MINUTES OF THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Eighty-third Session
March 12, 2025

The Senate Committee on Education was called to order by Chair Angela D. Taylor at 1:02 p.m. on Wednesday, March 12, 2025, in Room 2134 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. The meeting was videoconferenced to Room 4 of the Nevada Legislature Hearing Rooms, 7120 Amigo Street, Las Vegas, Nevada. Exhibit A is the agenda. Exhibit B is the attendance roster. All exhibits are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Angela D. Taylor, Chair
Senator Marilyn Dondero Loop, Vice Chair
Senator Fabian Doñate
Senator Michelee Cruz-Crawford
Senator Carrie Ann Buck
Senator Robin L. Titus
Senator Lori Rogich

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jen Sturm-Gahner, Committee Policy Analyst
Alberto Quintero, Committee Policy Analyst
Cameron Newton, Committee Counsel
Virginia Weitzel, Committee Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT:

Michael Stewart, Research Director, Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities
Jill Tolles, Executive Director, Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities
Anna Colquitt, Director of Education Policy, Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities
Todd Butterworth, Senior Research Analyst, Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities
Danica Hays, Dean, College of Education, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Kenny Varner, Associate Dean, College of Education, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Kassie Griffith, Nevada School Counselor Association
Brian Wallace, Vice President, Nevada State Education Association
Marie Neisess, President, Clark County Education Association
Calen Evans, President, Washoe Education Association
Anna Jeakins
Jazmyn Horton
Christina Rodriguez
Matthew Winterhawk
Michael Ryan
Al Rojas

CHAIR TAYLOR:
We're going to start with a presentation from the Kenny Guinn Center.

MICHAEL STEWART (Research Director, Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities):
I spent about 25 years at the Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB) and retired a few years ago after three rounds of redistricting, but the Guinn Center is a perfect place to land. The Guinn Center is a statewide, nonpartisan policy research institute. We are really excited to delve into many different areas of education policy. We also focus on health and social policy, economic and fiscal policy, as well as governance and civics. We hope to eventually build out into natural resources, land and water. In Southern Nevada, we have Anna Colquitt, our Director of Education Policy.

Our first couple of slides talk about our team. I will have Jill highlight our wonderful team then we'll turn it over to Anna for the presentation (Exhibit C contains copyrighted material. Original is available upon request from the Research Library.).

JILL TOLLES (Executive Director, Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities):
We have an expansive team of not only full-time and part-time researchers, but also partnerships with academic faculty and graduate students at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), Boyd School of Law and University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV).

MR. STEWART:
We are going to leave you all with a packet that features all of the research that Anna is going to cover, as well as our *Nevada Briefing Book*, which showcases

all of the work that the Guinn Center completed during the interim including all the policy areas that I highlighted in the introduction.

ANNA COLQUITT (Director of Education Policy, Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities):
I first want to start by introducing our incredible education team. We are so fortunate to be strengthened by the talent of our Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) partners and our senior education researcher, Todd Butterworth, who is joining us via Zoom. These are the individuals who have contributed to the work that I am going to be sharing with you today as well as the work that we are engaging in right now.

As I mentioned, we completed six education reports and briefs over the last interim, and I will be sharing an overview of the findings for each of them. However, I am going to go in depth on the final two as they were the most recent publications and are very comprehensive. I do want to note that all of our reports are available for free to download on our website <guinncenter.org>.

I am going to start with our out-of-school youth report (Exhibit D contains copyrighted material. Original is available upon request from the Research Library.). This looked at dual perspectives—youth and service provider perspectives—in order to better understand why students are dropping out of school and what service providers have experienced trying to bridge the gap in order to reengage them. One of the core findings of this research is that there are so many factors that impact a student's desire and ability to stay in school. Our policy considerations were centered around the need to engage in individualized factors for students, things like staggered business hours. That hones in on what students need and how we can best provide those services for them in order to reengage them in their education.

Next, we studied national education rankings, and this report (Exhibit E contains copyrighted material. Original is available upon request from the Research Library.) was authored by Todd Butterworth. I want to share that we all see the national rankings. We are all familiar with the lists that often place Nevada at the bottom. We are all very accustomed to that feeling. This report is really critical because it challenges us to examine what these comparisons look like. It is a real depiction of where we're at as a State compared to ourselves. It shows how we've performed over time as a State and as an education system, but also looks at other states that are utilizing comparable metrics.

What we found is that oftentimes these national rankings use apples-to-oranges comparisons. Therefore, we don't have a firm grasp on where we actually lie. The bigger picture here is not to say that Nevada is actually at the top of all these lists, and they're just deceiving us—we're actually doing fantastic in every category. What it is saying is, if we do not know where we actually land in these comparisons, we could be allocating resources or making decisions based on inaccurate metrics or comparisons. Therefore, we could be inefficiently spending our resources or allocating our efforts. This is really asking what we could do to create some type of Nevada-specific scorecard or rubric to think about how Nevada is performing within our own educational system.

Competency-based education is a topic that is on the forefront of many minds when we think about the future of education. We produced a brief (Exhibit F contains copyrighted material. Original is available upon request from the Research Library.) that explains what competency-based education is. It includes an overview on what other states are doing to implement competency-based education from a legislative perspective with some practical and logistical components in there as well. It also looks at what Nevada has already done legislatively in this area. What are those steps to continue moving in that direction?

Our workforce ready report (Exhibit G contains copyrighted material. Original is available upon request from the Research Library.) was published over the summer and the goal of this research was to determine if there is alignment between what students are learning inside of the classroom, and what employers are saying is needed for jobs in Nevada. I went about this by looking at Career and Technical Education (CTE) standards. These programs have their own set of standards called workforce-readiness standards. These standards are separate from the Nevada academic content standards but arranged in a way that complements the Nevada academic content standards very well.

I looked at these standards and compared them to the highest employed industries in Nevada using data from the Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation to determine the alignment. What I found is that there is significant alignment between the highest enrolled CTE and the highest employed industries. There is also great alignment between what the employers are saying are important skills. Most of those skills fell within durable or soft skills, things like communication, problem-solving and teamwork. The one skill

that was missing from employers "dream list" was emotional intelligence. Other than that, every skill was included in the list of workforce-readiness skills.

These policy considerations challenge us to consider these workforce-readiness competencies that are only available for CTE students. Thinking about a small population of students in Nevada, we want all of our students to be workforce ready. We have a great foundation for these competencies that are developed through CTE programs. This report challenges us to think about making these skills accessible for all students, not just CTE students.

Next, we are going to dive in a little bit deeper on our two most recent reports. The first report is on early childhood systems (Exhibit H contains copyrighted material. Original is available upon request from the Research Library.). It was published in October and was commissioned by The Children's Cabinet through a federal grant. The reason we did this research is because of the numbers [found in] Exhibit H. There are over 60 entities involved in the early childhood space in Nevada alone. Those operate under 26 chapters of *Nevada Revised Statutes* (NRS) and are funded through over 40 separate State budget accounts. This is an incredibly complex system with a lot of players in the game. What we found very quickly is that not only is it complex, but also very siloed.

