The State of Education in Nevada (2025): A Comprehensive Report

Executive Summary

Nevada's education system faces persistent challenges but also some recent improvements. **Key findings include:**

- **Below-Average Student Achievement (High Confidence):** Nevada's K-12 students score below national averages on standardized tests. In 2022, Nevada's fourth- and eighth-graders trailed the nation in NAEP reading and math, continuing a long-running performance gap[1]. Only about **25%–30% of students are proficient** in core subjects, and ACT scores remain low (average composite ~17–18 out of 36), signaling college-readiness concerns (High Confidence).
- **Stagnant or Declining Post-Pandemic Outcomes (High Confidence):** Achievement dropped during COVID-19 and has not fully rebounded. **NAEP 2022 results** showed significant declines from 2019 (e.g. –7 points in eighth-grade math)[2]. By 2024, **fourth-grade scores improved slightly** but are still *3–5 points below* pre-pandemic levels[3]. Eighth-grade math in 2024 hit a **20+ year low**[4].
- **Gradual Improvement in Graduation Rates (High Confidence):** The **four-year high school graduation rate** rose from **71% in 2013 to 84% in 2019**[5]. Due to pandemic disruptions, it dipped to **81% by 2022-23**[6] – still below the ~86% national average, but a marked increase over the last decade. Dropout rates are around 5% statewide (higher for underserved groups) (High Confidence)[7][8].
- **Chronic Early Literacy Struggles (High Confidence):** Fewer than **50% of Nevada third-graders** read on grade level, a critical benchmark. In 2022, only **about one-quarter of fourth-graders** scored *proficient* on reading exams[9]. Eighth-grade reading proficiency is similarly low (~30%), underscoring a crisis in literacy that threatens later success.
- **Low Per-Pupil Funding Despite Recent Increases (High Confidence):** Nevada's **per-student spending (~$13,000)** remains about **$4,000 below** the U.S. average[10]. Even after a record $2.6 billion K-12 budget boost in 2023, Nevada ranks roughly **45th–49th in school funding** depending on the measure. Experts recommend ~$17,000 per pupil for adequacy, highlighting a **significant funding gap**[11].
- **New Funding Formula – More Transparent but Still Insufficient (High Confidence):** The **Pupil-Centered Funding Plan (PCFP)**, implemented in 2021, consolidated most revenue streams into a weighted formula accounting for English learners, low-income ("at-risk"), and gifted students[12]. While it increased equity and transparency, overall funding

remains **well below needed levels**. Nevada spends only ~**57% of what high-poverty districts should receive** according to a 2018 study[13]. **Facility needs** also persist, with **overcrowded schools** in fast-growing Las Vegas suburbs using portable classrooms and year-round calendars (Medium Confidence)[14][15].

- **Severe Teacher Shortages Easing After Pay Raises (Medium Confidence):** Nevada's teacher workforce crisis peaked around 2021–2022 with ~**3,000 vacancies statewide**. Recent 15–20% salary increases and hiring incentives funded in 2023 have cut vacancies significantly[16][17]. In Clark County (the largest district), open teaching positions fell to **320 (2%)** in fall 2025, the lowest in six years[18]. **Teacher attrition dropped 30%** year-over-year (from ~12% down to 8–9%)[16]. Nevertheless, **hard-to-staff subjects** (special education, math, science) and rural schools still face recruiting challenges (High Confidence).

- **Competitive Teacher Pay Still Lags Cost of Living (High Confidence):** Average teacher salaries in Nevada (~**$67,000** in 2024) now rank in the middle of U.S. states[19], but this is offset by Nevada's rising living costs. After adjustments, **real teacher pay** remains lower than in many states. New teachers start around $47k[19], and unions note veteran pay compression issues. Improving compensation helped, but **retention will require sustained support**, as working conditions and housing affordability remain concerns (High Confidence).

- **Persistent Equity Gaps (High Confidence):** Educational outcomes vary starkly by subgroup. **Low-income, Black, and Latino students consistently perform far below** White and Asian peers. Nevada's Black students score on average ~**29 points lower** than White students on NAEP – equivalent to roughly **3 years of learning behind**[20]. Only **4% of Black and 13% of Hispanic eighth-graders** reached NAEP math proficiency, versus 34% of White students[21][22]. Likewise, students from low-income families averaged **21 points lower** than non-disadvantaged students[20]. **Graduation rates for Black (~72%) and Hispanic (~80%) students** trail White students (~89%), and only **two-thirds of students with disabilities** graduate on time[23]. These inequities are longstanding and widening post-pandemic.

- **Urban-Rural Divide (Medium Confidence):** Nevada's urban districts (Clark and Washoe) educate ~90% of students and face big-city challenges: high ELL populations, overcrowded schools in growth areas, and concentrated poverty. Rural districts, while smaller, struggle with **limited course offerings, teacher vacancies, and funding volatility**. Some rural communities boast high graduation rates (e.g. White Pine County surged from 67% to 87% grad rate in four years)[24], often aided by close-knit support and local industry funding. However, remote areas often lack access to advanced coursework, specialized services, and technology infrastructure, creating an **opportunity gap** between Nevada's

rural and urban students.

- **Governance and Structural Challenges (Medium Confidence):** Nevada's unique K-12 governance—17 county-based districts, including the nation's **5th-largest district (Clark County)**—poses structural issues. Clark County School District (CCSD) alone enrolls ~65% of Nevada's students, which some argue leads to bureaucracy and one-size-fits-all policies. Past attempts to **decentralize CCSD** (through a 2017 reorganization giving more autonomy to local school "precincts") had mixed results. The sheer scale of CCSD is often cited as a disadvantage, although it provides economies of scale in areas like procurement. The State Board of Education (mostly appointed) sets policy, but implementation varies widely at the local level. **Coordination across such a large, diverse system remains difficult**, affecting consistency in outcomes.
- **Early Childhood Education Lags (High Confidence):** Nevada invests relatively little in early childhood. Only **9% of Nevada's four-year-olds** attend state-funded pre-K, and just 1% of three-year-olds[25]. This ranks Nevada near the bottom for preschool access. State pre-K programs (Nevada Ready!) have expanded enrollment to ~3,600 children in 2023-24, but **capacity meets a fraction of demand**. Quality is also a concern: Nevada met only 5 of 10 quality benchmarks in 2022 according to NIEER. Many low-income children enter kindergarten without formal preschool, contributing to achievement gaps evident by 3rd grade.
- **Higher Education Enrollment Down, But Workforce Alignment Improving (Medium Confidence):** The Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) – including UNLV, UNR, state colleges, and community colleges – saw **enrollment declines during COVID** and only partial recovery. College continuation rates hover around 50% of high school graduates. Completion is a challenge: **6-year graduation rates** are about 55% at UNR and 45% at UNLV, and much lower at community colleges. Affordability is a mixed picture – Nevada's in-state tuition is moderate (community college ~$3,300/year, universities ~$8,000/year), and the state has increased need-based aid, but many students still cite cost of living as a barrier. A positive trend is closer **alignment with workforce needs**: NSHE institutions have expanded healthcare, technology, and skilled trades programs (e.g. UNLV's medical school, TMCC's advanced manufacturing training) to support Nevada's diversifying economy. Yet, a sizable skills gap remains, and employers report shortages of qualified local graduates in STEM fields.
- **College/Career Readiness Gaps (High Confidence):** Despite rising graduation rates, many Nevada grads are not fully prepared for college or careers. In 2018, **over 40% of Nevada's university-bound graduates** and nearly **70% of community college entrants** required remedial math or English courses[26]. This led NSHE to abolish standalone remedial classes in 2021 in favor of corequisite college courses[27]. Only **13%**

of Nevada's ACT-tested students met all four college-ready benchmarks (English, math, reading, science) in 2022 (Low Confidence – estimate based on ACT data). Career readiness is improving through Career & Technical Education (CTE) programs – Nevada's CTE completer graduation rate is above 95%, and initiatives like Jobs for Nevada's Graduates have strong placement rates – but participation is limited. Overall, the pipeline from K-12 to higher ed and the workforce is leaky, with too many graduates unprepared for the demands of college-level coursework or the skill requirements of Nevada's growth industries.

- **Urgent Challenges and Opportunities (High Confidence):** Nevada's most pressing education challenges are **funding adequacy, early literacy, and persistent achievement gaps**. These contribute to the state's low rankings (Nevada has perennially been in the bottom five of Education Week's Quality Counts index[28][29]). However, opportunities exist: the influx of new funding in 2023–25, if sustained and strategically spent, could reduce class sizes, improve facilities, and expand student supports. The state's **improvement trajectory** (it was once the "fastest-improving" in Quality Counts[30]) shows that progress is possible with focused effort. **Community and industry partnerships** – such as tech companies supporting STEM programs and casinos funding early childhood centers – are emerging to supplement public investments. Nevada stands at a crossroads where informed policy choices and civic engagement can translate recent momentum into lasting educational improvement.

Most Urgent Needs: (1) **Invest in Early Literacy and Intervention:** Ensure all students read proficiently by Grade 3 through expanded pre-K, full implementation of the science of reading, and targeted tutoring (High Confidence in impact). (2) **Sustain Funding Increases:** Close the ~$4,000 per-pupil spending gap with national averages by maintaining and building on recent budget gains (High Confidence – funding tied to outcomes[10]). (3) **Address Teacher Pipeline & Pay:** Make Nevada a competitive destination for educators by continuing salary improvements, mentoring new teachers, and improving working conditions, especially in high-need schools (High Confidence). These steps, combined with strong accountability and community support, are critical for Nevada to shed its "bottom of the rankings" status and deliver the quality education its children deserve.

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1. Student Outcomes (K-12)

Assessment Performance: Nevada students have long trailed national averages on standardized assessments, though trends vary by grade and subject. On the **National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)** – often called the Nation's Report Card – Nevada's **2022 scores** were significantly below U.S.

averages in most areas. For example, **8th-grade math** in Nevada averaged **269** (out of 500) vs. **273 nationally**[1]. Only **21% of Nevada 8th graders** reached NAEP's Proficient level in math (vs. 26% in 2019)[21]. **Fourth-grade NAEP results** in 2022 were similarly low: Nevada's 4th graders scored **6–7 points lower in math and reading** than in 2019[2], and well below national proficiency rates (e.g. ~25% vs ~34% nationally)[9]. The **ACT**, taken by all Nevada 11th graders as a college readiness exam, had a 2022 state **average composite around 17.3**, below the national average (~19.8, which includes many non-mandated test-takers). This indicates many students are not meeting college-readiness benchmarks (for instance, less than **20% meet the ACT math benchmark**, according to ACT profile reports).

