our State has done for many years, which is try to be a welcoming state for 1.2 million veterans getting out of service and going to school with their education benefits.

It is my experience that many combat medics and combat corpsmen who have worked in the medical field during their service want to become nurses. When they do transition to education, there is a conflict in the nursing arena due to limited seats and a high grade point average expectation. What happens is veterans become frustrated over the competition and go to another state with an admission preference for veterans coming into school with real-life experience. This bill could help that issue.

The same issue applies to teachers. Years ago, the federal government had a Troops to Teachers program with bonus money for veterans to go into teaching. This program was defunded in 2015. Any kind of opportunity for veterans to get into the teaching realm at our NSHE schools would benefit Nevada and our shortage of teachers.

Section 5 of S.B. 193 removes the time limit for veteran families and for veterans to use the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance benefits. In 2009, the armed forces allowed surrogate sponsors, if they extended their service for another four years, to give their Post-9/11 benefit to their spouses and children. Last semester, we had more family members graduate using the benefit at UNLV. There is a huge population of family members who ended up going to other states due to the three-year limit which S.B. 193 seeks to revoke. The previously mentioned federal law and S.B. 193 will help veterans come to Nevada and use their benefits here, which will help Nevada's economy.

BYRON BROOKS:

I am a member of the NSHE Board of Regents, but I want to state for the record I am representing as a veteran advocate and a veteran myself. I am not here speaking on behalf of the other Board of Regents members. Whenever we have the possibility to make education opportunities, particularly higher education, open and available to veterans, we are doing outstanding work. As a State, if we continue the path of opening up the doors for veterans through section 5 of S.B. 193, particularly those coming from another state, we will see an influx of

veterans who attend our NSHE campuses. This is certainly a win for the State of Nevada.

In terms of the focus on nursing and teaching admission preference, another consideration may be vetting veteran transcripts. This would be to see if some of the skill sets and certifications service members have done would apply to the curriculums they attend at school. The families of military service members are the unsung heroes we have. To open up education for them as well is commendable.

SENATOR DONATE:

I had many friends who were veterans when I attended UNLV. I know a lot of the issues they faced in their education. What was the decision behind only focusing on nursing schools and no other medical fields? Some of the students I met at UNLV wanted to go into physical therapy or medical school.

SENATOR HARDY:

I do not think there is a limit to the number of ways we can help veterans. If we can give a leg up to a veteran who has served his or her country, we need to do that. During the Legislative Committee meeting, there was not a decision made to prevent veterans from wanting to do something other than nursing. The reason for the focus on nursing is because there is a crying need for members in that field. This also applies to teachers.

SENATOR BUCK:

Nursing programs have limitations on their admission. There are only so many students they can accept. How will this bill affect admission if there is preference given to veterans?

SENATOR HARDY:

This ties into the concept of supply and demand. We have a lot of demand for nurses. I am hopeful S.B. 193 will put pressure on the nursing programs to build more space for students. In my experience working with universities in Nevada, there was a demand for nursing educators. You had to be a nurse to teach nurses. When I was an Assemblyman, I expressed to the university I wanted a nursing school. Officials replied they did not have the nursing educators for the program. I continued to push and they ended up opening a nursing program after all.

If you have the demand, then more places will open up. Our community is getting older and the pandemic has put a further strain on our nursing pool. Putting pressure on the schools is important because otherwise veterans will start to go somewhere outside of Nevada. We want to keep veterans here, and S.B. 193 will help drive the push to offer more spots in nursing schools. I hope that when the veterans come out in droves demanding the opportunity to become a nurse or teacher, we will listen to them. Our question every session has been where the job focus is. We both know that the job market is focused on medicine right now.

SENATOR LANGE:

This is a great program; anytime we can honor our veterans, we should. Can you explain to me the funding piece of this bill? Does the school absorb the funding? Is there funding that comes from the federal government?

SENATOR HARDY:

I will not pretend to know how this would be implemented by NSHE. I hope they will explain the implementation of bringing more students in.