When we talk about early childhood systems, what we are referring to and what we utilized in our research is not just Pre-K or the educational aspect, which is what I think a lot of us picture when we hear early childhood. What we envisioned is a comprehensive set of systems that involves every aspect of childhood and services that serves children and their families from zero to eight [years old]. This involves education, preschool, and childcare, but also things like physical health care, mental health care, nutritional support, economic support, child welfare and early intervention services—all serving children under age eight and their families.

Before I get into recommendations, I want to quickly recap the methods that we used for this research. We conducted a very in-depth literature review that is meant to be a resource, not really a standalone fun reading document, but a reference point. We also formed a really helpful key entities document [shown on slide 13] Exhibit C. We talk about these 60 entities in the early childhood space. Who are they, how are they funded, who has authority over them? What is their role in this system as a whole? We formulated a document

that includes all of that information in a singular place. We hope that is a helpful resource.

Once we had the literature review—which is over 100 pages of condensed information, the original information was even lengthier—we then had the key entities document, so we knew who our players were in the game. We formulated a list of over 30 recommendations and then talked to other states to hear about their experiences from those who had transformed the early childhood system so that we could learn from their experiences. Then, from that list of 30 recommendations, we formed a condensed version and talked with our Nevada stakeholders to hear what they felt about these recommendations. Did they feel like they would be something that they could implement? Did they see challenges that—from a policy perspective—we did not anticipate? We then refined our policy recommendations and created this phased approach.

What we learned from other states is that there's an order to how this takes place in an efficient way. We wanted to provide that organization three phases for our recommendations. I am going to briefly talk about them today, but they are included in-depth in our report.

The first phase are the core recommendations about authority and oversight. What we found through our conversations is that there is a lack of clarity on who is responsible for what and who has authority over what. Other states that we talked to ... specifically Colorado and Vermont stand out in this example. Creating some type of early childhood office that would oversee all aspects of early childhood and create a structure around who has authority and responsibility would not only increase efficiencies within the system, but also allow those in the system to know what is going on at a higher level. Another key piece of this phase is to ensure that the right stakeholders are engaged and having conversations. Sharing the realities that they are undergoing is important, as is making sure that we have seats at the table for everybody to share their perspectives about their experiences in the system.

The second phase is the logistics phase. We have a lot on funding and thinking about how we could move toward a cost-based funding model. This model would use appropriate integrated data systems to ensure that policies reflect the needs of the community. It would look at access, knowing that families are left to navigate these incredibly complex systems on their own. How can we ease that process? Things like universal applications or no-wrong-door approaches

came up over and over again as important mechanisms for easing this process. For workforce development, we want to engage a really diverse and qualified workforce for our early childhood spaces. At the end of the day, we want to make sure that the policies we are putting into place reflect the needs of the community we are serving; that is only possible through family engagement.

The final phase of our recommendations is continuous improvement. We want to make sure that we are continuing to refine and improve based on the needs of the community and put a structure in place so that this process is happening routinely, and that refinement is continuous.

Next, I am going to get into school funding. In October, we published a report on the Pupil-Centered Funding Plan (PCFP) and how it has played out across the State. This was commissioned by the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) and is a really exciting project. It was intended to look at not only how PCFP funds have played out across the State, but also federal and local funding sources to really get a full picture of what braided funding is and what it looks like in our schools in Nevada.

Before I get started here, I want to set the context on a couple of notes. One of them is that the PCFP is very early in implementation. I just want to make sure that we are all clear that, although we do include preliminary analysis of how this is playing out in terms of funding and performance and chronic absenteeism, they are not included to be a basis for decision-making right now. They are included to be a foundation for trends in the future and giving us a baseline for how this is going to play out in the future. We are still very early on. I think it's important to note that PCFP has made huge strides and what we will talk about today is kind of the nitty-gritty pieces of it.

I would like to start this conversation by explaining how school funding actually works. I think most of you are quite familiar with this, but it's important to all be on the same page. The way I like to explain it is that every student across Nevada receives a base funding amount of about $9,000. It's really $8,966, but we are going to say $9,000. There is an adjusted base for some of our rural areas that have to [adjust] for things like transportation and some added expenses with recruiting teachers, et cetera. That does give them a bit of an adjusted base. For the sake of this conversation, we are going to say that every student across the State receives this $9,000 base amount.

If a student is an English learner, at-risk of not graduating, or a Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) student, they receive an additional weighted amount. These weights are listed here [on slide 18 of] Exhibit C. We include two values for each of those because there was some rearranging specifically with the at-risk category. I have some notes on that in a minute, but because of that, those numbers drastically changed from when our research was conducted to where it stands now. We wanted to make note that our research was under the prior definition of at-risk funding under free-and-reduced-lunch (FRL) definition.

I also want to note that we included special education in our analysis. Although special education is not a weighted category, we included it because, if a student qualifies for special education services, they are not eligible to receive funding in any of these other weighted categories. Because of that exclusionary factor, we included them as if they were a weighted category. Those services are cost-based; they are not a set weight for every student who receives special education services.

As I mentioned, our research was under the prior definition of at-risk funding. I am sure you have heard a lot of conversation around the 200,000 fewer students that are receiving the at-risk funding. You can see [on slide 19 of] Exhibit C that the funding has significantly increased for those students that are receiving that at-risk funding. This is the percentage of students by funding categories across each of our districts in Nevada; we include our charter schools as well.

I have a couple of things that I would like to share from this slide [19]. First is on GATE funding. When we conducted our research, we spoke with district and school administrators. What we quickly realized is that most of our rural districts receive no GATE funding. What we learned is that most rural districts do have GATE programs, but they do not receive funding because they are not State-accredited GATE programs. When we inquired about that, we found that the administrative burden for maintaining GATE programs is too much for a lot of our rural areas. So, for them, it is worth not receiving the funding and still providing these services even though they do not have the administrative support to maintain a State-accredited GATE program and therefore do not receive State funds.

I want to dive into at-risk a little bit. I know I mentioned that we use the prior definition of FRL. I do want to note now, that the at-risk calculation is determined by an algorithm that uses 75 different factors and calculates this graduation related analytic data (GRAD) score through Infinite Campus. When we spoke to school and district administrators about this implementation, we learned that several states use the 75 factors, but we are the only State that uses it to determine funding. The way that we do that is by calculating the lowest quintile of the GRAD score—the bottom 20th percentile who qualifies for at-risk funding.

One thing that came up in the interviews is that there's a lot of confusion about how these funds should be used. Our school and district administrators are unclear about how the at-risk determinations were made, and therefore it's very difficult for them to link their interventions to the funding algorithm and ensure that they were equitably distributing these funds. On funding in general, in these weighted categories, is that students are only eligible for the highest of the weights. If a student is an English learner and also a GATE student, they only receive funding for being an English learner, but that school or district is still providing the GATE services for that student.

What this looks like in Washoe County, in the preliminary conversations that we have had with them, is that they are spending about $20 million to account for students who are qualified for multiple categories, but are not receiving the funding. They are only receiving the funding for the highest of the weights.

In our research, what we learned overall is that although the PCFP has made huge strides, school funding is still not adequate. In Nevada, we are $4,000 short per pupil for the national average, and well over $4,000 short per pupil in what subject matter experts deem as adequate funding.

