

# Preparing the Way for a New Economy

A Nevada Career Pathways Initiative

Commissioned by the Clark County Education Association

December 30, 2022

## Forward

The Clark County Education Association (“CCEA”) commissioned the following report for the 82<sup>nd</sup> Nevada Legislative Session. It complements and builds upon a landscape analysis that CCEA previously commissioned: *The Landscape of Workforce Development Federally and in the State of Nevada* (August 26, 2022). The purpose of this follow-up report is to translate the findings of the landscape analysis into actionable policy recommendations that will address significant gaps in Nevada’s workforce development landscape. The objective is to foster the development of K-16 career pathways that enable individuals to prepare for and succeed in high-quality jobs that will sustain them and will contribute to the needs of the Nevada community and society.

## Background

*It is not that man must develop in order to work, but that man must work in order to develop.*

Maria Montessori

In the wake of the Great Recession of the late 2000's, Nevada found itself at an inflection point in its economic development.<sup>1</sup> Nevada's traditional economic model—one overly-dependent on consumption sectors, such as residential and commercial construction, gaming, entertainment, and mineral extraction and too little invested in innovation and economic diversification—was pushed to its breaking point. At its lowest point in 2010, Nevada had an unemployment rate nearing 14 percent, the highest nationwide at the time.<sup>2</sup> Nevada's leadership—recognizing the urgency of the situation and the need for change—took action to modernize Nevada's economic and workforce development system.

Those changes made it possible over the past decade for Nevada to make significant strides to grow and diversify its economy and develop a skilled workforce. But there is more substantial work to be done. The COVID-19 pandemic made this clear, and it appears that Nevada leaders are poised to take on the hurdles that continue to hamper the economic success of the state's workforce and employers. The work now is to channel the state's energy into a more coordinated effort.

## The Gap

Administration of workforce development suffers from several crippling defects. There are multiple, overlapping plans that lead to resources being siloed for discrete projects without strategic alignment. There are siloed data sources relied on differently by different agencies. There is a default to workforce development for historically predominant industries rather than for growing industries.<sup>3</sup>

Underlying and exacerbating these shortcomings is Nevada's failure to recognize K-12 education and K-12 teachers as an economic development priority. Career readiness starts with and depends on quality K-12 educational experiences. Quality educational experiences cannot be achieved without ensuring teacher effectiveness, which research shows is the most important in-school factor affecting

<sup>1</sup> See The Brookings Inst., Metro. Div., Brookings Mountain West & SRI Int'l, Unify Regionalize Diversify: An Economic Development Agenda for Nevada 3 (2011), available at [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1114\\_nevada\\_economy.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1114_nevada_economy.pdf) (last visited Aug. 6, 2022) (hereinafter Brookings Rep. 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See Jacob Solis, *Ten Years After Great Recession, Sisolak Inherits Mixed Economic Bag*, *The Nevada Independent*, Jan. 7, 2019, <https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/ten-years-after-great-recession-sisolak-inherits-mixed-economic-bag> (last visited Aug. 6, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> For example, a GOED-commissioned labor supply state found that “The entire workforce pipeline should be reworked so that workers from hospitality can be fed into public health and other needed fields, with an emphasis on competencies and skills rather than formal credentials.” SRI Int'l, *The Future Beyond the Pandemic: Nevada's Plan for Recovery and Resilience* (2020), available at <https://goed.nv.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Nevada-Recovery-and-Resiliency-Plan-FINAL.pdf>, (last visited Dec. 21, 2022) (hereinafter SRI Recovery Report 2022), p. 17.

student achievement.<sup>4</sup> Nevada—like many other states—is suffering from a teacher shortage that is projected to continue through the decade.<sup>5</sup> Yet neither Nevada’s economic development nor its workforce development planning attends to the K-12 teaching pipeline.