Trend Analysis (10-Year): Over the past decade, student outcomes saw modest improvements pre-pandemic, followed by setbacks. **Graduation rates** climbed steadily from **70.7% in 2013 to 84.1% in 2018-19**[5], reflecting statewide efforts to reduce dropouts. NAEP scores also inched up in the 2010s – e.g. Nevada's 4th-grade math NAEP proficiency rose from 34% in 2013 to ~37% in 2019[9]. However, **COVID-19 sharply disrupted progress**. From 2019 to 2022, Nevada saw statistically significant declines on NAEP: **–5 points in 8th-grade math** and **–7 points in 4th-grade reading**, mirroring national drops[31]. State exams (Smarter Balanced Assessments, SBAC) likewise showed proficiency rates plunging in 2021, then partially rebounding. For instance, 3rd-grade English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency fell from ~48% in 2019 to ~40% in 2021, before rising to ~45% in 2023 (approximate, based on NDE data). Despite recent gains, **2022–2023 scores remain below pre-pandemic baselines** in most subjects, meaning a decade's worth of improvement was largely erased by the pandemic. *Figure:* Over 2013–2023, Nevada's 4th-grade NAEP math scale score moved from 235 to ~233 (peaking at 239 in 2019 before dropping) – a net flat trend, while graduation rates improved overall, as shown below.

Table: Key Student Outcome Metrics – Nevada vs. U.S.

Metric (Most Recent)	**Nevada**	**United States**
NAEP 4th Grade Math (2022)	232 (NV avg score) – 26% at Proficient[32][9]	235 (US avg score) – 36% at Proficient[33][9]
NAEP 8th Grade Reading (2022)	256 (NV avg score) – 27% at Proficient (no change from 2019)[2]	259 (US avg score) – 30% at Proficient (decline from 2019)
HS Graduation Rate (Class of 2023)	81.4% (on-time, 4-year)[6]	~86% (2019 nationwide; ~84% est. 2022)[5]

Metric (Most Recent)	**Nevada**	**United States**
ACT Composite (Grade 11, 2022)	~17.3 (mandated testing)	19.8 (national average*)
3rd Graders Reading at Grade Level	~47% (SBAC ELA proficient, 2022)**	~50% (est. national**)
8th Graders Math at Grade Level	~28% (SBAC math proficient, 2022)**	~33% (est. national**)

<small>*Note:* ACT national average includes many states where only college-bound students test. **SBAC** = Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium exam. Nevada's SBAC proficiency roughly aligns with "on grade level" performance. National SBAC comparisons are approximate, as not all states use SBAC.</small>

These figures underscore Nevada's academic underperformance. In national rankings, **Education Week's Quality Counts 2021 report** graded Nevada's K-12 achievement a **D–, 50th of 50 states**[28]. Recent NAEP 2024 results bring a glimmer of hope: **Nevada's 4th graders gained 4 points in math**, narrowing the gap to the U.S. average to just 4 points[34][35]. Fourth-grade reading also improved slightly, putting Nevada only 1 point shy of the national score[35]. These gains suggest that **learning recovery efforts (tutoring, summer programs) may be paying off**, at least in early grades. In contrast, **8th-grade outcomes continue to slide**, indicating middle school as an acute trouble spot[36].

Graduation & Dropout Rates: Nevada's *Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate* (ACGR) for 2022-23 was **81.4% statewide**[6]. This is a few points below the U.S. average (~85%) but a significant improvement from a decade ago. By subgroup, 2022 graduation rates were highest for Asian students (~94%) and White students (~89%), and lower for Hispanics (~81%) and Blacks (~72%) (NDE Report Card data). The **dropout rate** (annual grades 9–12 "event" dropout) was **~3.9%** in 2021-22, down from 4–5% in the early 2010s[37]. However, dropout rates are far higher in certain categories: about **7.5% of 12th-grade English Learners and students with disabilities** dropped out in 2022-23[38][8], compared to <5% for non-EL, non-IEP peers. *Trend:* Dropout rates in Nevada declined through 2019, spiked slightly during COVID (as disengagement rose), and are now trending back down. Some rural districts occasionally see double-digit dropout rates (e.g. Mineral County hit 14.8% in 2023)[39], whereas many suburban districts keep dropouts under 5% consistently[40].

College & Career Readiness: Preparing students for life after high school remains a challenge. Though a growing share of graduates are earning the

state's College and Career Ready (CCR) diploma, **remediation rates in college signal readiness gaps**. For the Nevada HS class of 2019, **42% of UNR freshmen and 31% of UNLV freshmen** needed remedial coursework[41]. At the College of Southern Nevada (two-year), an alarming **69% of recent grads required remediation** in math or English[26]. These figures prompted NSHE to move to **corequisite remediation** (placing students in credit-bearing courses with support) in 2021[27]. On career readiness, Nevada reports that about **55% of students in the class of 2022 earned a CCR diploma or an industry-recognized credential** (Governor's Office of Workforce Innovation, 2023). The state has expanded Career & Technical Education – over **84% of CTE concentrators** (students completing a career pathway) went on to postsecondary education or employment[42][43]. Still, large numbers of graduates enter adulthood without the skills to thrive in Nevada's economy, which increasingly demands postsecondary training. Improving early fundamentals (reading by 3rd grade, algebra by 8th) is widely seen as key to boosting later college/workforce readiness[44][45].

Third-Grade Reading: Achieving reading proficiency by the end of third grade is a pivotal milestone. In Nevada, **only about 48% of third graders in 2022** were proficient in English Language Arts on the SBAC exam (meaning roughly half are below grade level in reading). This metric has improved slightly from ~45% in 2015 to ~50% pre-pandemic, but COVID erased some gains. Nevada's **Read by Grade 3** initiative (launched 2015) poured resources into early literacy, including reading specialists and early screening. While the 2020 legislature removed the stringent retention requirement for struggling readers, the emphasis on early intervention remains. **Research shows third-grade reading proficiency strongly predicts high school graduation**[46]. Nevada's current data – with a majority of low-income and minority third-graders not reading on grade level – suggests an ongoing crisis. The state's response includes new phonics-based curricula aligned to the "science of reading" and tutoring programs funded by federal recovery dollars[47][48]. These efforts aim to boost the percentage of students reading proficiently by third grade (a goal of 85% was set by prior state plans, though Nevada is far from it).

Eighth-Grade Math & Readiness: Eighth grade is another make-or-break point. Nevada's **8th-grade SBAC math proficiency** in 2022 was only ~28%. This helps explain why NAEP 8th-grade math hit its lowest state score since 2000[4]. Mastery of middle school math (pre-algebra/algebra) is critical for high school STEM courses and college admission. The state's struggles here correlate with downstream effects: for instance, Nevada has one of the lowest rates of students taking advanced math in high school and subsequently one of the highest percentages of adults without a college degree in STEM fields. Recognizing this, Nevada invested in a pilot "Algebra I readiness" program (called **Algebra Zero**) to strengthen foundational math in middle school[49]. Additionally, the new weighted funding formula provides extra funds for "at-risk" students (defined partly by a low 8th-grade credit adequacy predictor) to support interventions before high school. Still, as of 2023, only about **35% of**

Nevada 8th graders take algebra in 8th grade (versus ~50% nationally), indicating many are behind the expected trajectory.

English Learners (EL) & Special Education: Nevada's diverse student population includes ~**11% English Learners** and ~13% students with disabilities. Outcomes for these groups are concerning. Only **5% of EL students** scored proficient in reading and 7% in math on 2022 state assessments (per Nevada Report Card), reflecting language barriers and academic gaps. The state has had dedicated "Zoom Schools" (with extra funding for EL-rich schools) since 2015, which yielded some gains (e.g. improved reading scores among ELs in those schools). Under the PCFP, EL students now carry a **0.45 weight** – roughly an extra \$4,200 per EL student in funding[50][51]. This is intended to provide resources like bilingual aides, ESL curriculum, and teacher training in TESL strategies. Special education students (those with IEPs) have a graduation rate around **67%** (four-year)[23] and proficiency in single digits on state tests. Nevada has struggled to staff critical special education roles (tie-in with teacher shortage), impacting service quality. The **Inclusive Practice** reforms and increased special education funding (a weight of 2.0 under PCFP) aim to improve outcomes, but data so far do not show major movement. Closing these subgroup gaps will be crucial for lifting Nevada's overall performance profile.

2. Funding & Resources

Per-Pupil Spending: Nevada has historically ranked near the bottom in education spending. In Fiscal Year 2020, Nevada spent about **$9,800 per pupil**, versus the U.S. average of $13,494[52][53]. This placed Nevada ~45th among states. Thanks to recent legislative investments, per-pupil spending has risen – roughly **$11,673 in 2023** (estimate) and about **$13,000 in 2024**[10]. Even so, Nevada's spending remains **approximately \$4,000 below the national average** on a raw basis[10]. Adjusting for cost of living narrows the gap somewhat (Nevada's cost index is slightly lower than California or East Coast states), but by any measure, Nevada spends significantly less on K-12 than most states. For perspective, **New York** spends over \$30,000 per student, and the U.S. leader (D.C.) exceeds \$31,000[54][55]. Nevada's spending is more comparable to states like Florida or Arizona, which also invest relatively less in schools.

In **national rankings of school finance**, Nevada often comes last or near-last when combining spending and equity measures. For example, the Education Law Center's **Making the Grade 2021** report gave Nevada a **21/100 on funding adequacy (rank 45/48)**[56]. Education Week's 2019 Quality Counts ranked Nevada **50th in finance** (D– grade)[29]. The state points out these rankings used data before the latest funding increases, suggesting Nevada may inch upward as new dollars flow. Indeed, Nevada's **31% boost in per-student funding from 2018 to 2025** is among the largest nationwide[57], reflecting a policy shift to prioritize education in recent budgets.

State vs. Local vs. Federal Funding: Nevada's education funding comes

from a mix of state, local, and federal sources. Historically, **local revenues have been the primary source**, mainly via property taxes and a portion of sales tax (the Local School Support Tax). In FY2013, for example, Nevada schools received **\$2.56 billion local, \$1.18 billion state, and \$392 million federal**[58]. That worked out to roughly **62% local, 29% state, 9% federal**. The *Nevada Plan* (the funding system in place from 1967–2020) guaranteed a base funding level by using state dollars to fill the gap between local revenues and a per-pupil target. Under the new **Pupil-Centered Funding Plan**, most local revenues (except debt service levies) are now pooled at the state level and redistributed. Essentially, **state and local funds are combined** into one pot, which is allocated to districts on a weighted formula. In FY2024, the split is roughly **60–65% state (including local in the pot)** and the remainder from other local discretionary funds and federal grants. Federal funding (Title I, IDEA, etc.) typically constitutes 8–10% of total K-12 funding in Nevada, although it spiked with one-time COVID relief.

The **PCFP** aims to equalize funding across rich and poor areas: wealthy districts no longer simply keep all local revenue, but rather excess is redistributed. For example, previously property-rich districts like Eureka (with a large mining tax base) far outspent others. Now, that revenue is shared via the state formula. Still, there are **hold-harmless provisions** and a phase-in such that no district receives a dramatic cut. *Funding breakdown example:* In 2022-23, Clark County (with ~75% of state enrollment) received about \$5 billion in combined state/local funding, while all rural counties combined received around \$1 billion (NDE finance data). The **state general fund** contributes significantly – about \$2.5 billion/year in the current biennium – supplemented by local property and sales taxes. Nevada notably lacks local school boards with independent taxing authority beyond what's legislatively approved, which centralizes funding decisions at the state legislature.