I would like to make sure that I emphasize here that this is not dream funding per pupil. This is adequate funding per pupil, and we are $4,000 short per pupil. It is still very difficult to equitably distribute the funds, especially in the at-risk category. Along with that, schools and districts feel like they are lacking in uniform guidance on how to allocate the funds, which has an additional component when there is differing levels of budgetary autonomy across our districts.

Every single interview with a principal at our schools in Nevada noted that the increased needs, post pandemic, have put a strain on resources. They are not able to provide the services that these children and their families need. It is it is incredibly difficult for them.

The policy recommendations that came out of this research was thinking about standardizing reporting and data collection, looking at increased consistency, transparency and funding distribution. All of the numbers that you see in our report are based on allocated funds; what those actual expenses are is not known. That is one of the places of transparency that's critical. The importance of conducting long-term longitudinal studies on the PCFP is critical. As I mentioned at the beginning, we should not be drawing conclusions on linking funding to performance at this point in implementation because we just changed the definition of at-risk last year. I think allowing time for this to play out and looking at it over a longer period of time is critical. [The challenge is] how to support the increased needs of our students and their families and then develop comprehensive performance metrics that align with funding. Because we have changed how we fund our students and these weighted categories, how can we ensure from an accountability perspective that we are aligning metrics to how we are determining funding?

We are currently looking at the Native American Fee Waiver Program and how that plays out across the State in our NSHE institutions. We are looking at chronic absenteeism here in Nevada and nationally, including innovative practices from across the State that other districts and schools can use as a model. As a State, we can look at that to see what is being done in this area. We also hope to continually look at school funding, specifically with the at-risk category, and how those actual expenditures have played out by continually looking at durable skills and workforce development to see what is needed in our State.

SENATOR TITUS:
Thank you for addressing one of my concerns early in the presentation about the different numbers that we use for our standards. Sometimes we're comparing apples to oranges. For example, in one of the presentations, we are talking about graduation rates. I was very concerned about Nevada's graduation rate because we are like sixth in the nation at 83 percent. I said, oh but wait, in the nineties, we were at 64 percent. It turned out they used a totally different

set of criteria for graduation, so it really wasn't a fair comparison. Making sure that we understand what we're using to judge this is important.

On slide 19 of Exhibit C, about district-level percent of students by funding categories, I think that is a really important picture. We hear certain numbers in Clark County—that it uses up the funding based on pupils. It makes sense because there's so many more pupils there.

My question is about the percent of at-risk weighted students. It is a large percent in Clark County versus the other counties. Is there a different criteria on what they use as a percent of at-risk weighted students, or is that base the same for all the students in all the counties? It just seems like Clark County shouldn't … yes they have more students and yes the populations … but this is a percent. I am concerned about that figure and why Clark County?

MS. COLQUITT:
I do want to emphasize again that these numbers are pulled from the prior definition of at-risk funding, which uses an FRL definition. I will reiterate that the metrics are consistent. Your question: Are districts using different metrics to determine at-risk funding? No, that is a set State determination.

Under the new definition—being those 75 factors—those are consistent across the State. I will say that in our conversations with school administrators, we learned pretty quickly that without being familiar with what those 75 factors are and what weight each of them have—which differs according to the student—principals and schools may not be tracking some of these metrics within Infinite Campus. We learned that nurse visits are one of the 75 factors. We learned that some schools do not keep track of nurse visits within the Infinite Campus system. They have a separate reporting system for that metric. Therefore, their students would not have a number to use for that calculation so it might be impacting their GRAD scores. That is not a conclusion that we can draw right now. It is just an example that did come up and why we created the policy consideration, making sure that there is transparency for how those funds should be used and how they are calculated. [We want to make sure] that they are calculated accurately using all of the data available.

SENATOR TITUS:
That is what I was suspicious of. I think I heard there's 75 different components to that matrix; there's no transparency on what they actually are or how each

individual school—not the districts—can weigh those differently. Is that what I just heard you say?

MS. COLQUITT:
No, schools cannot weight those differently. The Infinite Campus algorithm … the way that they produce their early-warning system, the GRAD score system, is that those weights are different for each student. It is not a set weight. What that means is that every student is not impacted by the number of nurse visits in the same way; it differs according to all of the other factors. That is where it starts to become incredibly complex and where the questions have come up. In terms of your other question, knowing the 75 factors, they were presented to the Commission on School Funding. They requested [to know] what they were, and Infinite Campus presented them. There was a list that was presented two years ago; whether that is an accurate list today, I am not sure. Whether that has been communicated, I can confidently say that it hasn't to many of our schools across the State.

SENATOR TITUS:
Do other states use this type of formula on Infinite Campus? Is it the same 75 questions?

MS. COLQUITT:
Yes. Other states use it as a factor. We are the only State that uses it to determine funding for our students.

SENATOR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
I have used so much of your research to guide some of the policy that I've developed. One of the things I'm in total agreement that we need to … we have so many silos here in Nevada and so many resources that our community does not know about. That results in overspending or people not getting services. I definitely want to explore that with my Senators. What is the proper amount of money to fund? We have our per-pupil ratio here [slide 18], the one with the circles. Did you come up with a recommendation on what we need as a State to align to national averages and to serve our population appropriately?

MS. COLQUITT:
The Commission on School Funding has looked and is looking at this in depth to determine how we get to that place of adequacy. That expert recommendation

is from Augenblick, Palaich & Associates. They provided a $17,000 number and the ways and opportunities to get to that place.

We want to compliment that work with what we have provided, how these weighted categories have played out and how the base funding has played out in the distribution across the State. That was the scope of this research. We have not looked at the number for adequacy and other state models or other things that we could rely on for getting to that place. I think that is naturally the next step.

SENATOR DONDERO LOOP:
I want to go back to slide 10, Exhibit C, where you have policy considerations. Can you talk to me a little bit about … when you say considerations you mean maybe a bill? Maybe working with a group? What do you mean considerations?

MS. COLQUITT:
When we talk about policy considerations, they could mean a variety of things as they do in any of our reports. It could be legislative policy; it could also be State policies and regulations. It kind of differs depending on the topic. What I will say here on workforce readiness is there are a lot of ways that these things could be accomplished if there was interest in doing so. When I talk about policy considerations in this report, we have this phenomenal model for CTE standards, and we already have all of the competencies other than emotional intelligence. If we decided to go that route, they are already all developed, every competency. Why are we limiting that to only CTE students? What would that look like to provide those competencies and that skill development to all of our students in Nevada? That could mean a Nevada academic content standards integration; that could mean a class or a track. There are lots of different avenues to explore and where we stand with policies of being nonpartisan not advocating for initiatives. We are raising this as an opportunity, we see a model here in CTE and an opportunity for anyone interested to take it or explore it further.

MS. TOLLES:
I think you answered it pretty well. The Guinn Center, as you know, is a policy research center; we are not advocates or lobbyists for or against any specific legislation. You'll never see us show up in support of a bill or in opposition to a bill. We do strict peer review standard research of various topics in the State, where we can find best practices, evidence-based recommendations or topics to

consider on various levels. [We look at everything]—whether it is policy, changes in NRS, regulations or practices within agencies and departments, or if it is other programs that could be considered that don't require an NRS change.