Currently, it is not only Nevada’s teaching profession that is hamstrung by faulty pipelines. Others suffer similarly particularly with respect to K-16 opportunities. Postsecondary students, industry, and Nevada’s population all pay a price for the failure to connect students’ educational experiences with industry professional standards and needs. The health-care industry offers a compelling example. As of 2020, Nevada ranked 48th among the 50 states in nurses per capita.<sup>6</sup> Two-thirds of Nevadans reside in a primary health professional shortage area, and 94.5% live in a mental health professional shortage area.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, one study projects the number of healthcare professionals needed in Clark County, alone, to triple over the next decade.<sup>8</sup>

The healthcare gap exists despite Nevada’s postsecondary institutions offering strong nursing programs. Nevada’s nursing students boast some of the highest national licensing exam pass rates in the country.<sup>9</sup> Nevada also has favorable compensation for nurses in relation to the cost of living.<sup>10</sup> Yet there are still not nearly enough people entering the profession. Nevada’s higher education may need to expand their capacity. More K-12 students may need opportunities to explore nursing as a career pathway. The healthcare industry may need to do more to communicate their professional opportunities and training needs. These actions and others require a focus not just on job opportunities but on developing and fulfilling career pathways that start in the K-12 system. They require a level of strategic planning, coordination, and allocation of resources that is not currently happening and may not be possible under the current workforce development structure.

Nevada needs to make connections from economic development priorities to K-12 education. Currently, GOED supports identification of “in-demand” jobs based on 10-year projections for market needs.<sup>11</sup> This work sometimes considers the role of higher education in preparing students for

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Opper, Isaac, M. *Teachers Matter*, RAND Corporation (2019). Available at [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR4312.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4312.html). Accessed Dec. 20, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Nationally, in spring of 2022, nearly half (44%) of all public schools reported having full- or part-time teaching vacancies. National Center for Education Statistics, *U.S. Schools Report Increased Teacher Vacancies Due to COVID-19 Pandemic*, (Mar. 3, 2022). Accessed Dec. 16, 2022. Locally, Clark County School District showed 900 licensed teaching position vacancies in FY22. CCSD Open Book, Available at <https://openbook.ccsd.net/pdf/FY-2022-Licensed-FTE-Vacancies-NRS388G6901c1.pdf>. Accessed Dec. 16, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Penzy Moog, C. *States with the highest pass rates on the nursing licensure exam*. Nursing Education (Sep. 23, 2021) Available at <https://nursingeducation.org/states-with-the-highest-pass-rates-on-the-nursing-licensure-exam/>. Accessed Dec. 20, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Griswold, M., *Health Workforce Supply and Demand in Nevada: Implications for Network Adequacy*. Nevada Health Workforce Research Center (Mar. 8, 2022), pp. 9, 12. Available at <https://doi.nv.gov>. Accessed Dec. 16, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Evans, P., *Nevada Workforce Evolving with Economy, Crucial to Development*, Nevada Business (Nov. 1, 2022). Accessed Dec. 16, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Penzy Moog, C. *States with the highest pass rates on the nursing licensure exam*. Nursing Education (Sep. 23, 2021) (ranking Nevada 3rd nationally with a cumulative 93.2% pass rate). Available at <https://nursingeducation.org/states-with-the-highest-pass-rates-on-the-nursing-licensure-exam/>. Accessed Dec. 20, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance, *2022 Workforce Blueprint: Southern Nevada*, pp. 20-21 (identifying high-demand occupational priorities for the region).

opportunities and for success.<sup>12</sup> However, it rarely, if ever, extends the view to how K-12 education can better develop both general competencies (e.g., problem solving, critical thinking, and communication) and offer career-specific exploration opportunities that would better connect, motivate, and prepare students for success.

A more strategic career pathways plan and program would have a significant impact on education, employment, and economic development in Nevada:

- Elementary and middle school students would have early exposure to career options and opportunities;
- High school students would have practical experience and training that enables them to make informed career choices and prepare themselves for postsecondary opportunities that are necessary for securing employment;
- High school graduates would be aware of and have access to programs that provide the training and knowledge needed for licensure;
- Higher education institutions would be able to build capacity to train more students to meet identified needs; and
- Industry would coordinate with K-12 and higher education institutions to align educational programs with the professional standards and practical experience needed to complete the pathway to employment.

