BOARD OF REGENTS
BRIEFING PAPER

1. AGENDA ITEM TITLE: NSHE Strategic Plan 2025-2031: Success by Design

    MEETING DATE: January 16-17, 2025

2. BACKGROUND & POLICY CONTEXT OF ISSUE:

The proposed Strategic Plan for 2025-2031 is the culmination of work that began in late 2021 when NSHE held its first community listening session (for details, see Strategic Planning Committee Archive). On **January 24, 2022**, the Board's ad hoc Strategic Planning Committee received a presentation on the intended process as well as feedback receive to date.
Agenda
Minutes
Video

Additional listening sessions were held throughout the spring of 2022, and in March 2022 a statewide strategic planning advisory committee was convened. However, NSHE's strategic planning work was paused in May 2022 due to System leadership changes. The next meeting of the Board's ad hoc Strategic Planning Committee occurred on **September 23, 2022**, at which time the Board received a presentation summarizing the feedback from all listening sessions, as well as a strategic planning framework proposal.
Agenda
Minutes
Video

Subsequently, on **November 18, 2022**, the Board's ad hoc Strategic Planning Committee approved the proposed NSHE strategic planning framework that had been modified according to Regent guidance received at the previous meeting.
Agenda
Minutes
Video

The framework received full Board approval at the **February 3, 2023**, special meeting.
Agenda
Minutes
Video

On **April 21, 2023**, the full Board discussed the next steps for NSHE's strategic planning, after which work on the plan was again paused due to System leadership changes.
Agenda
Minutes
Video

At the Board's **July 11-12, 2024**, workshop Regents received a brief presentation on NSHE's past strategic planning efforts; the development of the strategic planning framework that was approved by the Board in February 2023; and a timeline for continuing work on strategic planning in earnest. The Regents, Chancellor and Presidents then actively engaged in a strategic planning brainstorming session, making it possible for all Regents present to weigh in at length on items to be included in the strategic plan as well as what should be measured to assess progress toward future plan goals.
Agenda
Minutes
Video

After the July workshop, System staff continued a comprehensive effort to develop a strategic plan grounded in extensive feedback from stakeholders and the Regents, dating back to December 2021. This process was firmly anchored within the framework approved by the Board in 2022 and reinforced by rigorous analysis of data, research, and proven best practices from other systems. The resulting proposed strategic plan reflects a thoughtful and evidence-based approach and is now being presented for the Board's approval.

3. SPECIFIC ACTIONS BEING RECOMMENDED OR REQUESTED:

Approval of the proposed strategic plan.

Form Revised: 3/2023

4. IMPETUS (WHY NOW?):

The most recent full strategic plan was approved by the Board a decade ago (*Expanding by Degrees*, 2015). It is customary for large organizations to update strategic plans every 3 to 5 years, so an update by NSHE is long overdue.

5. CHECK THE NSHE STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL THAT IS SUPPORTED BY THIS REQUEST:
- **X**   **Access (Increase access to higher education)**
- **X**   **Success (Improve student success)**
- **X**   **Close Institutional Performance Gaps**
- **X**   **Workforce (Meet workforce needs in Nevada)**
- **X**   **Research (Increase solutions-focused research)**
- **X**   **Coordination, Accountability, and Transparency (Ensure system coordination, accountability, and transparency)**
- ❑   **Not Applicable to NSHE Strategic Plan Goals**

6. INDICATE HOW THE PROPOSAL SUPPORTS THE SPECIFIC STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL

Having a current strategic plan in place will help to keep the focus of the System and its institutions on the Board's strategic goals. It also provides a framework for measuring success toward these goals.

7. BULLET POINTS TO SUPPORT REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:
- Since December 2021 NSHE has put considerable time and effort into gathering feedback upon which to base a strategic plan. It is now time to finalize an actionable plan.
- A current strategic plan is required to ensure NSHE and its institutions are performing at full potential.
- A current strategic plan will guide the System and Institutions to focus efforts on what is important to the Board and stakeholders across the state.

8. POTENTIAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:
- Some Regents may wish to have additional time to process the presentation or hold a follow-up discussion about the plan at a subsequent meeting.

9. ALTERNATIVE(S) TO WHAT IS BEING REQUESTED/RECOMMENDED:
- Defer taking action on a strategic plan.

10. RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE:

The Chancellor's Office supports approval of the proposed strategic plan.