SENATOR DONDERO LOOP:
As a person who puts forth policy, I can't put forth policy if I do not know the policy needs to be put forth. With that being said, I recognize your nonpartisan stance. I guess I was trying to figure out how we would know. If it's in NRS, it's got to be a bill. Here we are and then two years from now we come back. So, if we don't do it now, the train's leaving the station. That's why I was asking about that. I appreciate your nonpartisan stance; I think at some point maybe those discussions need to be had and, of course, they are being had here.

MS. COLQUITT:
Could I add something to that question? We like to be a resource for LCB and a partner with LCB. We are doing this in-depth research and when there are topics that you all are bringing forth that involve or relate to our research, we hope to have those conversations and provide that information and be a great supporter in that.

SENATOR BUCK:
I am very interested in slide 8 of Exhibit C and the results from that. What exact stage is this in, as far as national education rankings? Maybe [identify] the states that are doing or are moving the needle with similar demographics or metrics across the nation? When is that going to be readily available?

TODD BUTTERWORTH (Senior Research Analyst, Kenny Guinn Center for Policy Priorities):
I had the honor of staffing in this committee back in 2015 and 2017. To your question, the big picture question we were presented with in doing this report is that Nevada always ranks so low in these national rankings. Are they really accurate? It seems like good things are happening here in the State and those things may not be well reflected in these rankings. We really dug into these ranking systems. As a result, we discovered there's definitely a fair bit of truth to the rankings, but they often lack context, and that context is just so important.

For example, the old Education Week-Quality Counts rankings really placed a premium on spending. So, if two pretty similar states were doing similarly well with their students, but one state was spending considerably more than the other, it would be ranked higher even though the other state actually got more done with less money. You can have an argument about spending in education, but it is difficult to deny that was important context to know. But that context was often missing from these rankings.

Let's say Nevada improves a lot in some metric. If other states also improve a lot in that metric, Nevada's ranking may not actually go up. Again, if you don't have that context in looking at rankings, you may not fully understand exactly where Nevada stands. What we suggested, the bottom line of our report, is we thought that Nevada might consider creating a proprietary system for comparing itself to other states. In that way, there would be some control over the context that is provided in the report. This hasn't been done; it is a suggestion that we have floated, but somebody in the State would certainly need to take this on. We do think it is a beneficial endeavor to compare Nevada to other states. There needs to be more background provided with the information that we are looking at.

CHAIR TAYLOR:
Dr. Colquitt spoke about an office for Early Childhood Education. Senate Bill (S.B.) 82 is just that.

SENATE BILL 82: Creates the Office of Early Childhood Services within the Office of the Governor. (BDR 18-527)

It is a bill that came out of the Interim Committee on Education and will be heard at some point. So certainly, be looking for that.

My first question is on slide 13 of Exhibit C, you talk about early childhood education and the comprehensive system. I am wondering how these components are identified, these eight that are here?

MS. COLQUITT:
When we are talking about an early childhood system, we are thinking about all aspects of early childhood. This is likely not a comprehensive list. These are to give an example that we are looking at more than education, more than

preschool, more than childcare. We are looking at this from every service and program that is provided to children and their families up to age eight.

You'll see at the bottom of slide [13], it says "and any other program" because it is not a comprehensive list. It is just capturing some of the main aspects of early childhood.

CHAIR TAYLOR:
On slide 18, Exhibit C, you talk about the weights and lay that information out. We certainly recognize the differences between the last system and the old one. In your opinion, after doing this work, what is the impact of not allowing the double dipping, so to speak? Schools still have to provide that service, but they are not getting the resources to do it.

MS. COLQUITT:
As I shared, this was something that came up a bit later into our research process. We interviewed school administrators and principals and learned pretty quickly that, outside of Clark County School District (CCSD), school principals are largely unfamiliar with what PCFP is and how their school is funded—really anything related to funding measures. All of those decisions are done at the district level outside of CCSD. We turned to talking to district administrators as well to gain a full picture of how this funding is playing out. When we did talk to district administrators … we talked in depth to Joe Ernst at Washoe County School District (WCSD) and learned quickly that this has a huge impact in Washoe County. They are the only district so far that we have discussed this with in terms of numbers and actual impact. It was brought up several times.

In Washoe County, this results in a $20 million deficit between those that are funded through that single weighted category and the services that are still required for Washoe County to provide for the students that qualify for multiple categories. That $20 million is coming … it is a large number that is making a huge impact in their ability to provide these comprehensive services that are needed for these students.

MS. TOLLES:
I always like to joke that she has book ends on her name. She is Dr. Anna Colquitt esquire. She has a law degree from UNLV, and she also has her Ph.D. in educational psychology. Living for the passion of doing education

policy research, she is joined by an incredible team at UNR and other assistants from UNLV and Boyd Law School. I would be remiss if I did not say thank you to this body. We are a nonprofit, philanthropically supported preferred vendor for the State. The funding for that PCFP in particular came through the NDE, which allowed us to be able to have access to data, to do that deep diving comprehensive work.

CHAIR TAYLOR:
Now we will open the hearing on S.B. 277.

SENATE BILL 277: Revises provisions relating to education. (BDR 34-786)

SENATOR MICHELEE CRUZ-CRAWFORD (Senatorial District No. 1):
Looking at all the resources that we have in Nevada, the person that connects us to those resources in the schools are our school social workers, with the help of our school counselors and our school psychologists. I am going to walk through this bill very simply. The catalyst of this bill really started under Senator Dondero Loop in 2019 with S.B. No. 319 of the 80th Session she passed. It has similar verbiage and establishes duties for a counselor, school psychologist and social worker employed by the district to the extent money is available.

We did receive money, a lot of money for school social workers. I was investigating which districts were successful and where we needed some support. The first part of the bill aims to make sure that, as we receive money as a State, we are able to use that money to employ those school social workers. What I found is a lot of the districts employed contractors in order to hire the school social workers. There will be a conceptional amendment (Exhibit I). I was just taking the bill as written, and I knew that the wording came out not exactly to my intent. So I am working to get that conceptual amendment hemmed up a little bit. This first part of the bill would be for districts over 700,000 students, which just pertains to Clark County.

We have had contractors hired first at the school level before contracting out, because we had a placement gap in social workers. Contractors were taking a certain percentage off the top and then school social workers were not able to be placed because—in the private sector at the school level—they were paid more. In my presentation (Exhibit J) section 1 is requesting that as money is available, school districts over a population of 700,000—which will be the

conceptual amendment—will first have the right to employ a full-time social worker at the school level.

For the second part of the bill, my guests Dr. Hayes and Dr. Varner are going to be discussing school counseling and school social work programs within UNLV. The second part is modeled after a bill that I wrote in 2021, S.B. No. 352 of the 81st Session sponsored by [former] Senator Mo Denis. It was investigating ways to increase our teacher pipeline across Nevada. It looked at allowing paraprofessionals to work while they were doing their student teaching. This has resulted in about 300 educators a year in Nevada. We might actually have more data on here … now this is in 37 other states. As investigated, we have a need for school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers. I investigated whether it would be appropriate to also allow them to be employed by a district while they are doing their internship hours.

I worked with social worker associations, the Nevada Association of School Counselors and found that, yes, this is something that we could do at the same time. Before someone's a school social worker they are usually a Safe School Professional, and while they are doing their licensing hours, they can remain in that role through their accreditation process.