## The Mandate: A Career Pathways Plan

The state's current workforce development activities are substantial, but they are falling short because they lack an overarching strategic vision; measurable, outcomes-based objectives; and visible exemplars. As a result, the Nevada Legislature should task the Governor's Office of Economic Development ("GOED") with developing and expanding K-16-to-employment career pathways for students to gain the skills and experiences that will sustain them in professions serving the long-term needs of their communities and of the state.

GOED's mandate should be data-based and outcomes-oriented. The work should include clear, measurable career pathways objectives aligned to GOED's Economic Development Plan goals and identified needs. The strategy should prioritize career pathways to quality jobs with a regional focus based on collaboration between K-16 education institutions and high-growth industries.

Starting the career pathway in the K-12 system will introduce middle and even elementary school students to in-demand careers. It can provide secondary and postsecondary students with practical training and experience that will help them develop valuable professional skills. And it can reinforce the importance of core educational requirements for high-quality employment. Secondary and

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<sup>12</sup> See, id., pp. 22-25 (considering higher education program alignment with high-demand occupational priorities).

postsecondary development can emphasize practical, paid work opportunities as students' progress. Engagement with postsecondary education and industry will foster better alignment between educational programs, professional credentialing, and the skills and competencies needed to be successfully employed. The career pathway can be further strengthened with tuition assistance or other incentives for students to complete their programs successfully and to enter the field for which they have prepared.

Given the teacher shortage impacting the state, and the critical need for effective educators to prepare young Nevadans for high quality jobs of the future, the career pathways initiative should start as a 5-year demonstration project and should include a K-12 educator career pathway. There are significant economic, educational, and regulatory barriers to entering the teaching profession that can be modernized through the lens of education career pathways.

Aligning K-16 education deliberately with economic development is groundbreaking work that should be treated as an evolutionary process. Proceeding via a demonstration project will allow the state to evaluate, learn, and improve on the design of career pathways. As the work develops, the demonstrations will serve as models for pathways in other industries. Development of a K-16 to employment career pathway for educators will serve as a model for healthcare and public safety pathways design and implementation including opportunities for exposure, experience, credentialing, and retention.

A career pathways demonstration will make Nevada a national leader in this area. Workforce development is a nationwide priority, yet no state is taking the integrated, systemic K-16-through-employment approach envisioned here. Situating this work in GOED allows for a level of strategic coordination, planning, and resourcing that can only occur when responsibility resides with the governor.

## The Policy: A Career Pathways Initiative

A career pathway is a series of structured and connected work-related educational opportunities and activities for K-16 through employment, enabling individuals to prepare for and develop successfully in high-quality jobs<sup>13</sup> that will sustain them and will contribute productively to the needs of the community and society. A career pathways initiative will respond to the shortcomings of current efforts. Based on its existing responsibilities, GOED is uniquely positioned to maximize the state's workforce development impact by:

- Linking economic and workforce development data for planning;
- Establishing objective, measurable expectations for career pathways outcomes;

<sup>13</sup> The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed a framework for measuring the quality of a job based on three objective, measurable dimensions: earnings quality, labor market security, and quality of the working environment. See OECD, [Job Quality](https://www.oecd.org/employment/job-quality.htm), Available at <https://www.oecd.org/employment/job-quality.htm>. (accessed Dec. 13, 2022).

- Holding educational institutions, industry, and other stakeholders accountable for results; and
- Adapting based on projected needs and demonstrated outcomes.

The following plan for a GOED-led approach to career pathways has three primary components:

1. Align career pathways with GOED's economic development planning.
2. Design and implement a career pathways demonstration project.
3. Designate K-12 education as an economic development priority.

### Align career pathways with GOED's economic development planning.

GOED will create and expand K-16 opportunities for students to develop work skills and experience that will sustain them in their careers and that align to long-term needs of their communities and of the state.

The plan for K-16 opportunities should be supported by reliable, aligned data including for the following areas:

- projections for the number of high-quality industry jobs required in the next 5-10 years;
- number and capacity of existing industry-aligned career pathway programs;
- enrollment, participation and completion rates for industry-aligned career pathway programs;
- credentialing rates and/or data for other industry-aligned indicators of workforce readiness;
- industry-aligned skill-based employee retention rates for years 2 through 5;
- projected workforce capacity in relation to the projected number of skill-based industry positions required in the next 5-10 years; and
- other relevant data as needed and available through the state's longitudinal data system.