11. COMPLIANCE WITH BOARD POLICY:

X   Consistent With Current Board Policy: Title #__4___ Chapter #____1_ Section #____1___

❑   Amends Current Board Policy: Title #_____ Chapter #_____ Section #_____

❑   Amends Current Procedures & Guidelines Manual: Chapter #_____ Section #_____

❑   Other:_____

❑   Fiscal Impact: Yes_____ No_____

     Explain:_____

Form Revised: 3/2023

# SUCCESS BY DESIGN

The Strategic Plan for the Nevada System of Higher Education

A Blueprint for 2025-2031

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Between 2021 and 2031, over 1.5 million jobs – 61% of which will require some form of higher education – are projected to open in Nevada.[i]   Of the new jobs that are created during this time, those requiring higher education are projected to grow 81% faster than those only requiring a high school diploma or equivalent. Given these needs, the Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) is positioned to play a pivotal role in developing the educated and skilled employees that Nevada requires to meet its upcoming workforce demands. Producing a more educated and skilled workforce will also bring profound and far-reaching benefits to the state. Most notably, higher education is a key driver in elevating the social mobility of Nevada families. In 2022, the US Census Bureau cited that median wages for Nevadans between 25 and 64 were 60% higher for those who earned baccalaureate degrees compared to those who earned a high school diploma or equivalent and 100% higher for those who earned a graduate or professional degree compared to those who earned a high school diploma or equivalent.[ii] On top of the higher earnings, individuals who complete a college degree – at any level – are far more likely to own a home, be employed, have health insurance, vote, and volunteer in their community and are significantly less likely to be incarcerated, live in poverty, or experience divorce.[iii]

NSHE plays an essential function for Nevada in meeting workforce needs, raising social mobility, and cultivating civically engaged citizens. Going forward, to meet its potential and maximize opportunities for impact, NSHE's strategic plan – *Success by Design* – will be launched to guide major strategic initiative work for the system through 2031. The plan builds on NSHE's commitment to "ensure system coordination, accountability, and transparency" as the guiding principle to execute five key pillars: 1) increase access to higher education, 2) improve student success, 3) close institutional performance gaps, 4) meet Nevada's workforce needs, and 5) increase solution-focused research. Each pillar is structured with measurable outcomes and actionable steps to ensure the system is primed to elevate performance. Through the alignment of goals across institutions, *Success by Design* seeks to create a unified, data-driven approach that elevates student achievement, drives innovation, and positions NSHE as a national leader.

SUCCESS BY DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Ensure System Coordination, Accountability and Transparency

Increase Access to Higher Education	Improve Student Success	Close Institutional Performance Gaps	Meet Workforce Needs in Nevada	Increase Solutions Focused Research
I	II	III	IV	V