DANICA HAYS (Dean, College of Education, University of Nevada, Las Vegas):
We are going to provide some context and insights regarding the school-based mental health services needed statewide.

KENNY VARNER (Associate Dean, College of Education, University of Nevada, Las Vegas):
The 2024 annual report by the Nevada Division of Child and Family Services highlights an ongoing mental health crisis among youth. Noting that Nevada has consistently ranked 51st for youth mental health access and services, these challenges vary by geography. In fact, 87 percent of Nevadans live in a critical crisis shortage for mental health professionals. Rural and frontier communities particularly struggle with limited provider access, while urban centers navigate high-density stressors and socioeconomic disparities. These exist throughout the State, contributing to various mental health needs.

MS. HAYS:
A very startling ratio that we deal with is 1-to-2,000 ratio. That means that for every school-based mental health professional, whether it is a school

psychologist, school counselor or school social worker, there are 2,000 students that person is assigned to.

A lot of our support for these types of mental health workforce efforts are based on the kids in those classrooms that are not getting the support they need. A key component of this bill that is critical and important is the potential creation of a provisional license for school social workers, school counselors and school psychologists so that they can complete their internship hours while working in a school setting. This is a model that replicates what we have been doing successfully with the Nevada Forward Teacher Apprenticeship licensure.

Since last session, we've also been able to have a Nevada apprentice license created through the NDE, which has been very helpful for bridging the gap in the workforce. The availability of this license, coupled with on-site supervision, is the solution as we move forward to bridge this workforce gap.

MR. VARNER:
At UNLV, we have led the way in Nevada toward developing teacher apprenticeships. That is not the topic of today; we will be back hopefully at some other point in the session to talk to you about that work. It is worth noting that the model that started before last session with just 36 people has now grown to a model of over 1,200. There are apprentices in every single Senate and Assembly district in the State. We have found a statewide solution through apprenticeships and on-the-job learning that models into how our programs work.

We also have created a successful practicum at places of employment in our mental health programs, allowing students to gain on-the-job experience under supervision without requiring a separate license for pre-degree hours. Those folks are remaining in their current job setting; it becomes a little bit tricky for them to navigate. We are expanding the concept of teacher apprenticeships to school mental health professionals as a way to ensure that graduates are prepared to serve on day one, while mitigating workforce shortages. The time to [obtain a] degree for those folks is quite extended if you need an education specialist or a master's degree. There are a number of bachelor-level employees in districts who want to take on these roles and get the training. Trying to create a tiered support is one way to think about this.

MS. HAYS:
I think it is important to say out loud that this bill does not alter what is already in statute in terms of licensure for these mental health professionals. At this time, school counselors and school social workers do not have a separate license, but they are endorsed by NDE. The Nevada Board of Examiners for Social Workers does regulate the Nevada license for social workers. They also regulate the degrees that are offered in Nevada, and, through that regulation, there is rigorous preparation in terms of field hours and weekly supervision requirements. In addition, *Nevada Administrative Code* (NAC) 391.185, 391.316 through 391.320 provide the code for endorsement pathways for these professions, namely school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers respectively.

Senate Bill 277 does not alter these existing licensing structures, but instead seeks to create an efficient pathway for pre-licensed professionals to serve in schools while completing their training.

MR. VARNER:
Nevada's geographic and cultural diversity demands a flexible approach to school-based mental health support. As Senator Cruz-Crawford said, the idea is where funds are available. That's the idea, but something to think about in rural and frontier areas is that they often need a more adaptive staffing model that can blend remote and in-person services to overcome provider shortages and draw upon a variety of service providers.

Funds become limited in terms of being able to hire full-time school social workers. For example, they might be different than in an urban setting. In all cases, what we want to share is that students and communities benefit from full-time in-school mental health professionals across the spectrum. School psychologists, school counselors, school social workers are needed who can serve to address both immediate crisis as well as long-term wellness. A lot of our time is spent on immediate crisis. We also want to think about long-term wellness development as well.

By removing unnecessary roadblocks and promoting a sustainable workforce pipeline, Nevada has the opportunity to help provide a balanced and pragmatic approach. It will ensure that students have access to mental health support through our degree programs and through the proper training, while maintaining a high professional standard for licensed personnel in schools.

SENATOR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
I will have those conceptual amendments added, Exhibit I. I also have Kassie Griffith available who is on the board of the Nevada Association of School Counselors. I would just like to close in telling you that I had difficulty hiring a school counselor, but I would never write a bill for one scenario. I am a researcher, and I make sure that there is quantitative issues and drill down with the stakeholders to ensure that we are filling these positions without lowering the bar.

I could not hire a school counselor. I finally asked my staff who would like to go to school and enroll in a master's for school counseling. In the meantime, I will put you in a behavioral strategist position. One person raised their hand, and they said this is the opportunity of a lifetime. I put them in a behavioral strategist position while they were getting their master of counseling at UNLV. I found out he needed 700 hours and most of those hours had to be outside of the workday, even though a lot of his work aligns to the hours required to accrue for that degree. This was an opportunity to help many other schools. It is not going to lower the bar; it is just going to get services to our students faster while they are completing their programming. Making sure that our staff stays employed and we are taking care of them with their health insurance and benefits while they are learning on the job. Apprenticeship models work.

SENATOR BUCK:
You mentioned a cut number of 700,000?

SENATOR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
Specifically at this time, it would be for Clark County School District. Just for the right to hire at the school level prior to contracting out for full time. There are contract scenarios where people share service, like three different schools at a time, which would be appropriate.

SENATOR BUCK:
Okay. I just say that because if you put 700,000 in there that makes all of them disqualified because Clark County is 309,000 students.

What issues are you seeing? That Clark County is hiring contractors? Are they hiring contractors, or the social workers are contractors?

SENATOR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
Most of the school districts that I have spoken to have a contracting service that hires their social workers because it is a lot of work.

You basically need a whole team and HR. It worked for smaller districts, and it did work in Clark County as well. There were also issues at the school level, the right to hire first before a contractor was a better scenario because we could pay the social worker more and attract more consistent employment.

SENATOR BUCK:
As of right now, you get a social worker placed at your site or you are dividing it, as opposed to you being able to hire as a principal. Of course, I would prefer you being able to choose that person who works at your site.

SENATOR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
Yes, but there was low funding, so the social worker program was diminished quite a bit this last year.

SENATOR TITUS:
First, I am hearing you use—almost as if they are the same profession—school psychologists, school counselors and school social workers. It is my belief that they are different careers and that one does not supplant the other.

KASSIE GRIFFITH (Nevada School Counselor Association):
I like to use analogies, and I hope this helps. I think of us as a team. You are correct, there are different roles within that mental health system. The way that it looks in a school may look a little different than what it looks like on paper, or what it looks like from one school to the next.

School psychologists typically deal with assessments. They are assessing our students and looking for supports to help them with special education or behavior interventions. They have a lot of diagnosing, educational and behavioral deficits that they do. School counselors, and typically school social workers, do not do that. They often help with our crisis interventions, but because they are not at schools every single day or at the same school every single day, they are not necessarily that first line of crisis intervention. No fault of their own.