GOED will include clear, measurable career pathways objectives aligned to identified Economic Development Plan goals and identified needs.

The objectives should include but not be limited to measurable targets based on reliable data in the following areas:

- number of individuals entering the career pathway;
- number and percentage of individuals completing distinct phases of the career pathway such as high school graduation with CTE or other career readiness credits, community college program completion, professional credentialing or certifications earned, etc.;
- number and percentage of career pathway participants earning high-quality employment in the target industry; and

- number and percentage of career pathway participants employed at least two years in the target industry.

Prioritize career pathways with a regional focus based on collaboration between local educational agencies, higher education entities operating in the region, GOED-authorized regional development authorities, and representatives from target industries.

Effective career pathways development requires coordination and collaboration among stakeholders whose work is typically siloed from each other. Aligning career pathways with economic development creates opportunities for coordination and collaboration to take place. It means ensuring that K-16 education provides students the kinds of skills (problem solving, critical thinking, communication) that are important to all high-quality jobs as well as opportunities to explore industry- or profession-specific pathways that are of interest to them.

### Design and implement a career pathways demonstration project.

GOED should have the opportunity to identify two to three industries in which to pilot development of K-16 career pathways.

GOED should carry out a five-year demonstration program to facilitate the creation and implementation of career pathways within the public K-16 education system aligned to the K-16 career pathways elements of the State Plan for Economic Development. The industries should be among those that GOED has identified as priorities in its Economic Development Plan provided that K-12 education should be a priority industry for the reasons discussed, above.

### Demonstration Project Design and Selection

GOED should develop and implement a competitive process to select project proposals that draw on best practices for career pathways design. To that end, the selection process should require career pathway project proposals to address, at a minimum, the following components:

#### 1. Job preparation

The types of priority industry, high-quality jobs for which the career pathway(s) will prepare students based on GOED guidance regarding the definition of and objective criteria for determining “high quality.”<sup>14</sup>

#### 2. K-16 opportunities

The types of K-16 career pathways opportunities that the project will offer including but not limited to the following:

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, footnote 1, supra, regarding OECD guidance on a framework and criteria for determining the relative quality of a job along three objective, measurable dimensions.



- early exposure (career option exposure beginning in middle school or earlier);
- multiple entry points at both secondary and postsecondary levels;
- meaningful, practice-based (apprenticeship, internship, etc.) secondary and postsecondary opportunities including paid work-based learning opportunities aligned to the career pathway and industry priority;
- pathway recruitment practices that foster equity and inclusion of historically underserved populations; and
- secondary and postsecondary credentialing opportunities aligned to the skills and experience needed for employment in the target industry.

### 3. Early Career

The types of early career guidance, incentives, and support that the project will offer including but not limited to the following:

- anticipated work opportunities including employer commitments to recruiting candidates who have fulfilled the career pathways qualifications for employment;
- early career scaffolding of professional supports and development including but not limited to mentoring; and
- financial incentives and supports that foster equitable access and that eliminate or substantially reduce financial means as a barrier to entry to the profession.

### 4. Pathway Development and Implementation

The capacity needed to develop and implement the pathway including but not limited to the following:

- the plan for development and administration of the career pathway including staffing capacity and needs;
- the partner K-12, higher education, and industry organizations that will have a material role in project development and/or implementation;
- the role and responsibilities of the GOED-authorized regional development authority; and
- the role and responsibilities of any other partners necessary for success.

### 5. Financial Plan

The financial plan for the project including but not limited to the following:

- the projected 5-year (including planning year) budget by year;
- existing funding sources and amounts that the organization will allocate to the project;
- anticipated funding opportunities (grants, etc.); and
- remaining funding needs for project implementation.

## 6. Outcomes

Anticipated project outcomes including goals and targets for the following:

- the target number of total project participants;
- the target number of participants that successfully complete one or more intermediate stages of the career pathway as marked by earning secondary or postsecondary credit, a credential, certification, or other externally validated and recognized documentation of interim completion; and
- the target number of participants that successfully complete the K-16 pathway—regardless of their entry point.

