

Determination of weights to be used to allocate funding for ELL students and students at risk of low academic achievement and treatment of students who qualify for multiple weight categories. (Special Education is not included)

Executive Summary

Per Item IV of the March 31, 2014 Agenda of the Task Force on K-12 Public Education Funding – Technical Advisory Committee, members were tasked to provide reports on various topics related to weighted funding for English Language Learner (ELL) students and students at risk of low academic achievement (at-risk). This report offers a calculation of the weights that can be used for both ELL and at-risk students and how to treat those students that fall into both categories.

It is the recommendation in this report to weight students that identify as at-risk or as ELL as follows:

ELL - 1.33 additional weight

At-risk – Range of 1.11 – 1.25 additional weights

To limit complexity in the state funding formula and to avoid additional bureaucracy and auditing requirements, it is further recommended that these weights apply to all school levels (i.e. elementary and secondary.) In addition, due to the previously referenced desire to avoid increased infrastructure costs in implementing weighted categories to student funding and based on testing and observation, there is no recommendation to provide additional transition funding once students are no longer identified as ELL or at-risk.

Due to similar supports utilized in both programs, for students who qualify for both categories it is recommended that only the highest (ELL) category applies for weighted funding and “stacked” weights not be used, however, the committee may want to consider some form of blending or averaging.

English Language Learners

The goal of the English language learner program in the State of Nevada is to serve ELL students so that they succeed academically and ultimately move them from the ELL designation through teaching proficiency in the English language. Three considerations were made in determining the weight to be used for the ELL population:

- What additional supports are required to educate ELL students?
- Do students at different levels (i.e. elementary vs. secondary) cost more to educate?
- Are there additional costs to transition students out of an ELL program?

In the 77th Session of the Nevada Legislature, through Senate Bill 504, additional funding was provided for students with limited English language proficiency. This particular funding was provided for students as part of a pilot program to enhance the performance of English language learning students over the next two years. These schools called “Zoom Schools,” provide a good start for calculating the expected supports for these ELL students. Programs and supports to be provided at Zoom Schools include pre-

kindergarten, full-day kindergarten, summer school, and reading development. The weighted calculation for the cost of educating ELL students is based off of the Zoom School program as this is the most relevant information the Clark County School District (CCSD) has regarding the education of limited English students. While programs may vary for ELL students, Zoom Schools at CCSD incur the following additional expenditures to support the associated programs:

- Teachers and Teacher Family Assistants for pre-kindergarten classes at a ratio of 18:2
- Teachers to teach full-day kindergarten classes at a ratio of 21:1
- A Project Facilitator and 3 Paraprofessional Tutors at each site reading center
- Extra instruction pay and associated facility/transportation costs related to an additional 17 days of school each year known as the Summer Academy

Current per-pupil costs at Clark County School District Zoom Schools are an additional \$1,668 above the standard allocation through state grant funding and an additional \$184 dollars of Federal Title III funding for a total of \$1,852 per pupil. While there currently are no quantifiable test results to verify whether the additional resources referenced earlier are adequate, they are the best estimate we have to determine an appropriate weight.

The current (FY 2014) per-pupil basic support amount for CCSD is \$5,457. If CCSD were to receive the above amount as a supplemental weight it would equate to an additional 33% above basic support funding.

The recommended weight for ELL funding would be 1.33. It is assumed in this model that this weight would be applied universally to all districts and any economies of scale lacking at rural school districts could be captured through a small/rural school adjustment. This may warrant further discussion.

As a comparison, per the American Institutes for Research (AIR), *Study of a New Method of Funding for Public Schools in Nevada*, (Dr. Jay Chambers, Dr. Jesse Levin, and Antonio Wang (AIR), Deborah Versteegen, University of Nevada, Reno, Emerita Teresa Jordan, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Bruce Baker, Rutgers University), of the states that use a single weight for ELL funding, the average weight is 1.387 with weights ranging from 1.10 (Texas) to 1.99 (Maryland).

It should be noted that this number is predicated on costs associated with Zoom Schools which are all at the elementary level, however, there are a number of identified ELL students at the secondary level. While there are additional costs associated with older ELL students, these costs are still similar to the amounts required at the elementary level. The most expensive aspect of teaching an elementary ELL student are the costs of pre-kindergarten and full-day kindergarten programs. These are not required at the secondary level, but are offset by the need for additional interventions. Attempting to stratify costs based on levels of students would create complexity in the formula and would be difficult and/or costly to administer and audit. Our recommendation is that ELL funding remain weighted at 1.33 at all school levels.