School social workers, I like to think of them as the person that gets our kids to school. They are removing those external barriers like transportation and basic needs. Why doesn't the student want to come to school? What kind of community resources can we link that parent to in order to get them to school? They also help with the after-school piece. They do provide some services in schools, but they aren't at one single school. They help with the wraparound services, and they can provide services that kind of intertwine with crisis intervention and meeting with students.

The school counselors, on the other hand, are trained mental health professionals. We have a comprehensive school counseling program. We are standards-based. At the elementary level, we are in classrooms; we are teaching them skills like those workforce-readiness skills and social and emotional skills. We work on academics, attendance, college and career readiness. We pull groups. We have those direct services with the students. Although not every school has a school counselor, I will admit there are probably more school counselors than there are the other professions. We are not always full-time with our students. We work on taking our school improvement goals and using our data with our programs to match up and to drive student success. We are that safe space for students to come and deal with the problems that are happening at school. I am not sure if that helps clear that up a little.

SENATOR TITUS:
I did know all of the above. I do not usually ask a question unless I already know the answer. I wanted that on the record because I am getting a lot of pushback from folks and a lot of emails against this particular bill. They are saying, and I think it is a misconception, that we do not need social workers. We have school counselors. I just wanted to make sure that was clear because during the testimony, there was a lot of combining them all. I wanted to make sure it was teased out: school counselors versus school psychologists versus the social workers and what they do.

My daughter is a school psychologist. She is in my ear all the time about things and so I get it. Senator Doñate and I, during the Health and Human Services interim committee, addressed issues with not enough social workers and the importance of getting them out. When we're looking at a social worker apprentice program—not unlike the nursing apprentice program—what I am hearing is we would look at some of the funding for that apprenticeship where

they would actually get paid, and to get them out in the rural areas, schools, et cetera. I am hearing that this is a little bit along those same lines except you are actually going to use school funding if you do not have any additional money to help pay for this apprenticeship, internship or something like a social worker doing their necessary field rotations. Is that correct?

MR. VARNER:
In an apprenticeship, there's two components, there's the employer component which is the responsibility of the employer. So, the school district has to pay whether it is someone who's in a current role that is learning and transitioning into something new or hired separately, that is the responsibility of the employer. In Nevada, the sponsor—which in our case with the teacher apprenticeship is UNLV College of Education—has the legal obligation to make sure that an apprentice does not have any costs for their tuition, or what they call related technical instructions.

In the apprenticeship world, no one's dictating where the funding has to come from. On the academic side, if they are going to be a registered apprentice for their program, we have to find the money to pay for their tuition and fees and the employer has to make sure that they can offer them viable employment and that they have the funds to do it. One of the key parts is to always work in collaboration with school districts because they may not be able to support everyone that wants to be an apprentice. They may not have the funding or money to do so. We equally have to have enough scholarship funding and other sources to be able to cover the tuition and fees. It is braided.

SENATOR TITUS:
I have been an educator myself. I have taught resident students, nurses, physician assistants through internships and rotations. I know with the social workers; they also have to do their clinical rotations, as you mentioned. What you are looking at is giving them a stipend or paying them for whatever role they are already in? You had some creative ideas with the person in your school to make sure they are employed with a certain title. For social work, you do have to have a supervisor, you have to have a licensed person. How does that supervisor position … if you do not have them? How do you establish that proper oversight that is required for this licensure pathway?

MS. HAYS:
Similar to school social workers, school counselors have the same weekly supervision requirement. Supervision can be done triadically or individually, it could be done in person or on site. There may be opportunities where, if they do not have a licensed supervisor at that site, they could share them among a couple of schools. It is a weekly supervision requirement, not a daily supervision requirement if that helps.

SENATOR TITUS:
One of the concerns I had … I do know a social worker student that had some issues with getting hours because her supervisor was not in the same building with her, and they actually had to be on site so many hours with them. Do you not see that as a problem?

MS. HAYES:
No, that is not a problem. There's flexibility in how supervision can be delivered. Triadic supervision has helped to cut down on that a lot, which is a 2-to-1 ratio.

MR. VARNER:
I think an underlying aspect of that question is that we also have to prepare those that work in those capacities, also to know they are going to work in an environment where the training looks a little different than how they were trained themselves.

Teachers also need to be supervised when they are pre-service—prior to having a bachelors [degree]—that does not change in the teacher apprenticeship. I was trained and prepared in traditional student teaching, so that is what I know. How would I work with someone who's being prepared in an apprenticeship, which is a different model? We are investing a lot into the training of the supervision itself. Not only to do what they have to do for their licensing requirements, but also to be responsive to a preparation model that is slightly different than what other people are familiar with.

SENATOR TITUS:
You keep using the term apprenticeship. Apprenticeships have a strict definition. When we talk about a social worker apprenticeship program and met with the U.S. Department of Labor, they did not even recognize that apprenticeship in social work as a job. I am wondering, you are not going through the U.S. Department of Labor for this particular official apprenticeship, or are you?

MR. VARNER:
[This is] not our bill; we were just asked to offer some contours because we have been working in the teacher space. How it works in Nevada—just to give some contours to apprenticeships—the federal government recognizes two types of states, those with a state office of apprenticeship and those with a state apprenticeship agency. There are a couple of states that do both and we're not one of those. We're a state apprenticeship agency State, which in the case of Nevada is the [Nevada] State Apprenticeship Council, under the Office of the Labor Commissioner. They have to approve all apprenticeships, whether it is plumbing or teaching or anything in between. This is a really important point; a lot of people call what they do apprenticeships, and they are not. They are just using the word because it might sound fashionable. They might be doing an extended residency or a long-term placement, but they are not apprenticeships. You have to go through a standards recognition process with the state apprenticeship agency, in this case, the Nevada State Apprenticeship Council. You have to furnish your standards, your supervision, your hours, how they are going to break down by all the competencies that are aligned to your field, and it has to be a field that can be apprenticed.

The federal government has a registry of fields that you are able to apprentice in. If social work is—I do not know—if they were not in there, that is a process where the State director of apprenticeships works with the federal government to add it. School psychologists are also not recognized currently, we are in the process of registering an apprenticeship and the State is working with the federal government to have that recognized and then that gets vetted with the national organizations that oversee that.

SENATOR TITUS:
Right. That is exactly what we found out when we met with the dean of the School of Social Work and the Department of Labor in Nevada. They said this does not even exist; this is a pathway we would have to do that. Obviously, you have already been schooled on that. That is something that this bill will apparently address.

MR. VARNER:
Yes, I think that is the hope. Our part of this is saying what the pathways could look like and that the goal is a school social worker in every school. There's a shortage and the training ramp is really long. We're offering apprenticeships as an appreciable model—as a pathway—to achieve that while being realistic about

the time it takes to train someone and building a skill set over time. As opposed to saying, you have to complete all these hours before you can ever do that. What we are saying is we have a model of apprenticeships that is working in education. The Department of Labor believes that it will work in a variety of other fields within education. That is our part of this. I think that is a little bit separate from just the bill itself, which is to ensure that schools have access, when possible, to having the full complement of mental health workers available.

SENATOR DONDERO LOOP:
I was just going to use myself as an example. When I did my master's to be a librarian, in the middle of all that, the librarian actually passed away. What happened was they needed me in the library, so we had to get creative. I can tell all of you listening or in person that if there's anybody who knows how to be creative and make things work, it is schools. I do believe a school counselor needs a supervisor, if you will. You may do exactly what they did with me, and they took someone from a nearby school and had them work with me.

