

Nevada improves data collection to measure student achievement

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nevada has made significant progress in the collection of the data needed to measure and help improve student achievement, but still has work to do in putting the information to work for parents, educators and policy makers, a national report says.

The Data Quality Campaign's (DQC) seventh annual state analysis, Data for Action 2011, shows that states have made major progress building their student data systems. More states than ever – 36, up from zero in 2005, including Nevada – have implemented all of DQC's 10 Essential Elements of Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems.

The report shows however, that states continue struggle with the 10 State Actions to Ensure Effective Data Use, which are intended to ensure that stakeholders can effectively use the data to increase student success. The report shows that Nevada has implemented five of the 10 actions.

The report shows, for example, that 41 states do not link workforce data with K-12 data and 38 states do not link workforce data with post-secondary data.

Aimee Guidera, executive director of the Data Quality Campaign, said in a telephone conference call today that there has been substantial progress since the first report was released in 2005 in collecting the data needed to improve student achievement.

“Not only have states made progress, but for the first time,

the campaign is thrilled to announce that we believe that every single state in this country now has the capacity to empower education stakeholders," she said. "And that means everyone from parents to policy makers, with quality data to inform decision making. And that is an amazing, gaming changing opportunity for us in the education sector.

"People have complained they didn't have access to information, they didn't know where to get the information, we didn't have the quality information, and we think that we are now at a turning point in the conversation to say there are no more excuses, we now have this data that is collected at the state level," Guidera said.

But states need to do more to provide access to the data to teachers, parents and policy makers, and to make sure they know how to use the information, she said. Only eight states are now providing individual student information to parents, and only five are providing information to students themselves, Guidera said.

States particularly need to ensure the data can be effectively used by teachers, she said.

Gov. Brian Sandoval has made quality data collection a priority of his administration because of its importance in measuring education reform efforts.

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 Nov. 9 to begin the process of creating a usable data system to track student performance from early childhood education through college.

In remarks at the meeting, Sandoval 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.”

Guidera said Nevada is in the middle of the states with five actions met. The average nationwide is 4.6.

Nevada has a lot of momentum in the data collection effort, having this year put the 10 elements in place, she said. The challenge now is to ensure the state data system is meeting the needs of the local school districts as well as other users, Guidera said.

Keith Rheault, Nevada’s superintendent of public instruction, said the state was able to meet the data quality elements through a federal grant received in 2008. The funds ran out this year but the agency is pursuing another federal grant to continue the process.

“Our next step will be to link the data systems of K-12 education to the (Nevada System of Higher Education) NSHE data as well as the workforce database (managed by the Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation),” he said.

Rheault said the new grant would be used to meet several of the missing action items cited in the report, including the linkage of the systems as well as building a statewide data repository.

“Quality educational data that is readily available to school districts and the public is a key element in improving schools and the achievement and success of our students,” he said.