Pupil-Centered Funding Plan (PCFP) Explained: Enacted in 2019 (SB543) and implemented in FY2022, PCFP replaced the antiquated Nevada Plan. Under PCFP, each student carries a **"base weight" plus additional weights** if they belong to certain groups: - **Base Funding:** A per-student dollar amount (~\$6,980 in FY2022, increased to \$7,431 in FY2023, and \$9,400 in FY2025) set by the Legislature[51][59]. This base is multiplied by enrollment to allocate core funding. - **Weighted Categories:** 1) **English Learners (EL):** weight of 0.45 – meaning an EL student should receive 1.45 × base funding (so an extra 45%). 2) **At-Risk (Low-Income):** weight ~0.24 (initially set to fund students in the lowest income quintile, identified via a "Grad Score" indicating risk of not graduating)[60][61]. 3) **Gifted and Talented:** weight 0.12 (for GATE-identified students)[62]. **Special Education** is funded separately via a block grant plus a weight (~2.0) for students with disabilities. - A student qualifying for multiple categories only receives the **highest single weight** (no "double dipping")[63]. - **Example:** In FY2025, base \$9,414; an EL student gets an additional \$4,236 (45% of base)[51]. A non-EL but at-risk student gets about \$2,259 extra (24% of base).

The PCFP was intended to direct more funds to students with greater needs and to simplify the funding streams (over 80 categorical funds were rolled into the formula)[64]. **Impact since implementation:** Transparency has improved – one can see how much each school is allocated per weighted student. The **Las Vegas area (Clark County)** has the highest concentration of weighted students (due to urban poverty and EL populations), so it received a substantial share of new weighted dollars[65]. In 2023, about **4% of total funding statewide** was distributed via weights (approximately \$163 million)[66] – a figure advocates argue should increase. The Guinn Center's independent evaluation in late 2023 found the PCFP a "huge stride" but noted **Nevada would need \$3.2 billion more over 10 years** to reach funding adequacy[67][68]. Since the PCFP did not magically enlarge the pie, many districts still face tight budgets. For example, **rural districts** benefitted less from weights (fewer EL/at-risk students) and more from a small-county adjustment that remains in place. **Clark County** saw increased state aid due to its high needs, but its leaders say it's still not enough to address massive class sizes and aging facilities. Overall, PCFP modernized the formula and highlighted the **shortfall between current funding (~\$10k per pupil in 2020) and targets (~\$14–17k)**[69].

Adequacy and Recent Investments: The 2023 Legislature approved an **historic $2.6 billion increase** for education over the biennium[70]. This allowed raising the base funding and provided \$250 million for teacher raises (SB231)[71]. As a result, per-pupil spending jumped by roughly 22% in one year. Despite this, Nevada's spending **remains inadequate by expert standards**. Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA), a school finance consulting firm, recommended Nevada spend **\$17,000+ per student** to meet outcome goals[72]. Currently at ~$13k, Nevada meets only ~76% of that recommendation. To reach the national average or adequacy targets, further revenue sources may be needed (the Commission on School Funding has floated ideas like adjusting mining taxes, revisiting property tax caps, or reallocating general funds). One positive: Nevada's booming economy (led by surging gaming revenues) enabled large 2021 and 2023 funding increases; however, this also raises questions of **stability** in an economy reliant on tourism.

Funding Distribution Equity: Before PCFP, Nevada had one of the nation's *least equitable* funding patterns – higher-poverty districts received only **57 cents for every dollar** that low-poverty districts got[73][74]. Clark County, with many Title I schools, often spent less per pupil than some rural districts with easier demographics. PCFP has started to address this by directing more funds per weighted student. For example, a high-poverty urban elementary now gets additional at-risk and EL dollars, whereas a wealthier suburban school does not. According to the Education Law Center, Nevada's funding progressivity (the degree to which high-poverty districts get more per pupil than low-poverty) improved slightly by 2021, but it's still regressive overall (meaning poorer districts still end up with somewhat **less** per pupil than richer ones, when local resources are factored)[73]. This is partly because Nevada's weights have been

underfunded – initially set at fractions of recommended levels due to limited funds. In 2023, only about **4% of total funding** was through weighted supplements[66]. Policymakers acknowledge more work to "fully fund" the weights so that, for instance, being an at-risk student would bring a true +50% funding boost instead of the current smaller bump.

Facilities and Overcrowding: A visible sign of resource strain is Nevada's school infrastructure. **Clark County**, home to Las Vegas, has grappled with rapid enrollment growth for decades. Even though CCSD enrollment plateaued around ~300,000 recently (and even dipped during the pandemic), certain fast-growing areas (e.g., southwest Las Vegas and Henderson) face **severe overcrowding**. As of 2024, some high schools (e.g. Liberty HS) were at **128% of capacity (3,213 students in a building for 2,509)**[75], requiring zone rezoning and new construction plans. Dozens of schools use **portable classrooms** (trailers) to handle overflow. In 2023-24, CCSD had 13 elementary schools on a multi-track **year-round calendar** – a last-resort measure when enrollment exceeds capacity by 125% for 3+ years[14][15]. Year-round schedules disrupt family life and indicate that traditional funding for construction (largely local bonds) hasn't kept up. Voters in 2016 rejected a property tax measure for school capital needs[76], limiting CCSD's ability to build. As a consequence, **maintenance backlogs** grew: some Vegas schools report leaky roofs, 30-year-old air conditioners, and overcrowded cafeterias. Rural districts have facility needs too – many schools were built mid-20th century and need modernization (e.g., Elko HS over 70 years old). Nevada does not have a statewide school construction fund, so wealth disparities emerge: Reno's Washoe County passed a capital funding sales tax in 2016, enabling a spree of new schools, while Clark relies on an older bond fund projected to run short. *One bright spot:* a new **$200 million State infrastructure program** (2021) helped rural districts with critical repairs.

Educational Resources & Class Sizes: Nevada's **class sizes are among the largest** in the nation, a direct result of lean funding. In 2019, Nevada's **pupil-teacher ratio was 19:1** (national average ~16:1)[77][78]. In practice, many classrooms are far more crowded: it's not uncommon for Clark County 1st-grade classes to have 28–30 students, or high school core classes with 35–40 students. State law sets target ratios (e.g. 16:1 in K-3), but districts routinely obtain waivers due to lack of staffing and space. The 2023 funding boost is intended to help hire more teachers and reduce class sizes gradually. Some progress is being reported: CCSD hired over **1,300 additional teachers** for 2023-24, nudging ratios down in early grades (e.g. average K-2 class size dropped from ~20 to 18 in CCSD according to district data). Still, Nevada will likely need thousands more teachers to meet recommended class sizes, especially in urban schools where crowding is worst.

Learning Materials and Technology: Resource equity isn't just about money – it's also about what that money provides. During the pandemic, Nevada struggled with the digital divide: in 2020 roughly **1 in 3 students**

lacked a device or home internet for distance learning. Emergency initiatives (Connecting Kids NV) closed that gap by providing Chromebooks and hotspots. By 2021, virtually all students had access to a device (often through CARES Act funds). However, the quality of access (reliable broadband, tech support) still varies, especially in rural areas where broadband can be spotty. On curriculum and materials: Nevada adopted new academic standards (Common Core) in the 2010s, but until recently many classrooms were using outdated textbooks or piecemeal resources. The state has since invested in standards-aligned materials (e.g., new K-5 literacy curriculum under Read by Grade 3). Resource disparities remain, though – wealthier PTOs in suburbs can fundraise for science labs, music programs, etc., whereas high-poverty schools often cannot. The state's weighted funding allows some extra discretionary funds at Title I schools, which principals report using for things like hiring reading interventionists or buying supplemental software.

Summary of Funding Ranking: By most measures, Nevada's **financial effort in education is low**. Nevada spends about **2.9% of its state wealth (GSP) on K-12**, one of the smallest shares nationally (Education Law Center, 2021). Part of this is due to Nevada's low tax structure (no state income tax, property tax caps) and competing budget priorities (like being a low-tax state to attract business). The state's **new funding formula is a step toward fairness**, but the overall pie's size is the pressing issue. As the Guinn Center concluded, *"Nevada's average per-pupil allocation, about \$13,000, still trails the national average by about \$4,000"*[10], and there is consensus that **underfunding is a root cause** of many educational shortcomings (confidence: high, as multiple data points corroborate the funding gap).

3. Educator Workforce

Teacher Shortage Overview: Nevada has faced **chronic teacher shortages**, with the situation reaching crisis levels in recent years. In fall 2021, as schools fully reopened, Nevada started the year with an estimated ~**1,500 teacher vacancies** in Clark County and over **3,000 statewide** (per Nevada State Education Association)[79]. This meant roughly **5–6% of teaching positions were unfilled**, leading to larger class sizes, canceled courses, or substitutes covering year-long classes. **High-need subjects** have been most affected: special education, math, science, and English as a Second Language (ESL) consistently top the shortage areas. **Geographically**, fast-growing urban areas (Las Vegas, North Las Vegas) and remote rural districts (e.g., Mineral, Nye counties) struggle to recruit and retain teachers, whereas some suburban pockets and smaller districts are closer to fully staffed.

The good news is that by 2023–2025, the shortage showed signs of easing. The 2023 Legislature's big investment (including **$250 million earmarked for raises**[71]) allowed districts to boost salaries 10–20%, which helped attract and retain educators. Clark County reduced its vacancies from roughly 1,300 in 2022 to just **320 in 2025**[18]. Statewide, the teacher vacancy rate fell from **4.35%**

to 3.42% in one year in Washoe County, for example[80]. Rural districts like Elko also reported improvements after offering bonuses and housing stipends.

Despite this progress, Nevada still had about **1,600 unfilled teaching positions for 2023-24** (approximately 3% of roles)[81][82]. Additionally, many classrooms were being led by **underqualified teachers** or long-term substitutes due to emergency hiring – effectively a hidden shortage. Hence, Nevada's teacher shortage remains a serious concern, though it is *trending in the right direction* after new policy measures.

Teacher Salaries and Compensation: Low pay has been a major factor in Nevada's teacher shortage. For years, Nevada teacher salaries lagged behind those in neighboring states and weren't keeping up with inflation or local housing costs. In 2019, the average Nevada teacher salary was about \$57,000, below the national average (~\$62,000). By 2023-24, with raises, **Nevada's average teacher salary rose to \$66,930**, which is about 93% of the U.S. average (${72,030)[19][83]. This put Nevada around **rank 15** nationally for average pay (higher than Arizona and Utah, lower than California)[19]. Starting salaries also improved; new CCSD teachers now start around \$50,115 (as of 2024 after a new contract).

However, Nevada's cost of living—especially in Las Vegas and Reno—has climbed. Housing and rent in Las Vegas have jumped significantly since 2015. A \$50k starting salary may not be sufficient to live comfortably in these cities without roommates or a second income. The **teacher pay gap** (the difference between teacher wages and those of similarly educated professionals) in Nevada was about 10-15% in recent analyses by the Economic Policy Institute. To compete regionally, Nevada aimed to outpace states like Arizona (avg teacher pay \$62k) and New Mexico (\$68k)[84][85]. New Mexico's example is notable: in 2022 it raised teacher salaries 20%+ and saw a 34% drop in vacancies, which Nevada's union highlighted as a model[86].

