

Panel: Spend \$4 mil. to fund Nev. student tracking system

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – A state panel charged with implementing a system to track individual student performance from preschool through entry into the workforce is recommending that \$4 million in state funds be appropriated by Gov. Brian Sandoval and the 2013 Legislature to help accomplish the task.

The P-16 Council, led by chairwoman and state Sen. Barbara Cegavske, R-Las Vegas, finalized its recommendations to Sandoval on Monday, proposing the funding to ensure the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) project moves forward in the next two-year budget.

“Everybody’s really been doing a yeoman’s job, I mean really working hard to get the information that we need to continue on,” she said. “I think the governor is going to be very pleased. I’ll be anxious for his review as well.

“So we’re really excited to be able to move on with this,” Cegavske said. “And we’re going to be like other states. It took a lot of people a long time to put theirs together and we’re not going to be any different. But I’m very hopeful that all entities will join and we’ll be able to get this done in a reasonable amount of time.”

Sandoval issued an Executive Order on Oct. 7, 2011, asking the council to take the necessary steps to create the system to track students, following the lead of other states as part of an effort to reform education and improve student performance in Nevada.

The effort got a boost in June when the Nevada Department of Education was awarded a \$4 million grant from the Institute of

Education Sciences (IES) to develop the SLDS. Nevada was one of 24 states to receive funding to support the design and implementation of its tracking system.

The three-year grant will create and assign a Unique State Personal Identifier so that students, teachers and those in the workforce can be followed from pre-school through grade 12, into post-secondary education and on into the workforce.

The grant will also be used to fund an in-depth technical needs assessment at the state Department of Education, the Nevada System of Higher Education and the state Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation to determine solutions for implementing the enhanced SLDS. The assessment is expected to be completed by June 2013.

But the P-16 Council, in its report, said that state funding will be needed to accomplish the solutions identified in the assessment. In addition, funding will be needed to incorporate early childhood data into the SLDS – a project that is not included within the grant.

As a result, the council made the funding recommendation to support the next steps of the SLDS project and sustain it beyond the grant funding.

The council made no recommendations on data polices, such as which data elements will be shared and how, or how privacy will be protected, saying such decisions are premature until the needs assessment is completed.

In introductory remarks to the council in November 2011, 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.

The Department of Education has already created a student data system, but it is not as comprehensive as required for Sandoval’s education reform efforts.

A national report showed that Nevada made progress in this data collection effort in 2011. 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.