

Nevada's higher education gets failing grade

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nevada is one of four states to receive an F grade for student access and success in its higher education system from the Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW), an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, in a report released this month.

The third edition of its Leaders & Laggards series, “A State-by-State Report Card on Public Postsecondary Education” examines public colleges and universities in all 50 states, including four-year and two-year institutions, and is designed to provide an in-depth evaluation of data and a careful analysis of postsecondary performance and policy across states.

“With tuition growing, debt loads increasing, students questioning the marketplace value of their degrees, and large amounts of taxpayer dollars invested, the business community and the public are starting to ask questions of policymakers and higher education leaders,” said Margaret Spellings, president of ICW and a former U.S. Education secretary. “This report begins to look at how states are doing in preparing students for jobs after college and the value state taxpayers are getting in meeting the demands of local economies and employers.”

The chamber is urging policymakers, the business community, and educators to craft a reform agenda that promotes transparency to the public, demands better data on performance and improved measurement of student outcomes.

For the first time, the report grades postsecondary institutions in the following six areas:

Student access and success

Efficiency and cost-effectiveness

Meeting labor market demand

Transparency and accountability

Policy environment

Innovation.

The Nevada System of Higher Education received an F grade for “student access and success” at both its four-year and two-year institutions.

Of the failing grades for student access and success in Nevada, the report said: “The four-year institutions rank in the bottom 10 states in terms of completion rate and the percentage of undergraduates receiving Pell Grants. The two-year institutions, despite having a retention rate in the top 10 states, ranked near the bottom on completion rates, credentials produced per 100 full-time equivalent undergraduates, and the percentage of Pell recipients.”

Nevada higher education officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the report.

Nevada’s three four-year institutions mustered a C grade for efficiency and cost effectiveness, and D grades in the categories of meeting labor market demand and transparency and accountability.

Its four two-year colleges received a C grade for meeting labor market demand, and D grades for efficiency and cost effectiveness and transparency and accountability.

Nevada’s higher education system as a whole received a C grade for its policy environment, a D grade for innovation: openness to providers, and an F grade for innovation: online learning.

“I think the results help illuminate that some state systems are doing a far better job of graduating students with the dollars they’re spending, and that too few states are providing students, families, and taxpayers with the information they need to make good choices or hold higher education institutions accountable,” said Rick Hess, director of Education Policy Studies for the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), which conducted research for the report. “With tuition rising at three times the rate of inflation, we want to work with the business community to ensure that students who invest in their education learn the knowledge and skills necessary to enter an increasingly competitive global workforce.”