In addition to base salary, some Nevada districts have offered **bonuses**: e.g., Clark County gave $4,000 bonus for new special education hires and $1,000 retention bonuses for all staff using federal funds. The 2023 **AB 398 law allocated \$70 million to Clark** specifically for bonuses in hard-to-staff schools/roles[87]. These incentives are credited with bringing veteran teachers back into Title I (high-poverty) schools and stabilizing turnover there[88].

Teacher Attrition and Retention: Nevada historically suffered from high teacher turnover. Annual attrition (leaving the district or profession) in CCSD hovered around **11–12%** pre-pandemic (meaning over 1 in 10 teachers left each year). This was higher than the national average (~8%). Rural districts often saw even higher turnover due to isolation and lack of amenities. The pandemic exacerbated burnout, with anecdotes of mid-year resignations and retirements. Notably, in 2020-21 CCSD saw a spike in retirements.

Encouragingly, for the 2023-24 year, **teacher retention improved to 94% statewide**, meaning attrition fell to ~6%[18]. This is a substantial improve-

ment – a **30% drop in attrition** as reported by the NDE[16]. The pay raises, improved morale, and fewer pandemic disruptions likely contributed. Districts also implemented mentorship programs for new teachers and better working conditions (e.g., more prep time, as negotiated in union contracts). Keeping experienced teachers is critical because, as experts note, **inexperienced teachers now make up 10% of Nevada's workforce (up from 6%)** due to all the new hires[89][90]. While new energy is welcome, high churn can affect instructional quality. The goal is to sustain recent retention gains. However, it's worth noting some rural areas still face revolving doors: e.g., Mineral County has reported over 20% teacher turnover annually, and certain Las Vegas at-risk schools historically had >50% staff turnover in a year. Targeted retention stipends for those schools are being tried.

Filling Shortage Areas: Nevada has taken multiple steps to address subject-area shortages: - **Special Education:** Perhaps the toughest role to fill. Districts have offered **extra stipends (~\$5k)** for special ed teachers. The state eased licensure rules to allow fast-track certification for special educators. Despite this, special ed vacancies remain common, leading to **students with IEPs sometimes missing services**, a civil rights concern. - **STEM (Math/Science):** The state provides **loan forgiveness** for new math/science teachers (up to \$5,000 of student loans repaid). Additionally, there are "Teach Nevada" scholarships aimed at those fields. UNLV and UNR have bolstered their secondary math/science education programs, but enrollment is still limited. Alternate route programs (like Teach For America and the **Nevada Teacher Corps**) place some math/science grads into classrooms after training. - **Rural Recruitment:** To lure teachers to rural Nevada, districts like Elko and Humboldt have started offering housing assistance (some own teacher housing or give rent stipends). The state permits retirees to return to teaching in rural areas without pension penalty to plug holes. Still, some remote schools rely on rotating substitute teachers or distance learning for subjects like physics or foreign language due to lack of staff.

Teaching Outside Credential (Out-of-Field): One consequence of shortages is that a growing share of Nevada teachers are **teaching subjects for which they lack full credentials**. In the 2024-25 school year, about **10–12% of teachers statewide** were considered "out-of-field" by the state's definition (license doesn't match teaching assignment) – up from roughly 6-7% a few years prior (state data). Notably, **charter schools had 17% of teachers out-of-field** – the highest level[91][92]. Charters often hire subject experts on alternative licenses, and until 2025 they were exempt from some licensure rules (a recent bill tightened that slightly)[93]. In Clark County School District, the reported out-of-field rate more than **doubled in 2024-25** according to NDE[94], though CCSD disputes the methodology and claims the true rate is lower (they argue they don't place teachers in classes they aren't licensed for)[95]. Regardless of the exact figure, it's clear many classrooms, especially in math, science, and special ed, are led by teachers on **temporary or emergency licenses**. For example, one might find an elementary-certified teacher

instructing middle school math, or a PE-endorsed teacher handling an English class – scenarios that can diminish instructional quality[96][97]. Statewide in 2022, **85% of classes in low-poverty schools were taught by certified teachers vs. only 75% in high-poverty schools** (approximate, per ESSA reporting), indicating that disadvantaged students bear the brunt of out-of-field teaching. The state's goal under ESSA is to eliminate disparities in access to qualified teachers; progress toward that has been limited.

To combat this, Nevada invested in **"Grow Your Own" teacher pipeline programs** – encouraging paraprofessionals, career-changers, and local high schoolers to become licensed teachers in their communities. UNLV and UNR launched fast-track programs (e.g., UNLV's nine-month teacher apprentice program) that produced hundreds of new teachers in 2023[98]. Many of these candidates start on provisional licenses (hence counted as out-of-field until fully licensed), but it's a crucial pipeline. **Experts commend Nevada** for being "particularly proactive" in building new routes to the classroom[98], such as alternative licensure paths that have added hundreds of educators statewide.

Workforce Diversity: About **27% of Nevada's teachers are people of color**, compared to roughly 70% of students being non-white. This diversity gap is especially pronounced for Black and Hispanic teachers. Efforts are underway to recruit more bilingual and minority teachers (e.g., the Nevada Department of Education offers incentives and has partnerships with HBCUs and HSIs to attract graduates). Clark County's hiring of teachers from the Philippines and other countries on special visas also contributes to diversity and fills vacancies, but is a temporary fix. Improving pay and support is expected to broaden the pool of applicants, including more diverse candidates.

Substitute Teachers & Support Staff: The educator workforce extends beyond licensed teachers. Nevada has also faced shortages of **substitute teachers**, forcing districts to raise sub pay (CCSD went from \$90 to \$150 per day for subs). Some days, schools operate with dozens of unfilled classes covered by stretching staff. Support staff (bus drivers, cafeteria workers, aides) shortages also strain operations – e.g., a bus driver shortfall in 2022 led to route delays. The 2023 funding allowed raises for these staff as well, which has improved staffing levels somewhat, but vacancies remain in hard roles like bus drivers (Nevada competes with higher-paying trucking jobs).

Teacher Unions and Morale: The Nevada State Education Association (NSEA) and local unions like the Clark County Education Association (CCEA) have been vocal about improving teacher conditions. In 2023, CCEA even threatened strikes to demand the raises that the legislature funded reach teacher paychecks. Ultimately, new contracts delivered those raises (approx 12-16% over two years in CCSD). Teacher morale, which was quite low after years of stagnant pay and pandemic stress, has seen a lift with the pay increases and supportive public rhetoric from leaders. Governor Joe Lombardo's 2023 State of the State declared a "teacher crisis" and pushed for "Time for 20" (a union slogan for 20% raises, \$20 minimum wage for support staff, 20-to-1 class sizes)[99]. Not

all those goals were met, but the partial progress has made many teachers feel cautiously optimistic. Still, challenges like large class sizes, high housing costs, and politicized curricula (Nevada has had intense debates over topics like social-emotional learning and COVID policies) continue to affect teacher satisfaction.

Conclusion (Educator Workforce): Nevada's ability to improve student outcomes is tightly linked to solving its teacher shortage. Recent data is encouraging: vacancy rates down, retention up, and more new teachers entering via alternative pathways[16][100]. However, the state must maintain competitive salaries (to prevent losing talent to neighboring states or other careers), continue supporting new teachers (so they stay beyond 1–3 years), and ensure every classroom is led by a qualified educator. **High teacher turnover and out-of-field teaching have disproportionately impacted high-poverty schools**, contributing to achievement gaps[97][96]. By focusing investments and support on those schools (as some AB398 incentives do), Nevada hopes to stabilize staffing where it's needed most. In short, the teacher workforce picture in 2025 is better than it was in 2020, but still far from ideal – it remains one of Nevada's most urgent educational challenges.

4. Equity & Access

Achievement Gaps: Educational equity – ensuring all demographic groups have comparable outcomes – remains an unmet goal in Nevada. The **achievement gaps across race/ethnicity, income, language, and disability are wide and, in some cases, widening**. For example, on the 2022 NAEP: - **Black students in Nevada scored on average 29 points lower than White students** (across 4th/8th reading and math)[20]. This gap equates to roughly three years of learning. Only ~**4% of Black eighth-graders** reached NAEP Proficient in math (vs. 34% of White eighth-graders)[21][22]. - **Hispanic students scored ~22 points lower than White students** on average[20]. In 4th-grade reading, for instance, about **17% of Nevada's Hispanic students were proficient** vs. 40% of White students (calculated from NAEP Data Explorer, 2022). - **Low-Income vs. Higher-Income:** Students eligible for the National School Lunch Program (a proxy for low-income) scored **21 points lower** than non-eligible peers on NAEP[101]. Only **18% of Nevada's economically disadvantaged 8th graders** were proficient in math, compared to 31% of non-disadvantaged[21][102]. - **English Learners (ELs):** Unsurprisingly, EL students perform far below English-proficient peers. In 2022 state exams, just **5% of ELs** achieved proficiency in ELA (vs. ~50% of non-ELs). NAEP does not report Nevada EL scores due to small sample, but national data shows similar gaps. - **Students with Disabilities:** Only **3% of Nevada's 4th grade students with IEPs** were proficient in reading (2019 NAEP), versus ~30% of students without IEPs (NCES). The graduation rate for students with disabilities is about **67%**, compared to 83% for general education[23].

These disparities start early and persist. By **3rd grade**, only 28% of Black students and 30% of Hispanic students in Nevada read at grade level, compared

to ~56% of White students (Nevada Report Card, 2019). By **middle school**, gaps often widen – e.g., in 8th-grade math SBAC 2022, 13% of Black students were proficient vs. 43% of White students (30-point gap). Notably, **Nevada's gaps mirror national trends** – historically underserved groups lag behind – but Nevada's overall low performance means these students are especially behind absolute standards.

Urban vs. Rural: Nevada's **urban districts (Clark and Washoe)** contain the majority of at-risk students, but also tend to have more resources (e.g., federal Title I funds, proximity to services) than rural districts. **Rural education** in Nevada is a story of extremes. Some rural districts, like Eureka County, are well-funded (due to local mining revenue yielding spending upwards of \$30,000/pupil) and have very small class sizes, leading to relatively strong outcomes (Eureka often tops Nevada in test scores). Conversely, rural areas without such tax base, like Mineral or Nye, struggle with funding and staffing. Rural students often have **less access to advanced coursework** – for instance, a small high school might not offer any Advanced Placement (AP) classes or calculus, simply because there aren't enough students or teachers. This puts rural college-bound students at a disadvantage for college readiness and scholarships.

Despite these challenges, rural schools often boast **tight-knit communities and high graduation rates**. In 2023, several rural districts (White Pine, Churchill, Lander) saw significant graduation improvements[24]. White Pine County, for example, raised grad rates from 67% to 87% over five years through focused interventions and personal graduation plans[24]. Rural schools also often report lower disciplinary issues and a sense of "family" among staff and students.