ELL students are tested for English proficiency through an assessment provided by the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment Consortium (WIDA) to determine their English proficiency. In the

previous fiscal year at CCSD, approximately 8,000 students in a population of 53,000 ELL students, or 15%, tested out of the ELL program through this assessment. It should be noted that the ELL program continues to grow, even with students testing out of the program. These students have successfully matriculated into a standard curriculum. Based on discussions with instructional staff, there did not seem to be a majority consensus on the need for additional supports once testing out of the ELL program. Many ELL students or formerly identifying ELL students also identify as at-risk students or attend at-risk schools that already receive additional Title funding. Because of this, there is no recommendation to provide any additional weights for students transitioning from an ELL program.

In order to avoid over-reporting of ELL, the Legislature may want to limit the number of years a student is qualified for ELL weighted funding.

At-Risk Funding

The purpose of additional at-risk student funding is to provide additional resources and support to those students to assist low-achieving/low-income students. Generally students falling within the at-risk category have a higher probability of failing academically and require additional educational support to be academically proficient.

This report will generally focus on those students that fall within the low-income category because this is the easiest category to identify and support. Students that fall into this category generally perform worse academically due to stress, emotional and social challenges, academic delays, and health needs. School districts have generally approached these problems by providing programs and supports such as smaller class-sizes, longer days (i.e. full-day kindergarten programs and extended school days) and school years, early childhood education (i.e. pre-kindergarten), wraparound or health-related services, parent engagement, career-readiness, and academic intervention programs.

Because there are so many variables regarding supporting needs for students from low-income families, this is a difficult area to determine weighting. Adding to the difficulty is the fact that additional supports are provided through the Federal Title I program.

In a recent study *Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card* (Bruce D. Baker, Rutgers University, David G. Sciarra, Education Law Center, Danielle Farrie, Education Law Center, January 2014) noted the following regarding funding for high-poverty students:

- Children with different needs require varying levels of funding to provide educational opportunity
- State finance systems should provide more support to districts serving larger shares of students in poverty
- State funding systems should provide additional supports for students of high-poverty vs. low-poverty

Currently, state-wide over 220,000 students qualify for free-and-reduced price meals (FRL) through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Of those students, 75% reside within Clark County.

Using Title I funding as a guide, in the current fiscal year (FY 2014), CCSD receives \$78,977,199 and has a rollover amount of \$15,087,920 for a total of \$94,065,119 in Title I funding. Students that are eligible for Title I funding per identification in the FRL program total 151,988 in Clark County alone. Total funding per pupil in fiscal year 2014 equals approximately \$619 per pupil. As a percentage of state basic support (\$5,457) in Clark County, this equates to an additional 11% in funding per-pupil. This assumes that additional funding similar to the Title I program would be adequate and in the case of at-risk students it may not depending on student need. We recommend a range up to 25% of weighted funding for at-risk students based on need and higher concentrations of at-risk students within the entire population.

Per the AIR study, for states that use a single weight for at-risk funding, the average weight applied is 1.29 and the amounts range from 1.05 (Mississippi) to 1.97 (Maryland).

As stated, districts receive additional federal supplements for at-risk/low-income students and will need to be careful in how it implements state funding. In addition, one of the many successful programs in addressing at-risk students has been full-day kindergarten. With state support now behind a state-wide full-day kindergarten program this will help further supplement support for at-risk students.

Qualifying for Multiple Weights

Both the ELL and the at-risk student population are generally intertwined. At CCSD, almost all ELL students additionally identify as at-risk and low-achieving students, but not all at-risk students are assessed as ELL. This raises the question as to the costs required to educate students that fall within both categories. In many cases, the programs and supports utilized to boost achievement for these students are similar. Title programs for at-risk or low-achieving students, pre-kindergarten and full-day kindergarten have shown success in helping the at-risk population. These programs are also highly recommended in supporting ELL students.

Because of the layering of many of these programs, it does not make sense to “stack” the weightings associated with these two categories. Many ELL students are enrolled in Title schools and will not only receive support as an ELL student but as an at-risk student. It is recommended that if a student is identified as both ELL and an at-risk student, they receive the funding weight no higher than the highest category, in this case the ELL weighting categorization, however, additional considerations could be made for a blended or hybrid weighting of the categories.