

Panel begins creating uniform data reporting system

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – It's hard to know how well Nevada's public school and college students are doing if there is no uniform and reliable data to view their performance over time.

Gov. Brian Sandoval is working to change that.

He issued an executive order Oct. 7 asking a state education panel to take the necessary steps to create a system to track students through their school years, following in the steps of other states as part of an overarching effort to reform education and improve student performance in Nevada.

That group, the P-16 Council, met last week to begin the process of creating a usable data system to track student performance from early childhood education through college.

The council was created to help coordinate education efforts in Nevada from preschool through post-secondary levels and has the authority to address the data information system for public school students.

In introductory remarks to the council, which includes lawmakers, educators, parents and business representatives, Sandoval said he wants Nevada to create a data system that will put it on a par with states that have successfully accomplished the task, including Florida, Maine, Connecticut and Washington.

The information, including performance measures of educators, is critical to moving Nevada forward in student achievement, he said.

A new panel, called the Teachers and Leaders Council, was

created as a result of legislation passed in the 2011 session, Sandoval said. It is charged with developing a statewide performance evaluation system for administrators and classroom teachers. Half of the evaluation must be based on student data, which is why the charge to the P-16 Council is so important, he said.

“This is a historical moment, this is really a crossroads in the state of Nevada and we have some great opportunities to really improve the delivery of education in this state,” Sandoval said.

“There is going to be a huge challenge for all of you,” he said. “You have all the resources of this administration to assist you.”

State Sen. Barbara Cegavske, R-Las Vegas, elected chairwoman of the 11-member council, said she has been working for years to create a reliable data system for public education in Nevada. It has been frustrating though, to see the money spent on different systems that have failed to generate the necessary information, she said. Right now there is no collaboration or coordination between school districts or with higher education, Cegavske said.

“When you look at other states, Florida, when you look at what they are able to collect and the information they are able to provide, it is just incredible,” she said. “It’s so exciting. And that’s where we need to be and we need to get there.”

In a three-plus hour meeting, the council reviewed the current status of data collection efforts, which started with a system called SMART, or Statewide Management of Automated Records Transfer, approved by the Nevada Legislature in 1995. After millions of dollars had been spent on developing the system, lawmakers in 2003 pulled the plug on the project.

The Nevada Department of Education beginning in 2007 developed a new system called SAIN, or System of Accountability

Information for Nevada, with a \$6 million federal grant. It has longitudinal student data from 2005 to the present, including enrollment, attendance, discipline, course completion and graduation, among other data elements.

The SAIN system has nine of 10 essential data elements, the department said in its presentation, but many issues remain with the database, the council was told.

Erin Cranor, a member of the council representing elementary and secondary education, said Nevada should identify what has already been done in other states that can be used as a starting point.

The council will meet again Jan. 11. A first progress report is due to Sandoval by Feb. 1. It is to complete its work by Aug. 1, 2012.