However, **rural vs. urban achievement data** show a mixed picture. On state assessments, rural districts like Douglas or Elko perform at or above state averages in many grades. The lowest proficiency rates tend to be in Clark County's inner-city schools and in a few remote districts (e.g., Mineral, where poverty is high and resources limited). Nevada thus has *pockets of success and pockets of deep inequity scattered across its map.*

School Funding Equity: The **distribution of funding between wealthier and poorer communities** is more equitable under PCFP than before, but disparities persist. Prior to 2021, a student in affluent Storey County (with lucrative industrial tax revenue from Tesla's Gigafactory) might have had double the funding of a student in Clark County. PCFP reallocated some of that, but differences remain in local supplemental funding. For example, parent fundraising and local bonds can widen resource gaps. In Summerlin (an upper-middle-class Las Vegas area), schools benefit from active parent organizations raising tens of thousands for technology or arts programs, whereas in East Las Vegas (a low-income area), schools rely solely on state/district funds.

One measure of equity is **per-pupil spending in highest-poverty vs lowest-poverty districts**. According to a 2018 study, Nevada provided only **57% as**

much to high-poverty districts compared to low-poverty[73] (meaning funding was regressive). With PCFP, the state claims to have increased that ratio, but updated independent analyses are pending. The Nevada Department of Education insists that now *"funds follow the student"* more than ever – so if a student is at a low-income school, they bring extra dollars. Still, critics note overall funding is so low that even weighted dollars don't ensure equal opportunity. For instance, a Clark County high-poverty school might get \$9,000 base + \$1,000 at-risk + \$500 EL = \$10,500 per pupil, while a low-poverty suburban school might get \$9,000 base only but then raise an extra \$500 per kid via PTA – ending up similar.

Services for At-Risk Students: Nevada has implemented various programs for students considered at-risk (due to poverty, homelessness, foster care, etc.). Under the **Victory Schools** program (2015-2020), the lowest-performing, high-poverty schools received additional funds for extended learning time, wraparound services, and incentives for teachers. An evaluation showed modest gains in Victory Schools' test scores and attendance. However, Victory and Zoom (EL-focused) programs were absorbed into the PCFP weights in 2021, which some fear diluted the targeted support. Now, the weighted funding is flexible money districts can spend on any proven intervention for those students. This could include: - **Free pre-K** for at-risk kids (some Title I schools offer pre-K classes). - **Reading and math specialists** or coaches in low-performing schools. - **After-school tutoring and summer programs** (many expanded with federal COVID funds). - **Behavioral support staff**, like social workers or psychologists, especially to address trauma and mental health (Nevada launched a Social Workers in Schools initiative in 2015 to place at least one in every high-needs school).

Are these services adequately funded? Generally, no – the need outpaces the resources. For example, 1 in 5 Nevada students is an English Learner or former EL, but districts struggle to hire enough ESL specialists; often a single ESL teacher is split among multiple schools. Mental health is another gap: Nevada has one of the worst counselor-to-student ratios (~1:400 in 2019). The pandemic saw surges in student anxiety and behavior issues, but despite some increased funding for wellness, schools report not having enough counselors or behavior interventionists. The **Nevada Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission (2023)** specifically highlighted "lack of behavioral and mental health resources" amid staff shortages as an equity issue[103].

Discipline and Opportunity Gaps: Equity also extends to how students are treated in school. Data show that in Nevada, **students of color (especially Black students) are disciplined at higher rates** than White students. In 2018-19, Black students (who were ~12% of enrollment) received ~26% of suspensions statewide (Civil Rights Data Collection). This disproportionate discipline contributes to lost instructional time and the so-called "school-to-prison pipeline." In 2019, Nevada passed a law limiting suspension/expulsion for young students (K-3) to reduce this, but disparities persist in higher grades. The Civil

Rights Committee report in 2024 expressed concern that **shortages of teachers and support staff** exacerbate these discipline issues, as overwhelmed schools resort to punitive measures in the absence of adequate counseling or classroom management support[104][105].

Language and Cultural Access: Roughly **1 in 3 Nevada students speak a language other than English at home** (primarily Spanish). Ensuring access means providing bilingual communication, translation at school events, and culturally responsive teaching. Clark County offers Spanish-translated materials and has a growing dual-language program (in a handful of elementary schools). Still, many parents with limited English have trouble engaging with schools. There's also been advocacy for curricula that reflect Nevada's diversity (for instance, integrating more Native American history given Nevada's tribes, or acknowledging contributions of Latino and Asian communities). Culturally responsive education is now part of teacher training requirements in Nevada.

Special Education Access: Students with disabilities face their own equity issues. Some Nevada families have filed lawsuits or complaints over inadequate special education services, citing staff shortages leading to violations of IEPs. The state has one of the lowest rates of inclusion (i.e., time mainstreamed with peers) for disabled students, partly due to lack of support personnel in general ed classes. Nevada's funding for special ed had been essentially flat for years, meaning districts cover extra costs from general funds. The new weighted funding (approximately \$5,000 extra per special ed student)[50] helps but is not fully covering actual costs. Advocates argue this shortchanges other students too, as districts must rob Peter to pay Paul to meet federal special ed mandates.

Gifted Education: On the flip side of equity, ensuring advanced learners across all demographics get opportunities is also important. Nevada's **gifted & talented (GATE)** programs vary – some districts test all students for GATE, others rely on referrals which can miss talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The state weight for Gifted is small (0.12) and often is used to fund GATE specialists, but in lean times those programs can be cut. This raises the issue of "excellence gaps" – e.g., far fewer Black and Hispanic students are in AP classes or GATE programs compared to White/Asian students. Efforts like universal screening in 2nd grade (which Washoe does) aim to identify more diverse gifted students.

Bright Spots in Equity: Despite the daunting gaps, there are bright spots. A few schools in Nevada have **defied the odds** – often through strong leadership, additional supports, and community engagement: - *Example:* **West Prep Academy** in Las Vegas (a K-12 magnet in a low-income area) has achieved above-average graduation rates (90%) and solid test scores despite serving mostly students of color and poverty. It leverages small class sizes and extended hours. - *Example:* **Elko County's Northeastern Nevada Virtual Academy** saw an increase in rural Native American student graduation via flexible online credit recovery. - *Zoom/Victory Schools Success:* Some former Zoom elementary schools (with high EL populations) dramatically improved reading

proficiency – e.g.,**Paradise Professional Development School** saw EL literacy gains of 20+ percentage points after implementing intensive language interventions and pre-K. - *Charter Schools:* A few charter schools focused on underserved students have done well. For instance, **Mater Academy East Las Vegas** (a charter serving 100% minority, high-poverty students) earned a 5-star state rating in 2019, with math and reading growth in the top quartile statewide. Charters overall in Nevada have a mix of outcomes, but as a sector they slightly outperform district schools on proficiency, even while enrolling a lower proportion of at-risk students on average. Importantly though, as noted earlier, charters had teacher staffing challenges and were excluded from initial state raises, which caused some inequity (now rectified by a 2025 law giving charters funds for raises)[106][107].

Funding Distribution Among Schools: Within districts, equitable budgeting is crucial. Clark County uses a weighted student funding formula for school budgets, meaning principals get funding based on their student counts and needs. This is intended to send more dollars to high-need schools. However, **teacher salary costs aren't fully differentiated** – a veteran teacher costs more but budgets average it out, so high-poverty schools with many new (cheaper) teachers often "lose" funds back to the district. Recent contract changes and budgeting reforms are trying to address that by not penalizing schools that attract experienced staff.

In summary, **Nevada has significant equity challenges**: large achievement gaps, funding inequities that mirror socioeconomic divides, and uneven access to quality education (from pre-K through advanced courses). The **COVID-19 pandemic amplified these disparities**, hitting low-income, Black, Hispanic, and rural students hardest (through digital divide, higher absenteeism, etc.). Data shows those students had the biggest drops in test scores[45][20]. The state's approach includes weighted funding, targeted programs, and accountability measures to monitor gap closure. Yet, closing gaps will likely require a sustained, multi-year effort addressing root causes like early childhood access, concentrated poverty, and systemic bias. Equity is at the forefront of Nevada's education debates because, as leaders often note, **Nevada cannot rise from the bottom of state rankings unless it lifts the outcomes of its most underserved students**.

5. Governance & Structural Issues

State Governance Structure: Nevada's education governance is fairly centralized at the state level compared to some states. The **Nevada Department of Education (NDE)** oversees all preK-12 public education, led by a **State Superintendent of Public Instruction** (appointed by the Governor) and the **Nevada State Board of Education**. The State Board has 11 members – 4 elected from districts and 7 appointed (by Governor or Legislature), a hybrid model unique to Nevada[108][109]. This structure aims to blend public representation with expertise. The State Board sets statewide policies, academic

standards, graduation requirements, etc., while NDE implements regulations and monitors compliance.

Practically, Nevada's size (17 districts for the whole state) means the state has a strong hand in funding and accountability. Under No Child Left Behind and its Nevada equivalents, NDE has intervened in low-performing districts and schools (e.g., via the now-defunct Achievement School District). The **Legislature** also plays a key role in governance – meeting biennially, it passes major education laws and budgets. There's also the **Interim Legislative Committee on Education** that meets between sessions to address ongoing issues. This state-driven approach can be efficient in enacting reforms quickly statewide (like Read by Grade 3 law or the new funding formula), but some argue it can lead to **one-size-fits-all mandates** that don't account for local context.

Local Governance – Districts and CCSD's Size: At the local level, Nevada is divided into **17 school districts, one for each county** (plus Carson City). This means Clark County School District (CCSD) encompasses all of Las Vegas and its suburbs – a massive and diverse jurisdiction. With **~300,000 students** and 360+ schools, CCSD is indeed the **5th largest district in the U.S.** (behind NYC, LA, Chicago, Miami-Dade)[110][111]. Washoe County (Reno/Sparks) is the next largest (~62,000 students), and the rest are much smaller (rural districts range from a few hundred to a few thousand students).

Is CCSD's size a structural disadvantage? Many stakeholders believe **yes**. Critics say CCSD's sheer scale creates bureaucracy that can be unresponsive to individual school needs – decisions are often far removed from the classroom. For example, routine matters (like school maintenance or hiring) have to wend through central office, causing delays. Parents sometimes feel their voices are lost in such a large system. Also, CCSD's finances are huge and complex, which in the past led to mismanagement (it infamously ran multi-million dollar budget deficits in 2017 due to accounting errors). Nevada has periodically debated **breaking up CCSD**. In 2016, a legislative advisory committee even drafted plans to split CCSD into smaller precincts or districts, but concerns about funding disparities and civil rights stalled it. Instead, the Legislature mandated the **CCSD Reorganization (AB469, 2017)** – this didn't break the district but **decentralized it**. It transferred more budget authority to individual schools (a site-based decision-making model) and created **School Organizational Teams (SOTs)** of parents/teachers at each school. The idea was to mimic the benefits of smaller districts by empowering schools.

The CCSD reorganization is still evolving. Anecdotally, some principals appreciate the autonomy over budgets, while others say the central office still exerts control. There have been turf battles between CCSD and the State over implementing AB469; in fact, in 2021 the State Board moved to enforce parts of it when CCSD lagged (like ensuring 85% of funds go to schools). So, while CCSD remains one entity, it's more decentralized than 10 years ago.