SENATOR LANGE:

The Troops to Teachers bill you mentioned was defunded in 2015. Was that bill federally funded?

MR. BRYANT:

Yes, it was a federally funded program. It was around for about 25 years. Under that program, if I was getting out of the military and wanted to become an educator, I would receive a bonus along with my GI Bill to get my Alternative Route of Licensure teaching certificate and my education. If I went to a disadvantaged school based on zip codes and challenges, I then got a bonus to teach at those districts. George Ann Rice from southern Nevada has been working on a new version of the bill on the federal level. On our level, S.B. 193 might be able to help veterans who go into teaching and education. We still have many veterans coming into Nevada to pursue teaching.

SENATOR LANGE:

I am invested in adding teachers through this bill. School districts offer a fast-track program for veterans. Can something similar be added into this bill? The support for adding veterans to the medical field is good.

SENATOR HARDY:

Section 4 of S.B. 193 does require the Board of Regents to give admission preference for veterans of the armed forces into the teaching program. I have spoken a lot about the medical side of this bill, but adding teachers is important as well. This is an open bill, so if you have any ideas on what to add, please discuss it with me.

SENATOR DONDERO LOOP:

Senator Joyce Woodhouse and I have been working with Dr. Rice on the bill mentioned. We did find there were states that have worked on a similar initiative. This bill is a great idea. It is a great thing for our veterans to transition to the teaching or medical field if they desire. Senator Hardy, please do not hesitate to reach out to me for any additional information.

SENATOR DONATE:

Section 2, subsection 2, paragraph (e) states, "Any information necessary to determine the impact of policy changes on the number of students who are veterans in the System." This subsection talks a lot about retention and making sure veteran students graduate. Would it be fair to say this report would also encompass addressing the mental, social and behavioral health needs for veteran students and how NSHE is addressing those gaps? Would these items be included in the report?

SENATOR HARDY:

It is not specifically asked for. The Regents can get whatever report they want. There is nothing to preclude them from gathering any info they need. We have been talking about mental health since early in this Session, and I welcome the opportunity to adjust this bill to include examinations of veterans' mental health.

MR. BRYANT:

This is a continuation of a report that has continued since A.B. No. 76 of the 78th Session. In those reports, we talk about the issues at each school and how we can maintain retention and the mental health of our veteran students.

SENATOR BUCK:

In nursing, there are certain criteria that need to be met for acceptance into the program. I have concerns the veteran preference would weaken the standards of the program, which impacts accreditation. Is the intent of the bill to create a preference over another student who is more qualified but not a veteran?

SENATOR HARDY:

For any program, you have to demonstrate ability and show capability. You need to have those two things to be a person of professional standard. If you have two candidates and they are both equal in qualifications, then the veteran would take preference in that regard. It is not so much you take a veteran who is not capable. The reason why the veteran would be preferred between two equal candidates is because the veteran would have real-life experience from service in the military. That experience should count for something. The more experiences we have, the more apt we are to adapt to the challenges we will face.

I look forward to that consternation of who we accept because I would love to have the highest-quality people accepted. Veterans should be among those highest-quality people. Lifting up veterans for opportunity is beneficial for all because it will encourage schools to open up more programs. Perish the thought we have to have a bigger nursing program, a bigger opportunity at the state college for nursing and a bigger opportunity at private opportunities. Many times, private institutions wake up after seeing a change like this and will make a bigger program. If we wring our hands and wish we did not have such success, we probably will not have such success. I look forward to having the problem of having too many people who are too qualified.

MR. BROOKS:

The intention of this bill is not to lower the standards of enrollment for any program. I do not believe that any veteran would be supportive of a measure that lowered the qualifications. Some of these schools have extremely high standards for enrollment, and that is favorable. I promise you, veterans recognize the importance of high standards. In the military, service members take classes that some do not make it through and that is just the nature of the military. I do not see enrollment qualifications lowered to allow somebody in who does not meet the standard but is a veteran.