Just so that we have it clear on the record, when I taught second grade, an entire family was killed in a car crash, except for one child. The child that was killed was in my class. The child that was not killed was in my daughter's class. As a teacher and a mother, I was sort of dealing on both ends. Social workers help children navigate whatever needs to be navigated, while counselors help children understand what happened. A psychologist is at a whole different level.

That is why all these different people are needed, especially in a crisis setting. As I said, when we are dealing with kids in crisis in a school, I hate to use the word creative—because in this situation, it was not being creative—it was doing what we needed to do for this family that was gone, and one child was left. There are definitely some things that probably need to happen, and the sponsor has already indicated that she is working on some of those amendments. We need to make some things work because we do not have enough feet on the ground. To make that work, I think that people who are worried about how this is working are not in favor of this bill. Maybe they will understand from my story, the need for us to do something so that we have some people in place for our most vulnerable kids.

CHAIR TAYLOR:
I have gotten a lot of emails and people asking why we need this? Why is it important? You did a really good job of talking about the three different roles from a mental health standpoint that's necessary for students. What I would like to hear mostly so it can be on the record is … what is the benefit of that for a student? Why does that matter for a student instead of just reading, writing and arithmetic?

MS. GRIFFITH:
I am a school counselor. I have been a school counselor for almost 20 years. The benefit of having more mental health supports in a school is … you can't measure it. Senator Dondero Loop had talked about how we are the boots on the ground to help in a situation that is maybe over a teacher's head, and I hear that a lot from our teachers. Yes. They do the immediate small things, but counselors will help provide that possible trauma response. What are those coping skills to deal with a situation like that? It is also to provide crisis intervention if there's a student in need.

The other day, I did not have enough people at my school. I had four different students in crisis at the same time. I'm in an elementary school and I am technically not even a fully funded full-time counselor. My principal—to Senator Dondero Loop's point—creative. Had I not been there, and there's no mental health person … we do not have a social worker assigned to our school and our psychologist was at a different school that day. We have a brand-new nurse who has not been in that situation. There's a lot of value to having [a counselor] there because those students were in need and a teacher does not have the mental health training that is so vital. There are big issues that our students are dealing with, and it is hard being the only person that is there at the school. It is even harder if you're the school that does not have anybody. Where can that student turn? It is really important that the people in those positions are qualified, following our code of ethics, looking at what they can do and what they can't do, and getting them resources. That becomes something for training and experience and leaning on those seasoned veterans.

CHAIR TAYLOR:
Research shows, scientifically as well as anecdotally, that if a child is in crisis, they cannot learn. That's another reason why this is important. My second question is to the sponsors. Senator, any thoughts for making this for counties that have less than 700,000 people in it? It has got to be counties, it can't be

schools, right? Some of our rural areas, for example, or even in Washoe or Carson, if they would like to be able to do that same thing, are you open to writing that in such a way? Because it is permissive right? It is not required. There's a big need and they may say, hey we can use this too.

SENATOR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
I would be open to working with the districts and that is why we do not have all the amendments yet, because as counties saw this, they were interested. I am also still working with counselor and social worker associations to define what the roles are in that limited licensing. We have not hammered all that out yet, but we will have it before work session. The answer is yes.

BRIAN WALLACE (Vice President, Nevada State Education Association):
Nevada State Education Association (NSEA) does support S.B. 277 as introduced to require public schools to employ a school social worker to the extent that these funds are available. Our educators are committed to the success and well-being of our students and our schools. Social workers play an essential role in addressing the social and emotional needs of our students so they can be successful within the classroom. They serve as a bridge between our families, our students and our school communities. Their presence and their contributions at school sites are instrumental in helping students thrive both inside and outside of our classrooms. We echo Senator Dondero Loop's comments, because these layers of support are what helped keep kids in our classrooms, so we as teachers can continue to do our job. Nevada State Education Association also supported S.B. No. 319 of the 80th Session in 2019 to establish the duties of school counselors, social workers and psychologists to require public schools to employ a school counselor to the extent funds are available. We believe the addition of school social workers is merited and our members ask for your support and so do our students.

MARIE NEISESS (President, Clark County Education Association):
I am here today to strongly support S.B. 277. The Clark County Education Association firmly believes that mental health is essential to a student's overall well-being. Providing mental health support to meet student needs is crucial, as their well-being directly impacts their academic performance and overall growth. Children in crisis often struggle to focus on learning. Every school should have a dedicated social worker on site to provide essential support for students. While substantial funds are allocated to service contracts to support student mental health, such as millions allocated to [inaudible] in fiscal year 2024. These

services were initially intended to be a short-term solution. However, they have now become the default approach to provide long-term stability and consistency for our students. We must prioritize hiring school social workers fully vested in our community and student outcomes. By bringing in permanent dedicated professionals, we can ensure that our students receive the support they need on an ongoing basis. We understand there's an amendment with a population cap that applies to CCSD, and we support the amendment.

CALEN EVANS (President, Washoe Education Association):
We represent the certified professionals in WCSD. We do support the bill as introduced. We have some amazing social workers here from Washoe County and I want to make sure they have enough time. The conceptual amendment that was presented just now … we would love to engage with the sponsor on that because we also feel that both Washoe and other districts should have priority hiring at the school site. Speaking on behalf of those on the ground and the social workers in the classrooms, those are things that we want to see in those other districts as well.

ANNA JEAKINS:
I have been a licensed school social worker in Washoe County for seven years. I am also a nationally certified school social worker through the Social Work Association of America and a member of the Washoe Education Association (WEA). I am here to represent my own personal opinions. While current law ensures every school has a school counselor when funds are available, S.B. 277 takes a crucial step in extending this to include school social workers. In Nevada, school social workers are duly licensed mental health professionals that hold a social work license from the Nevada Board of Examiners and a school social work endorsement through the NDE. Our students and families are facing mounting mental health challenges. School social workers are uniquely trained to integrate school, community and family context into interventions and help to reduce barriers to learning by enabling students to be physically, mentally and emotionally present and ready to learn in the classroom. By having a full-time school social worker in every school, we increase equitable access to vital supports and services enabling early intervention before a crisis develops rather than relying on crisis management after problems escalate. I urge you to support S.B. 277 as a responsible investment in our students well-being.

JAZMYN HORTON:
I am a school social worker and a member of the WEA. I am here to advocate and express why supporting S.B. 277 ensures a more successful future for students, families and staff. School social workers are licensed professionals who play a crucial role in supporting student well-being and ensuring that they have the resources and emotional support needed to succeed. Our students and families face increasing challenges, including mental health struggles, economic hardships and behavioral concerns. We advocate and provide wraparound care for students. We do this not just for them but their families and our staff as well. Our services help mitigate and support a variety of challenges, and we get to be a part of the growth and success of our kids, their families and our staff, which is my favorite part of this job.

School social workers do tough and important work each and every day with love and care for every person that we come across. That is why this bill is so important to consider. Having dedicated skilled social workers in schools improves student outcomes and strengthens a positive learning environment. I strongly urge and ask that you consider the health and well-being that the school system can build upon for our students by supporting S.B. 277 and giving every public school the opportunity to employ school social workers.