Whether smaller districts would improve outcomes is debatable – research na-

tionally is mixed. Breaking up CCSD might create **inequities**, as some parts of the valley are wealthier. It could also reduce economies of scale (CCSD leverages its size for better deals on transportation, food service, etc.). On the other hand, smaller districts could innovate and tailor to local communities better. As of 2025, **no major move to split CCSD** is on the table legislatively, but the conversation lingers. State lawmakers from rural areas sometimes chafe that CCSD's issues dominate every education discussion (given its size, any statewide metric is largely a CCSD metric). Statewide governance must balance this by ensuring policies work for both the largest urban district and the tiniest rural ones.

Reforms and Initiatives (Past 15 Years): Nevada has attempted numerous reforms since around 2010. Here's a brief timeline of major efforts and their outcomes: - **2011 Social Studies & Governance Reform:** The Legislature (under Gov. Sandoval) ended social promotion for third grade (requiring retention if reading below grade level), though this was never fully enforced and later softened. They also gave the Governor more power in appointing the State Board and Superintendent, to ensure aligned leadership. - **2013 Teacher Evaluation Overhaul:** Nevada adopted a new **teacher evaluation system** incorporating student achievement data (the Nevada Educator Performance Framework, NEPF). Initially, 50% of evaluations were tied to student growth measures. This led to almost all teachers being rated Effective or Highly Effective (as is common), and the system faced pushback. Eventually, the weight of test data was reduced and then temporarily removed during COVID. Outcome: modest changes in teacher development; evaluations still skew high, raising questions about effectiveness[112][113]. - **2015 "Education Session":** A watershed year – Gov. Brian Sandoval and a bipartisan Legislature implemented a suite of reforms with new funding: - **Zoom Schools** (for English Learners): extra funds for things like pre-K, Reading Centers, and reduced class sizes in highest EL schools. *Outcome:* Zoom elementary schools saw reading gains; a 2017 study found ELs in Zoom schools outperformed ELs in non-Zoom schools on literacy measures. - **Victory Schools** (for high-poverty zones): extra \$500 per pupil for tutoring, wraparound services, and teacher incentives. *Outcome:* Some Victory schools showed improved test scores and attendance vs. similar schools not in the program, but results varied. Both Zoom and Victory were effectively dissolved into the PCFP by 2021, trading targeted programs for broader weighted funding. - **Read by Grade 3:** Established early literacy supports and required retention of 3rd graders who didn't meet reading benchmarks (with exceptions). *Outcome:* Led to deployment of literacy specialists statewide and a culture shift to focus on K-3 reading. The retention clause was delayed then removed in 2019 (concerns about holding back too many), but the support structure remains. By 2019, 3rd grade proficiency ticked up a few points statewide, though it's hard to disentangle causes. - **Achievement School District (ASD):** Created in 2015 (AB448) to allow state takeover of up to 6 consistently low-performing schools and convert them to charter operation. *Outcome:* This was highly controversial. Initially, a list of schools in

Clark County were identified, causing community pushback. Only a couple of schools ever entered the ASD (one elementary converted to a charter, one new charter created). The ASD failed to gain traction, and in 2019 the Legislature **abolished the ASD** altogether[114][115]. One reason cited: disruptions and the charter operator for one school backed out, illustrating implementation difficulties[116]. - **Empowerment Schools & Turnaround Zone:** Around this time, CCSD also experimented with "empowerment schools" (giving individual schools charter-like flexibilities) and a Turnaround Zone for struggling schools with extra support. These produced some isolated successes but were not scaled broadly. - **2017 CCSD Reorganization:** (Already discussed above) aimed at decentralization. *Outcome:* In progress; mixed reviews. Did not directly improve student outcomes yet, but gave schools more budgeting voice. - **2019 Funding Formula Overhaul:** PCFP (as detailed earlier) replaced the 1967 formula. *Outcome:* Implementation happened in 2021-22; by 2023 saw transparency gains but funding adequacy still lacking. Also in 2019, collective bargaining changes allowed districts to go to binding arbitration, influencing teacher contract dynamics (less direct outcome on students). - **2021–2022 COVID Response:** While not a "reform" in the traditional sense, pandemic recovery efforts included large federal ESSER investments. Districts used funds for tech devices, learning loss mitigation (tutoring, summer school), and air quality improvements. *Outcome:* It helped return students to classrooms and provided short-term tutoring that likely contributed to the 2024 NAEP uptick in 4th grade[34]. But some funds were spent slowly, and learning loss remains significant. - **2023 New Initiatives under Gov. Lombardo:** A shift toward more parental choice and accountability. E.g., expansion of charter school facilities funding (Opportunity 180's charter support), attempts to fund private school vouchers (through "Opportunity Scholarships" increase – which stalled in final budget negotiations), and creation of the **Office of School Choice**. Also, AB400 in 2023 introduced a **Teacher Bill of Rights** and measures to improve discipline and campus safety. *Outcome:* It's too early to gauge. However, by late 2023, **nearly a third of Nevada schools improved their star rating** in the Nevada School Performance Framework from the prior year, suggesting post-pandemic recovery is underway (NDE, 2023)[117].

Governance Challenges: One structural issue is the sometimes tense dynamic between state authorities and local districts. For example, in 2023 the State Public Charter School Authority (SPCSA) and CCSD clashed over **charter school growth** – CCSD complained charters siphon funds and students, while the state pushed for more high-quality charters in Las Vegas as options. There's also political friction: e.g., in 2022, amid COVID policies, some local boards defied state mask mandates, requiring state intervention. And perennial debates occur at the Legislature about the role of teacher unions, collective bargaining limits, etc., reflecting governance philosophies.

School Boards: Each district has an elected board of trustees (7 members in Clark and Washoe, 5 in smaller districts). The boards hire superintendents and govern local policy. CCSD's Board has had high turnover and sometimes

scandal (e.g., a trustee censure in 2021, and frequent 4-3 split votes). The CCSD Board–Superintendent relationship has been fraught at times, with superintendents exiting every few years (5 different superintendents in the past 12 years). Stability in leadership is an issue; in contrast, some rural districts have superintendents who serve decade-long tenures, allowing consistent leadership.

Does governance affect outcomes? Possibly. Frequent leadership changes in CCSD likely stall momentum on reforms. Meanwhile, **state-level continuity** (NDE had Superintendent Jhone Ebert since 2019, providing steady direction) helped implement big changes like PCFP and navigate pandemic response. Clark County's size also means one board oversees almost 18,000 staff and 300k students, which is overwhelming compared to, say, a board overseeing 2,000 students in Elko. That can impact oversight quality and engagement. Some state leaders propose **regional sub-districts** or more empowerment of local school associate superintendents to manage within CCSD.

Interestingly, Nevada's centralization has meant things like standards and assessments are uniform statewide – which can be good for coherence. But it also means local innovation can be slower; districts can't adopt their own standards or tests even if they wanted to experiment.

Legislation and Policy Pendings: Looking ahead, a few structural ideas are being floated: revisiting **elected vs appointed State Board** (some advocate a fully elected board for more accountability, others fully appointed for expertise), establishing a **statewide Achievement School District 2.0** focusing on "whole state" improvement zones, or implementing **mayoral control** of CCSD (as some cities have done) – though that last one is unlikely due to lack of broad support. Education governance is deeply tied to Nevada's political shifts: with a Republican governor and Democratic legislature currently, any major changes will require bipartisan cooperation.

In conclusion, Nevada's governance system has evolved from a fairly traditional model to one trying to blend local control with state-driven innovation. The results have been mixed. It's clear, however, that **stable and effective governance is necessary for reforms to stick**. Many past reforms had promise but weren't sustained (e.g., ASD) or were undercut by governance conflicts (e.g., CCSD reorg fights). As Nevada moves forward, stakeholders emphasize collaboration – state, districts, charters, communities working together – as a structural approach that might finally move the needle for Nevada's schools.

6. Early Childhood & Higher Education

Early Childhood Education (Pre-K): Research consistently shows that quality early childhood education sets the foundation for later success. In Nevada, **access to early childhood programs is limited**, especially for low-income families. Nevada does not have universal preschool; instead, it funds a targeted **Nevada Ready! State Pre-K** program. In the 2023-24 school year, this program served **3,606 children** (mostly 4-year-olds), which is only

about **9% of Nevada's 4-year-old population and 1% of 3-year-olds**[25]. By comparison, the national average state pre-K enrollment is around 34% of 4-year-olds. Nevada's pre-K enrollment actually dropped in rank – NIEER's 2022 report noted other states expanding faster.

State spending on pre-K in Nevada for 2023 was \$31.8 million[118], up from \$10 million in 2015, but still modest. The per-child spending (~\$8,800) is fairly good and meets 5 out of 10 quality standards (including early learning standards and teacher degree requirements)[119]. However, many programs run only half-day and there are too few slots in high-need areas. The **Nevada Head Start** programs (federally funded) enroll additional low-income preschoolers (~2,700 children), but combined with state pre-K, that's under 7,000 seats for tens of thousands of Nevada preschool-aged kids in need.

Pre-K Quality: Quality varies. Some state pre-K sites in school districts have licensed teachers and follow evidence-based curricula (Nevada uses e.g. Creative Curriculum). These have shown gains in kids' readiness skills. But other community-based preschool providers may not meet the same standards, and Nevada's **child care sector** (for ages 0-3) has historically been under-regulated and underfunded. The Silver State had a **2-star quality rating** average (on 5-star QRIS scale) for its child care centers pre-pandemic. With federal relief, the state invested in improving childcare quality and pay for early educators, but it's an uphill battle. The **infant-toddler care shortage** is severe in many NV communities ("child care deserts").

Pre-K Outcomes and Initiatives: There have been some expansions: in 2019, a federal Preschool Development Grant allowed Nevada to slightly grow pre-K capacity and coordinate services. Clark and Washoe have each added a few pre-K classrooms in Title I schools. Kindergarten readiness assessments show that children who attended a high-quality pre-K (Nevada Ready or Head Start) enter school more ready in literacy and math than those who did not, giving credence to expansion efforts. Yet Nevada's **Kindergarten Entry Assessment** (KELS) in 2018 found only ~40% of incoming kindergartners demonstrated readiness across domains, indicating many start behind. The state has set a goal to at least double pre-K enrollment by 2030, but that depends on funding.

An interesting development is the growth of **Zoom Pre-K** classes targeting English Learners – these have been found to improve EL students' English proficiency by kindergarten. Also, some school districts partner with private providers via **Nevada Ready! Mixed Delivery** grants to expand access. However, with only 1 in 10 kids in state-funded pre-K, most Nevada children either attend private preschool (if their parents can afford ~$8,000/year tuition) or none at all. This lack of universal early education is a major reason for the low 3rd grade reading outcomes discussed earlier.

Full-Day Kindergarten: It's worth noting that Nevada did make progress in early childhood by achieving **full-day kindergarten statewide**. A decade

ago, many schools had only half-day K due to funding, but since 2017, the state funds full-day kindergarten for all public schools. As of 2022, virtually all kindergartners attend full-day, which research shows benefits literacy and numeracy development. That said, many kids still arrive in kindergarten with no prior formal education, and K teachers often have to start with the basics (letters, numbers, socialization).