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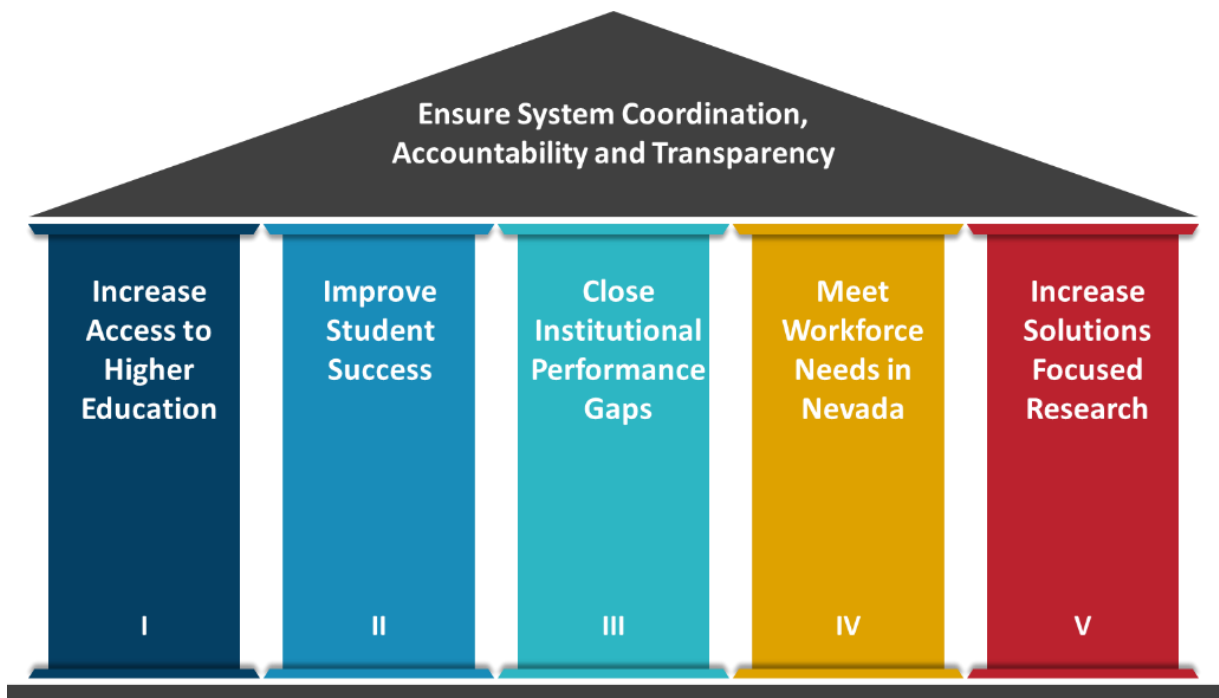
Knowing the workforce needs of the state coupled with the economic and social benefits of higher education, focusing on avenues that increase access to higher education will be critical. This has been a challenge for Nevada as the state has historically had a low percentage of its traditional-aged population (18-24) enrolled in higher education. In 2021, which is the most recent published national dataset that broke down reported traditional-aged population enrollment by state, only 31% of traditional-aged Nevadans were enrolled in higher education, which placed the state 47th in the nation compared to the national average of 41%.[iv] Equally important, the NSHE capture rate – which is the percentage of high school graduates each year that enroll at an NSHE institution within a one-year period after graduation – has also traditionally been low compared to other state systems and recently declined by six percentage points from 2015 to 2022, going from 43% to 37%.[v] In light of these issues and opportunities to strengthen coordination within NSHE, the system will focus on five access components below.

REVISITING THE UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSION APPLICATION PROCESS

Students approach college with different levels of financial support and varying family educational backgrounds, which leads to disparities in their understanding of processes, terminology, and the overall college landscape.[vi] With different steps, nomenclature, requirements, deadlines, websites and application fees that are employed by different colleges in the application process, over half of the students that participated in a national survey cited that applying to college was the most stressful academic experience of their life.[vii]

Based on some of the complexities and redundancies associated with completing multiple admission applications, several state systems have implemented a systemwide admission application. Under this system, a single admission application is utilized by all institutions in a system. If this approach – which was recommended by multiple Board members at the July 2024 workshop as a priority for system alignment – were utilized by NSHE, it would streamline the admissions process for Nevadans applying to multiple NSHE institutions and those wishing to concurrently enroll at more than one NSHE institution.   In addition to simplifying the admissions process and eliminating unnecessary redundancies for students, a systemwide admission application would also be advantageous from a systemwide data perspective. By using one admission application platform and a standardized set of application fields, all institutions would be collecting the same data at the point of application, which would, in turn, help improve data collection for institutional research and analysis purposes. Based on these issues, strong consideration should be given to NSHE developing a systemwide admission application.

While a systemwide admission application would be a significant project, based on the small volume of NSHE institutions and the fact that all NSHE institutions are using the same overarching computer student information system, this project would be more feasible for NSHE than most state systems, including some of those states that have already implemented it.   As just one example, Texas – which includes significantly more institutions and institutions that use a multitude of different computer student information systems – has been using a systemwide admission application called Apply Texas for several years.

More detailed information about some of the statewide admission application programs in other states is included here: *Apply Texas*, *Apply Maine*, and *The State University of New York*. Lastly, NSHE's System Computing Services (SCS) confirmed that the systemwide application project for NSHE is feasible. While there may be differences among institutions on the information that would be collected through the application process, the technical aspects will not pose a barrier to its implementation.