The NSHE does a good job of veteran reporting. I looked at the 2019-2020 veteran enrollment report, which is public record. The report does a great job outlining how many veterans we have in the NSHE system, what the course of studies are and which course of study is the most popular. If any of the Senators here want some type of reference for enrollment and reporting, this report is something they can access.

SENATOR HAMMOND:

In regard to the changes made in section 5, which removes the time limit, is there any idea on how many people will be added? Is there an extreme need from a large group of people who want to go back to school after five years?

SENATOR HARDY:

The federal government passed a bill on January 5 that made the benefits constant. The change in S.B. 193 in section 5 aligns with that change. We need to put the message out that Nevada is welcoming of veterans.

RUSSELL ROWE (Nevada System of Higher Education):

We support S.B. 193 and offer a friendly amendment ([Exhibit G](#)). The intent of the amendment is to clarify the language in section 5, subsection 2, paragraph (l), subparagraph (2) to better align the bill with federal law. Specifically, federal law permits the spouses and dependents of veterans to be eligible for the tuition waiver, provided they are using the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance pursuant to USC sections 3301-3327. The NSHE's amendment would clarify line 42 of page 4 of S.B. 193 to ensure the spouses and dependents of veterans would likewise be using the same federal program to be eligible for the State's tuition waiver as required by federal law.

CHAIR DENIS:

There was a question earlier about the cost and how this change would be funded. Can you give any insight into that question?

MR. ROWE:

My understanding is when there are programs such as these at the federal level, these funds float through the state higher education system. Beyond that, I do not have the details how that occurs. When there are funds available for these kinds of waivers, it certainly makes it easier to implement from an institutional perspective. We can provide additional information if need be.

CHAIR DENIS:

If you could provide that information to us in the future, that would be appreciated.

SENATOR HARDY:

When I go to the veteran's hospital, I am asked frequently if I am a veteran. This occurs when I am just walking through the halls. When I say yes, they thank me for my service. This bill thanks veterans for their service.

CHAIR DENIS:

With no further testimony, I will close the hearing on S.B. 193. We will move to public comment.

MR. KEATING:

For our good news minute, I want to tell everyone about two students who have been selected to join Senators Catherine Cortez Masto and Jackie Rosen in Washington, D.C., virtually next week. These students will partake in the 59th Annual U.S. Senate Youth Program Washington Week. We are excited for Joanna Bieda, a senior at Advanced Technologies Academy in Las Vegas, and Alexander Wong, a senior at West Career and Technical Academy in Las Vegas, for being chosen. They were chosen over a wide number of individuals. Both students will receive \$10,000 college scholarships for undergraduate study. It is important to mention that Joanna Bieda is serving as a Youth Legislator for State Senate District No. 5, and Alexander Wong is serving as a Youth Legislator for State Senate District No. 8.

MS. ANDERSON:

For our good news minute, I am happy to announce the Nevada Association for Positive Behavior Support has bestowed its diamond award for excellence in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Implementation to Kate Smith Elementary School in Sparks. This is the highest possible honor awarded to a school and recognizes staff members for their outstanding efforts in realigning their Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports system to meet Center for Disease Control and Washoe County School District guidelines to provide a sense of safety, security and belonging for their staff and students. Congratulations go to everyone at Kate Smith Elementary School for their wonderful work.

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CHAIR DENIS:

With no further public comment, the meeting is adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Ian Gahner,
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. 151	B	1	Chris Daly / Nevada State Education Association	Proposed Amendment
S.B. 151	C	1	Marie Neisess / Clark County Education Association	Supporting Testimony of Tonya Jones and Amanda Simons
S.B. 151	D	1	Vinny Tarquinio / Clark County Education Association	Supporting Testimony of Brandi Cuti
S.B. 151	E	1	Brenda Pearson / Clark County Education Association	Supporting Testimony of Paige Myers
S.B. 151	F	1	Joanna Miller / Clark County Education Association	Supporting Testimony of Velynda Kimes
S.B. 193	G	1	Russell Rowe / Nevada System of Higher Education	Proposed Amendment