CHRISTINA RODRIGUEZ:
I am a school social worker and WEA member, and I have been with WCSD for four years. I completed both years of my social work practicum in the schools, as well as my bachelor's degree practicum in California. I am here before you today in strong support of S.B. 277 because every student deserves a chance to succeed, not just academically but emotionally and socially. Our public schools are more than just places of learning, they are communities where students face challenges that extend far beyond the classroom. Some of the things I and other school social workers do on a weekly basis are meeting with students for one-on-one support, running our food pantries, providing hygiene and other basic needs materials and teaching social and emotional learning skills. School social workers are a lifeline for students struggling with mental health crisis, poverty, chronic absenteeism and bullying. They provide critical support in helping students navigate trauma, building resilience and staying engaged in education. Without school social workers, too many students fall between the cracks. Nevada's student-to-social worker ratio is far too high leaving thousands without the help they need. Senate Bill 277 can help ensure that every school—if funding allows—has a trained, licensed and certified

professional ready to support students' well-being. When we invest in school social workers, we invest in safer schools, better academic outcomes and a stronger future for our youth.

MATTHEW WINTERHAWK:
I am a Nevada father and constituent. I believe that parents and children must always come first in our educational policies, and I am deeply concerned with S.B. 277 and S.B. 278.

SENATE BILL 278: Revises provisions relating to education. (BDR 34-788)

It is a dangerous step toward State overreach right now. We're eroding parental rights and opening the door to policies that have already proven disastrous in states like California. In California, we've seen policies that diminish parental authority asserted by the state itself between children and families. Legislation such as [California] Assembly Bill 665 giving minors as young as 12 the ability to consent to mental health treatment including placement in residential shelters without parental knowledge or approval.

This is not hypothetical; this is happening right now under the guise of helping children while they are actually stripping rights from the parental role in the children's lives. Senate Bill 277 is a first step towards this kind of government intrusion in Nevada by lowering the professional standards for school administrators, social workers and educators. This bill weakens the foundation of our educational system and potentially allows unqualified individuals to influence, counsel and make decisions about our children's lives without the proper expertise and or, more alarmingly, without parental involvement.

Now I ask this committee: Who determines what is best for our children if unqualified individuals are placed in these roles? Also, protections exist to ensure that parents remain the primary decision-makers in their children's education and well-being. Third, why is Nevada being pushed toward policies that have already failed in California, New York, Texas and Florida? This current mismanagement already presents bureaucratic structures like the Nevada System of Higher Education and should serve as a warning.

A bloated inefficient system combined with an educational workforce that is not held to the highest standards, creates a direct path toward government overreach, weakened parental authority and ultimately the failure of our schools.

This bill does not serve the interests of Nevadans or Nevada parents or children. It serves bureaucrats, it serves policymakers, and it serves them wanting to push unqualified individuals into positions over our children, creating a system that sidelines parents entirely.

Nevada is battle born and we do not simply follow the failed policies of other states. We are Nevadans, not Californians, not New Yorkers, not Texans or Floridians. We must reject any of this and any future legislation that lowers the standards for those working with our children and allows State intervention in family matters. I urge the committee to oppose this in its entirety. The only acceptable path forward is one that maintains the highest professional standards of educators and officials while preserving the fundamental rights of parents to raise their children.

MICHAEL RYAN:
I am a long-time resident of Nevada and a Marine Corps veteran. Please vote no on S.B. 277. It does not provide any resources for schools to hire social workers. Limited resources should be used to teach our children academics, not on a social worker. Please vote no on S.B. 277.

AL ROJAS:
I live in Assembly District 12 in Southern Nevada. Half of my district is in Henderson; the other half is in Sunrise Manor. I am against this bill because it sounds to me like you just want to create an internship. We're already having problems with funding, and I have been advocating for an inspector general for education, who is going to audit where the money goes. You guys are saying that we do not really know where the money is going to come from, where it is going to be and how we are going to get it. You are not specifically stating that these kids are going to get this training. What you need to do is earmark funding—a bill that says this amount of money is going to go directly for this. That's the kind of administration that we need. If you want to have mental health [and students] that can read adequately, make the best decisions. You have to start putting your money on kids that can read by the third grade.

I am a retired electronics engineer and I grew up in the inner cities of Los Angeles—in East Los Angeles at Garfield High School. Right out of high school, I went to Irvine. I lived in Irvine, Newport and Huntington Beach for 38 years. On the beach, we have homeless, we have gangs, we have riots. All these things are manageable if you focus on getting kids to read early and parents to

get involved in their education when they are young. That is where the money should be going, not spending it on research. The other lady who testified when she had the presentation, she said that they do not know where the money is going, that they do not really have any accountability. They're just looking at the numbers and the numbers say that you have to have earmark funding. I am totally against that. What you guys should be focusing on is an inspector general for education and putting your money on getting kids to read by the third grade and directly funding that.

SENATOR CRUZ-CRAWFORD:
I am working with the NDE to get you those amendments. The long-range goal is to use these positions at Medicaid so we can fund these positions. I am working with Dr. Weiler on developing a pathway that will go on to next session.

CHAIR TAYLOR:
We're having too many technical issues, so we are going to postpone S.B. 278. Our last agenda item is public comment.

MR. WINTERHAWK:
Nevada is battle born. We do not simply follow failed policies of other states. My statement is that we are Nevadans, not Californians, not New Yorkers, not Texans and not Floridians. We need to reject both S.B. 277 and S.B. 278. Any future legislation that erodes parental rights, lowers the standards for those that are working with our children and allows State intervention in these family matters. I urge the committee to oppose any and all legislation. The only acceptable path forward is to maintain the highest professional standards for educators and our school officials, while preserving the fundamental rights of parents to raise their children without interference from the State. I stand for Nevada; I stand for parents, and I stand for our children. You will see my face; you will hear my voice. I will be here, from here on out talking, and speaking on education because we cannot allow what has failed these other states to fail our State.

CHAIR TAYLOR:
We are adjourned at 3:07 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Virginia Weitzel,
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

Senator Angela D. Taylor, Chair

DATE:

EXHIBIT SUMMARY				
Bill	**Exhibit Letter**	**Introduced on Minute Report Page No.**	**Witness / Entity**	**Description**
	A	1		Agenda
	B	1		Attendance Roster
	C	2	Michael Stewart/ Kenny Guinn Center	Presentation: An Overview of Education Policy Research
	D	3	Anna Colquitt/ Kenny Guinn Center	Policy Report: Out-of-School Youth in Southern Nevada
	E	3	Anna Colquitt/ Kenny Guinn Center	Policy Report: National Education Rankings
	F	4	Anna Colquitt/ Kenny Guinn Center	Policy Brief: Show What You Know
	G	4	Anna Colquitt/ Kenny Guinn Center	Policy Brief: Workforce Ready
	H	5	Anna Colquitt/ Kenny Guinn Center	Policy Report: From Crowded to Coordinated
S.B. 277	I	17	Senator Michelee Cruz-Crawford	Conceptional Amendment
S.B. 277	J	17	Senator Michelee Cruz-Crawford	Senate Bill 277 Presentation