

Nevada lawmakers want to revamp education funding

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – A panel of lawmakers this week recommended Nevada’s public education funding formula be revised to take into account the higher cost of educating specific groups of students, including English-language learners and children in poverty.

But lawmakers also acknowledged that updating the formula won’t mean any significant changes in funding for the state’s 17 school districts until the state’s economy improves and tax revenues increase.

There is no proposal to shift current funding from one district to another to fund a new weighted formula.

The New Method for Funding Public Schools interim study was authorized by the 2011 Legislature to look at the “Nevada Plan” the current funding formula adopted in 1967. The Clark County School District sought the review to look at whether the state’s education funding plan needs to include additional funding for educating specific groups of students.

The six lawmakers serving on the panel supported the recommendation to revise the formula, which will be presented to the Legislature when the 2013 session gets under way.

But lawmakers deferred to the Department of Education the technical details of which groups should be included and how the different categories of students should be weighted in any new funding formula. Other groups that could be included in a weighted formula are gifted and talented and career and technical education, among others.

“The committee, I think, could find quick and unanimous support for the recommendation that we as a state consider changing our K-12 funding formula to one that considers a variety of different weights, including but not limited to; and then a comprehensive list,” said Sen. Greg Brower, R-Reno. “That tees up the issue then for the next session. It tells the Legislature as a whole that this committee did its job, it studied the issue and it decided it was worthy of legislative consideration.”

The recommendation came after the Clark County School District provided \$125,000 to the legislative panel to hire a consultant to study the issue. The consultant, American Institutes for Research, issued a final report which found in part: “As low-income students and English learners are widely accepted in the mainstream education finance literature to be associated with higher educational costs, it is our strong recommendation that funding adjustments be incorporated into the current funding system to account for these student need cost factors.”

The report found that Nevada is not in line with most other states on funding, being one of 14 states that does not adjust funding for low-income students and one of eight that does not account for the cost of English learners.

“I think what we’ve learned is that the 1967 formula is no longer adequate,” said Assemblyman Ira Hansen, R-Sparks. “I think everybody on this committee agrees with that. It doesn’t meet the needs that it was originally intended to do.”