Higher Education – NSHE Overview: Nevada's public higher education is governed by the **Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE)**, overseen by an elected Board of Regents. NSHE includes **two doctoral universities** (University of Nevada, Reno and University of Nevada, Las Vegas), one state college (Nevada State College in Henderson), four community colleges (College of Southern NV, Truckee Meadows in Reno, Western NV in Carson/ Fallon, Great Basin in Elko), and a research institute (Desert Research Institute). Total NSHE enrollment in Fall 2024 was about **107,000 undergraduates**, down from ~122,000 in 2012 (a significant decline). The drop has been sharp at community colleges, which lost enrollment during the pandemic and haven't fully rebounded as the strong job market lured many would-be students.

College Enrollment & Completion Trends: Nevada has historically low college-going rates. Only about **44% of Nevada's high school graduates enroll in college immediately** (NSHE data 2022), compared to ~63% nationally. This is partly because of the many job opportunities in Las Vegas that don't require a degree (e.g., hospitality) and a lower emphasis on college in some communities. Among those who do enroll in NSHE institutions, **completion rates** have been improving but remain modest. The **6-year graduation rate** for first-time, full-time freshmen at UNR is ~61%; at UNLV ~50%. For community colleges, the **3-year associate degree graduation rate** is only ~15% (though many transfer or take longer). NSHE has a strategic goal to raise the statewide postsecondary attainment (associate degree or higher) to 60% of working-age Nevadans by 2025 (currently it's around 36%, per Census). That goal likely won't be met on time.

Contributing to low completion have been issues like remediation (addressed by the co-requisite policy, which early data suggests has *improved pass rates* in gateway math/English[120]), as well as many students attending part-time while working (over 70% of community college students attend part-time). **Affordability** also impacts persistence: while Nevada's tuition is relatively low, many students still face financial barriers given living expenses and often being first-generation college-goers with limited family support.

Affordability & Financial Aid: Nevada has one prominent scholarship, the **Millennium Scholarship**, which provides up to \$10,000 toward college for Nevada high school graduates with a 3.25 GPA or higher. This has helped thousands attend college since 2000. However, Millennium doesn't cover all costs and many low-income students don't qualify due to the GPA requirement. Nevada's need-based aid, the **Silver State Opportunity Grant**, is limited in funding and only aids a fraction of needy students. In 2022, Nevada spent only

~\$250 per undergraduate on state financial aid, well below the national average. On a positive note, NSHE froze tuition during the pandemic and through 2024, and the Regents recently postponed any hikes[121][122], meaning in-state tuition has been flat for ~5 years. In-state tuition+fees is about \$8,400/year at UNLV/UNR and \$3,300 at CSN (community college). Many students still incur significant loan debt for living costs – average debt at graduation is around \$22,000 (below U.S. average \$30k, but many Nevadans don't graduate at all, which is the bigger issue).

Alignment with Workforce Needs: As Nevada diversifies beyond gaming/tourism (e.g., Tesla's Gigafactory, Switch data centers, healthcare expansion), the education system is under pressure to produce skilled workers locally. The K-12 system has grown **Career and Technical Education (CTE)** programs: high schools offer career pathways in areas like cybersecurity, nursing, manufacturing, and automotive tech. In 2021, ~**30% of Nevada juniors and seniors were enrolled in a CTE program of study**. Students who complete these and earn industry certifications often transition directly into jobs or further technical training. For instance, the diesel technology program in a rural high school might pipeline grads to mining industry jobs.

Community colleges have also ramped up **workforce programs** (e.g., TMCC's partnership with Tesla for manufacturing technicians, CSN's hospitality management and coding bootcamps). Nevada established the **Governor's Office of Workforce Innovation (OWINN)** to better link education with high-demand jobs. There's been progress in healthcare: UNLV opened a medical school in 2017 to address the doctor shortage, and UNR's medical school expanded. NSC (Nevada State College) significantly increased its nursing and teacher education output, helping two critical fields.

However, misalignment remains. A 2022 analysis found Nevada imports a large share of skilled workers because local production is insufficient – for example, **only ~16% of computer science jobs** in Nevada are filled by Nevadans trained in-state. To tackle this, K-12 is slowly increasing STEM participation (robotics programs, AP Computer Science now in more schools). Also, the state has incentivized "high-demand" degrees: the Nevada Promise Scholarship offers community college free tuition for students, which many use for trades and applied science programs.

Higher Ed Outcomes: The pipeline from K-12 to college/workforce can be measured by remediation and retention. As noted, remediation was high but is improving with co-requisite courses – the percentage of recent HS grads needing math remediation dropped from 48% in 2016 to about 18% in 2022, since now many go straight into college math with support[41]. This is a promising development suggesting better alignment of high school exit standards with college entrance. Additionally, high schools are expanding dual-credit offerings (where students take college classes in HS). Over 10% of Nevada juniors/seniors now earn some college credit before graduating, giving them a head start.

Nevada's **workforce needs** particularly in healthcare (nurses, medical techs), education (teachers), and technology (coders, engineers) are acute. The K-12 and NSHE systems are focusing on those: e.g., "Teach Nevada" scholarships to grow teachers, and a new UNLV Kirk Kerkorian Medical School building to train more doctors. Nonetheless, the state still heavily relies on in-migration for highly educated workers. Improvement in the K-16 pipeline is gradual, but necessary for Nevada to develop a homegrown workforce.

In summary, **early childhood education in Nevada is an area of major need** – low access leaves many children behind before school even starts, which cascades into later achievement problems. **Higher education and workforce development** have bright spots in targeted programs and stable tuition, but face challenges in enrollment and completion. The link between K-12 preparation and college success is critical: better-prepared high school grads means less remediation and more likelihood of degree attainment. Nevada's education system, from pre-K through college, is working to align standards and expectations (for example, the recent adoption of **College and Career Ready Diploma** that requires more rigorous coursework signals to students what will be expected postsecondary).

Investments in early childhood and smoother transitions to postsecondary will be key if Nevada is to meet its talent demands and give its youth the opportunity to succeed in the state's changing economy.

7. Bright Spots & Models for Success

Amid Nevada's educational struggles, there are notable **"bright spots" – schools, programs, and approaches that have yielded exceptional results** and could inform broader improvement. Identifying what works is crucial for scaling up success. Below are some examples and models within Nevada that shine:

- **Five-Star Schools Exceeding Expectations:** Nevada's school rating system (NSPF) awards 1–5 stars based on performance metrics. A handful of schools with high-poverty or diverse student bodies have achieved **5-star ratings**, showing that demographics are not destiny. For instance, **Depot Elementary in Washoe County** serves a largely low-income student population yet consistently posts proficiency rates 15+ points above the state average in reading and math. Their model includes intensive data-driven instruction and parent engagement nights. Similarly, **West Career & Technical Academy (West CTA)** in Las Vegas is a magnet high school (public, lottery-based admission) that ranks among the top high schools nationally. West CTA boasts a **99% graduation rate** and high AP pass rates, with curricula focused on medical and environmental sciences – a model of rigorous, career-themed education that engages students.
- **Magnet Schools and Academies:** Clark County's magnet schools

have been a success story for urban education. Schools like **Clark High School's Academy of Math, Science, Arts** or **Rancho High School's Aviation Academy** draw diverse students from across the district and provide specialized programs. These magnets often outperform zone schools academically and send large numbers of students to college. Their success is attributed to theme-based learning that motivates students, strong teacher commitment, and application of best practices that could be replicated in comprehensive schools. For example, **Rancho HS** (a Title I school) has both a medical magnet and an aviation magnet and has seen its overall graduation rate climb above 90% in recent years, far exceeding similar non-magnet schools.

- **Turnaround School Successes:** Underperforming schools that received focused turnaround support have shown improvement. **Florence Drake Elementary** in Sparks was a 2-star school that, after implementing a turnaround plan with new leadership, coaching for teachers, and additional reading supports, rose to a 4-star rating within three years (2016–2019). Strategies included a longer school day and professional development in data use – strategies that could be extended to other struggling schools. Although not every turnaround effort has succeeded, the ones that do illustrate the power of strong leadership and resources: *takeaway:* sustained, targeted intervention can break the cycle of low performance.

- **Zoom School Gains:** The Zoom initiative for English Learners provided extra resources like Pre-K classes, reading centers, and extended learning time at designated schools. An evaluation found **Zoom elementary schools increased EL literacy rates by ~7 percentage points more** than non-Zoom comparison schools over four years[46]. For example, **Ortiz Elementary** in Las Vegas (a Zoom school) saw remarkable growth – its 3rd grade reading proficiency for ELs nearly doubled from 2015 to 2019. The key practices were small-group literacy interventions, bilingual support staff, and parent literacy workshops. With PCFP, Zoom funding ended as a separate stream, but many Zoom strategies continue and could be expanded statewide for EL-heavy schools.

- **CTE and Career Pathways:** Schools that integrate career/technical training are yielding strong outcomes. **Southeast Career Technical Academy (SECTA)** in Las Vegas is another example – a magnet high school where students follow pathways in fields like nursing, IT, or construction. SECTA has a **99% graduation rate** and high rates of industry certification attainment, demonstrating that when students see a tangible career outcome, engagement and achievement rise. Additionally, students from SECTA and similar schools often complete internships and graduate job-ready or college-ready. The model of blending academics with real-world skills is one that Nevada is trying to proliferate (the 2021 legislature funded expansion of CTE programs in rural and urban districts).

- **Early Learning & Family Engagement Centers: Family engage-**

ment has been critical in some bright spots. **Desert Heights Elementary** in Reno attributes part of its success (jumping from 3-star to 5-star) to an on-site Family Resource Center that offers parenting classes, English classes for parents, and wraparound services like food and clothing. Engaging families, especially in communities where school trust may be low, has improved attendance and homework completion. Clark County's **Family Engagement Office** similarly has recognized exemplary programs where parent volunteers assist in classrooms and governance, fostering a community that supports learning beyond school hours.

- **Higher Education Partnerships:** NSHE institutions have partnered with K-12 to bolster college readiness. A notable model is **UNLV's Math Bridge** program: college professors work with CCSD high schools to deliver a summer math bootcamp for graduating seniors who placed into remedial math. This has helped hundreds of students jump straight to college-level math, reducing time and money wasted on remediation. Also, **Nevada State College's Teach Nevada** scholarship/mentorship program for education majors has boosted the number of local teacher candidates, addressing workforce needs. These partnerships show how K-12 and higher ed can collaborate to smooth transitions and fill gaps.

- **Rural Innovations:** Some rural districts, despite limited resources, innovate out of necessity. **Nye County School District** (which spans a huge geographic area) implemented a hybrid distance learning model prepandemic to offer Advanced Placement courses to students in remote high schools via live video conferencing – effectively sharing one AP teacher across schools. This increased rural students' access to advanced coursework and is being looked at as a model for other sparse regions (especially now that everyone is more tech-proficient post-COVID). Additionally, **Churchill County** partnered with the local air force base to create a STEM program that greatly increased student interest and achievement in science – demonstrating creative use of local community assets.

- **Data-Driven Culture in Washoe:** Washoe County School District (Reno) has been recognized for its data-driven continuous improvement approach, particularly around social-emotional learning (SEL). Washoe developed a nationally noted **School Climate Survey** and uses SEL data alongside academic data to target interventions (for example, noticing that a drop in 9th-grade engagement predicts a dropout risk, they implemented a 9th Grade On-Track initiative). Their systematic monitoring led to improved **9th-grade credit sufficiency rates and lower dropout rates**[123][124]. This deliberate use of early warning data is a model that other districts, including Clark, are adopting through Nevada's Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework.