An additional step that goes beyond having a common systemwide application that may also be worthy of consideration would be to explore implementing a systemwide direct admission program.   In this program, higher education institutions in a system automatically admit high school students in the state – based on data like ACT scores or high school GPA – without a need for them to complete an application.[viii] To execute this strategy, data agreements are created with the K-12 system to identify and receive a list of students who meet the preset eligibility criteria. In turn, the students who meet the preset criteria receive an admission letter with instructions on steps they can take to claim their spot and finalize their status as an incoming college student. It is understood that some of these data agreements are already in place in Nevada, so some of this could build upon existing work. At least 10 state systems are utilizing a direct admission program, some of which are linked here: *Direct Admission Minnesota*, *Georgia Match*, *Next Steps Idaho*, *and* *Admit Utah*.

As NSHE works to cultivate a stronger college-going culture within Nevada, there is potential in exploring a systemwide direct admission program to better reach groups that have been shown to start the application but not complete it, which include lower socioeconomic background students and first-generation students.

<div align="center">DUAL CREDIT</div>

Dual credit occurs when a high school student takes a college course while in high school.   This has proven to be an effective strategy to increase the probability of students attending college after high school graduation and has had an especially noticeable benefit among underserved, low-income, and middle-to-lesser prepared students.[ix] [x]   NSHE has made solid progress in this area by increasing dual credit participation through the adoption of a discounted systemwide course flat fee ($75 per course) for concurrent enrollment courses. In the first year the discounted systemwide flat fee took effect, dual credit enrollment increased by 21% going from 12,820 to 15,499 students. [xi] It will be important to continue increasing these numbers to help expand the pipeline between Nevada high schools and NSHE institutions.
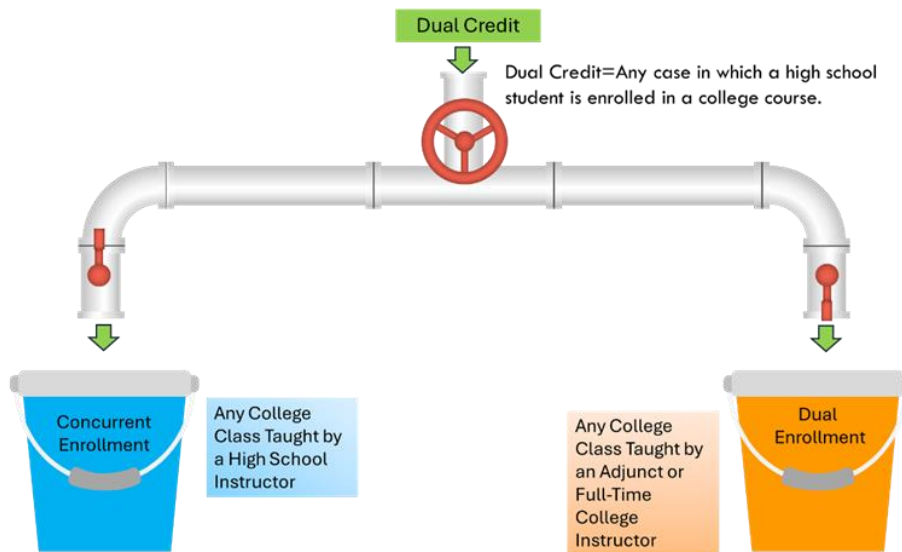
Despite the recent gains, dual credit participation gaps remain based on race and ethnicity. Black and Hispanic students are underrepresented in NSHE dual credit programs relative to their proportion in Nevada public high schools. Black students made up 11% of Nevada public high school enrollment but only 5% of NSHE dual credit enrollment, while Hispanic students represented 45% of Nevada public high school students compared to 33% of NSHE dual credit enrollment.[xii] To close these gaps, it will be important for NSHE to continue prioritizing dual credit offerings in high schools that serve higher populations of Black and Hispanic students.

<div align="center">4</div>

"Dual enrollment in which high school students take college courses, has great potential to help make the high-school-to-college transition more effective and equitable – and to do so on a large scale."
– Community College Research Center

Lastly, today, NSHE is one of the only systems in the country that does not have a robust dual credit policy and procedures. Knowing that there is a need to develop shared expectations and systemwide continuity, a policy working group called Align and Shine Nevada – which is comprised of both K-12 and higher ed representatives – will work on developing proposed policy and procedures that will promote access, success, and completion.