The selection process should include preferences for projects in industries that have potential to be models or exemplars for developing career pathways in other priority industries and/or projects that demonstrate strong potential to expand equitable access to career opportunities for groups that have historically been underrepresented in the profession and/or have lacked access to existing pathways.

### Demonstration Project Reporting

The legislature should require GOED to prepare interim and final reports related to the project. The reports should be delivered in time to inform the upcoming legislative session (no later than October 31 following completion of the third year of the demonstration project).

If the timing for a report falls in an even-numbered year, the report can be delivered directly to the legislature and the governor. If the interim timing falls in an odd-numbered year, the report can be delivered to the legislative counsel and the governor.

### Interim Report

An interim report will enable GOED, the legislature, the governor, and other stakeholders to assess initial progress and determine what adjustments, if any, need to be made for the duration of the project. An interim report should include, at a minimum, the following elements:

1. Description of the Demonstration Program including but not limited to the following:
  - the priorities identified;
  - the project selection process;
  - the projects selected;
  - summary of the career pathway design for each selected industry;
  - the industry-specific career pathway goals and objectives;
  - the status of implementation for each career pathway; and
  - a summary of proposals received but not selected for the demonstration project.

2. Interim evaluation of each career pathway demonstration (2 or 3 total) including but not limited to the following:
  - early successes of each pathway based on the industry-specific goals and objectives;
  - early challenges to implementation; and
  - changes, if any, to the career pathway design and implementation anticipated for the duration of the demonstration period

### Final Report

A final report will enable GOED, the legislature, the governor, and other stakeholders to assess the success of the project; determine whether and how it should be continued or expanded; and what policy or practical changes would make it more effective. A final report should include, at a minimum, the following elements:

1. Description of the Demonstration Program including but not limited to the following:
  - the priorities identified;
  - the project selection process;
  - the projects selected;
  - summary of the career pathway design for each selected industry; and
  - the industry-specific career pathway goals and objectives.
2. Evaluation of each career pathway demonstration (2 or 3 total) including but not limited to the following:
  - success of the industry-specific project based on the industry-specific goals and objectives;
  - assessment of the return on the state's investment in the career pathway;
  - opportunities to extend and/or expand the industry-specific career pathway;
  - opportunities for the industry-specific demonstration to serve as an exemplar or model for career pathways in other economic development priority industries; and
  - quantitative and qualitative data supporting the judgments and conclusions.
3. Evaluation of the overall Demonstration Project success including but not limited to the following:
  - overall outcomes of the demonstration project in relation to the goals and objectives;
  - project successes and the key elements contributing to success;
  - project shortcomings and the key elements hindering success;
  - recommendations for policy changes that would foster successful expansion of the career pathways initiative in the event the legislature and governor decide to continue it; and

- quantitative and qualitative data supporting the judgments and conclusions.

### Designate K-12 education as an economic development priority.

The K-12 education workforce is essential to the economic development and welfare of the people of Nevada. The current and growing shortage of K-12 educators is well documented. It weakens economic development and creates competitive disadvantages for the state. By including K-12 education in its economic development plans and recognizing K-12 educators as an essential economic development workforce, GOED will help Nevada’s children be better prepared for and successful in high-quality jobs that will sustain them and will contribute productively to Nevada’s welfare and growth.

In light of the importance of K-12 education to both workforce and economic development, the composition of the GOED board should be modified to include the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Currently, the board includes the Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education, or his or her designee, along with the Director of the Department of Business and Industry and the Director of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation as nonvoting members.<sup>15</sup> The statute should be amended to include the Superintendent of Public Instruction, or his or her designee, in the same capacity.

## Conclusion

Nevada is at an inflection point with respect to workforce development. The state can declare current efforts to be sufficient, maintaining the status quo. It can declare “mission accomplished” and reallocate workforce development resources elsewhere. Or it can use the foundation that has been laid to construct a vision, plan, and design for transformative workforce development practices that will better serve the people— especially the children—of Nevada through alignment of K-16 education, K-12 educators, and economic development toward the growth of the state.

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<sup>15</sup> See N.R.S. § 231.033 1.(b).