- **Educational Nonprofits & Charters:** Outside the traditional system, groups like **Opportunity 180** (a Las Vegas education nonprofit) have incubated high-quality charter schools and provided data transparency via a

School Quality Map, empowering parents to choose and thereby fostering competition. As noted, charters like **Doral Academy** and **Pinecrest Academy** networks regularly outperform district averages on state tests. They often have longer school days and more flexible staffing as charter autonomy allows – practices that district schools could potentially emulate through empowerment models. For instance, Pinecrest's emphasis on STEAM (science, tech, arts) in an extended-day format has led to high proficiency rates. The **Nevada State Public Charter School Authority**'s recent results showed that 85% of charters earned at least a 3-star rating[125], indicating overall charter quality is relatively strong[126]. The collaborative lesson here is leveraging charter innovations to inform public school improvement.

- **Community Schools Model:** A few Nevada schools are embracing the "community school" model (providing comprehensive services on campus). **Mission High School** in Clark County, which exclusively serves students recovering from substance abuse, combines academics with counseling and treatment services. It's one of the first of its kind and has achieved a graduation rate above 80% for a very at-risk population. Similarly, some elementary schools now house health clinics or food banks. This holistic approach addresses non-academic barriers and has shown improved attendance and stability for students, which in turn improves academic performance.

Key Takeaways from Bright Spots: 1. **High Expectations + Support = Results:** Schools that have succeeded with traditionally underserved students set a culture of high expectations (e.g., "every student will graduate college- or career-ready") and back it up with strong supports (tutoring, counseling, extended learning). This dual approach is evident in magnets, turnaround successes, and effective charters. 2. **Teacher & Leadership Quality is Crucial:** Many bright spot schools have veteran, dynamic principals and highly committed teachers, often incentivized to work there through leadership opportunities or extras. Retaining great educators in tough schools through recognition and support has paid off. 3. **Targeted Interventions Work:** Whether it's Zoom reading centers for ELs or credit-recovery for at-risk high schoolers, when Nevada has focused resources on a specific problem, it has seen improvements. Scaling these targeted programs statewide (and sustaining funding for them) is the challenge. 4. **Community Engagement Makes a Difference:** Schools that actively involve parents and community partners (businesses, non-profits, higher ed) create a support network that reinforces student success. This is a replicable model – e.g., expanding school-community partnerships for mentorship, apprenticeships, and wraparound services. 5. **Data and Accountability Can Drive Improvement:** The presence of transparent data (like star ratings, public dashboards) and accountability for growth has spurred some schools to innovate and work harder. For example, seeing star rating improvements celebrated has motivated neighboring schools to adopt similar strategies.

Nevada can leverage these bright spots by studying them and implementing their strategies more broadly. The state has begun this through initiatives like the **North Star School designations**, celebrating high-growth schools and encouraging mentorship between high-performing and low-performing schools. Moreover, Nevada's education community increasingly shares success stories at conferences and through professional learning networks. For instance, principals from rising-star schools often present at the Nevada Association of School Administrators on what worked for them, from using PLCs (professional learning communities) effectively to engaging student voice in school decisions.

In conclusion, **while Nevada faces many educational challenges, it is not without clear examples of success**. These bright spots illustrate that with the right combination of resources, practices, and people, Nevada students **can and do achieve at high levels**. The task ahead is scaling these successes so that they are not exceptions but rather the norm for schools across the Silver State.

Tables and Data Visualizations (Descriptions)

(To support the above sections, the following tables and conceptual graphics illustrate key data points and trends.)

Table 1: Nevada vs. National Education Snapshot – A comparative table highlighting Nevada's position on critical metrics: - Columns for Nevada, National Average, and (optionally) Nevada's Rank. - Rows for: **Per-Pupil Spending**, **NAEP 4th Grade Math Proficiency**, **NAEP 8th Grade Reading Proficiency**, **High School Graduation Rate**, **Average Teacher Salary**. - For instance, this table would show Nevada's spending (~\$11.6k) vs U.S. (~\$13.5k)[78], NAEP proficiency gaps of about 8-10 percentage points[9], grad rate 81% NV vs 86% US[6], teacher salary \$66.9k NV vs \$72k US[83]. This provides a quick visual of "Nevada trails the nation in X, Y, Z."

Table 2: Per-Pupil Spending by State (2022) – A ranking table showing Nevada's position among 50 states: - List top 5 spenders (New York ~$30k, etc.), the U.S. average (~\$13k), and Nevada (~\$11.6k, ranking ~46th)[55][54]. This could be color-coded (e.g., Nevada highlighted in red to denote bottom quintile). Such a table emphasizes the funding deficit. - Also note *cost-adjusted rank*: Nevada might rise a bit when adjusted (e.g., to ~40th), which can be footnoted.

Table 3: Achievement Gaps by Demographic (NAEP 2022) – A concise table showing proficiency rates or average scores for subgroups: - Example columns: All Students (NV), Black, Hispanic, White, Low-Income (with national comparison perhaps). - For 4th Grade Reading NAEP: NV Proficient %: All 25%, Black ~15%, Hisp ~20%, White ~40%, Low-income ~18%[20]. This visually underscores gaps. - Alternatively, a **bar chart** could be depicted: bars

for each subgroup's NAEP score, showing Black and Hispanic much lower than White[20]. A line across the chart could indicate the national average for each subgroup for context (since NV gaps roughly mirror national ones, but NV's bars are a bit lower across the board).

Table 4: 10-Year Trend – Graduation Rates and NAEP Scores: - A line graph or dual-axis chart might be described: one line showing Nevada's grad rate from ~71% in 2013 to 84% in 2019, dipping to 81% in 2023[5][6]. Another line could show NAEP 8th math proficiency from ~28% in 2013 to 26% in 2019 to 21% in 2022[21]. The visualization highlights that grad rates improved markedly (policy success), whereas academic proficiency did not (especially post-COVID). This could be two separate simple line charts if combining is confusing – one titled "Graduation Rate Trend" and one "NAEP Proficiency Trend."

Graphic: Funding Formula Flowchart (PCFP) – A schematic illustration showing how Nevada's funding formula works: - Boxes for **State General Fund**, **Local Revenues (sales, property)** combining into **Education Fund**, then arrows distributing to districts with weights. A few icons representing a student with an "EL" label getting +0.45, a "\$" symbol indicating base funding, etc. This helps readers conceptually grasp the weighted funding[51]. It would show, for example: Base \$X + EL weight \$Y + At-Risk weight \$Z School's budget. - Including a note that "only highest weight applies if multiple."[63]

Chart: Teacher Workforce Improvements – Possibly a before/after bar graph: - Bars showing "2022 Vacancies: ~1,500" vs "2025 Vacancies: 320 (CCSD)"[18], and "Attrition 2022: 12%" vs "2023: 8%"[16]. This visual would celebrate the progress in teacher staffing after raises. It could also incorporate a small inset showing average salary growth (e.g., \$56k in 2018 to \$67k in 2024). - Another angle: a map of Nevada highlighting teacher vacancy rates by district (with Clark at 2%, Washoe 3.4%, some rurals higher)[80]. But exact district-level data may clutter; a simple before/after is clearer.

Infographic: Pipeline to College – A flow diagram showing 100 students entering 9th grade and how many make it through key steps: - Out of 100 9th graders: ~81 graduate high school[6]; ~44 enroll in college; ~25 are still enrolled sophomore year; ~18 graduate college within 6 years. (Illustrative numbers from current stats). - This kind of "leaky pipeline" graphic powerfully shows attrition at each stage. It can be done with icons or just percentages at each arrow step. - Additionally, one could highlight where interventions are needed: e.g., at the high school to college transition (only 54% of grads go on to college, meaning 46% do not, which could be labeled).

Map: Rural vs Urban – A Nevada map indicating education outcomes by county: - Perhaps color counties by 2022 graduation rate or average ACT score. For instance, Eureka, Storey might be dark green (90%+ grad), Clark, Washoe green (80s), some rurals like Mineral red (67%). This visualizes the geographic disparities. - Alternatively, a map showing where Zoom/Victory schools were concentrated (Clark/Washoe) to illustrate needs concentrations.

Each of these visuals would be accompanied by captions explaining key insights, such as *"Nevada's funding remains thousands below the U.S. average, limiting resources available to its students"*, or *"Achievement gaps by race/ethnicity are large in Nevada, mirroring national patterns – e.g., White students are roughly twice as likely as Black students to be proficient in 8th grade math[21][22]."* These descriptions ensure the data is interpreted correctly in context.

Conclusion

Nevada's education system in 2025 stands at a pivotal juncture. The state has **identified its challenges clearly – low overall performance, funding shortfalls, teacher shortages, and deep inequities – and has begun to address them** through increased investment and policy change. Student outcomes, while still trailing national norms, show signs of rebound from the pandemic downturn, and a decade-long upward trend in graduation rates highlights what sustained focus can achieve[6]. Funding reforms have made the distribution of resources fairer, yet the overall level of support remains insufficient by about \$4,000 per pupil to meet adequacy[10]. The teacher workforce, arguably the linchpin of the entire enterprise, is stabilizing due to bold steps to improve pay and recruitment[16][18], but keeping classrooms filled with qualified, effective educators in every corner of Nevada is an ongoing battle.

Equity is the thread that weaves through all issues – whether it's rural students accessing AP courses, English Learners receiving early support, or low-income schools having modern facilities. The data makes plain that **Nevada will only rise as a whole when its most underserved populations are lifted**[20][101]. Encouragingly, models of success exist within the state that point the way: schools that beat the odds, programs that deliver results, and communities that rally around their children. Scaling these successes requires commitment to **evidence-based strategies – from high-quality early childhood education to rigorous college and career pathways – backed by adequate resources and political will**.

Civic debate in Nevada can now pivot from asking "what's wrong" to "what must we do." This report provides the factual foundation: Nevada's student achievement lags but is not intractable, its funding is low but now increasing, its teachers need support but are the key to unlocking student potential. For policymakers, the implication is that **consistent investment and continuity of reform** (avoiding the pendulum swings of the past) will be crucial. For citizens and advocates, the takeaway is that **engagement matters** – whether it's voting for school funding measures, serving on school organizational teams, or simply volunteering to read with a child.

Nevada's education rankings have sat at the bottom for too long, but as one state education leader optimistically noted, *"We are in no way satisfied, and we know we have a long way to go"*[127]. The progress of recent years – fastest-improving

in some metrics, no longer 51st in the nation[122] – shows that improvement is not just possible, it's happening. The question is whether Nevadans will accelerate that progress by confronting the remaining challenges with open eyes and a united purpose.

By marshaling the facts on student outcomes, funding, teachers, equity, governance, and the full spectrum from early childhood to higher ed, this report aims to inform and empower all stakeholders. The future of Nevada depends on the education of its people. With a shared understanding of the current state of education and a determination to build on what works, Nevada can transform its schools – and with them, the opportunities of the next generation.

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