FAFSA COMPLETION

Completing the FAFSA is linked with significantly higher rates of enrolling in college after high school graduation. On the national level, students who complete the FAFSA in high school are 84% more likely to enroll in college immediately after high school.[xiii] When reviewing recent FAFSA completion rate data – which measured the percentage of FAFSA completers for the high school graduating class of 2023 – Nevada exhibited a 59% FAFSA completion rate, which ranked 47th in the country.[xiv] As a result of many students not completing the FAFSA, the Nevada class of 2023 left $37 million in unclaimed Pell Grants.   Going forward, it will be critical for NSHE to increase the number of students completing the FAFSA and, in turn, help more Nevada residents claim their fair share of these federal dollars that can be invested toward higher education.

Seeing an opportunity for improvement in the FAFSA completion space, NSHE Academic and Student Affairs Staff has recently created a FAFSA completion committee. This committee will create a FAFSA completion campaign and establish a FAFSA completion competition among Nevada high schools. The high schools with the largest percentage of FAFSA completers will be awarded a FAFSA completion award, which will be awarded at an NSHE Board meeting, preferably during an annual joint meeting with NDE.   This will provide an opportunity to promote the FAFSA process, boost FAFSA completion through engaging high schools in a friendly competition and strengthen cohesion between the K-12 and higher education systems.

CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

One important demographic that likely does not receive enough attention from a system-level perspective is the adult student.   This is a particularly important demographic to focus on as NSHE has seen a significant drop in its adult student population in recent years, as the population of students age 25+ decreased by 23% between Fall 2014 and Fall 2023.[xv] On top of this, the Nevada adult degree attainment rate (the percentage of residents with associate degrees or higher who are age 25+) is 11 percentage points lower than the national adult degree attainment rate (47% versus 36%).[ii] These issues come at a time when Nevada has 321,000 adults who have some credit – but are not currently enrolled – and have not earned a degree.[xvi]

Compounding this issue is the projected decline in high school graduating classes across nearly every state outside Nevada, which will reduce the traditional pool of high school students from which to recruit. As just one example, between 2025 and 2037, California, which has long produced the highest volume of out-of-state students in NSHE, is projected to see its high school graduation class decrease by 16%.[xvii]

Knowing that there has been a sharp adult enrollment decline in recent years and there is currently a large unserved adult market, it is critical that the system places a greater emphasis on adult students. One opportunity to strengthen NSHE's commitment to recruiting and serving these students more effectively is to establish a more robust commitment to credit for prior learning (CPL).[xviii]   According to the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), CPL "is a term for various methods that colleges, universities, and other education or training providers use to evaluate learning that has occurred outside of the traditional academic environment."[xix]   Some

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examples of cases in which CPL is awarded include: standardized exams, such as Advanced Placement (AP); College-Level Examination Program (CLEP); and International Baccalaureate (IB); recommendations made by recognized professional organizations that evaluate training; professional certifications and licensures; evidence of specific training; and portfolio reviews. In addition to providing an avenue to engage and recruit adult students, CPL provides opportunities to increase the likelihood of adult credential completion, boost the probability of underrepresented and lower-income student completion, and reduce the time and cost required for students to complete a credential.[xx] Thus, it provides a tool that can support access while also serving as a vehicle to enhance success, completion, equity, and affordability.

Right now, much of CPL in NSHE focuses on traditional practices such as standardized exams and military training. Based on this, explicit feedback was provided in strategic planning listening sessions that stressed the need to develop a more robust and expansive systemwide CPL approach that will maximize opportunities to validate learning that occurs outside of the traditional learning environment. Revising the CPL procedures and guidelines, standardizing the most traditional forms of CPL when applicable (Advance Placement, CLEP, International Baccalaureate, military credit, etc.), providing faculty support to expand CPL beyond the most traditional forms of CPL, creating user-friendly CPL systemwide inventories to promote transparency, and developing reporting structures will be essential steps to create a meaningful systemwide approach to CPL.

ONLINE COURSE SHARING EXCHANGE

Course offerings can sometimes be too limiting for students or not financially viable for institutions. From a student access perspective, there are instances where they are unable to enroll in courses on their home campus. This can occur when course sections reach maximum capacity or when a course is only offered during a traditional semester when the student wishes to take it in the summer or during an intersession period between semesters. When students encounter these situations, it forces them to delay enrollment, which can increase the time to degree completion. From an institutional perspective, some course sections have low enrollment. These courses may either be canceled or continue to operate at a financial loss.

The creation of an online course sharing exchange – which connects students from various campuses to a shared network of online courses – is a viable strategy to address these issues because it provides expanded course options for students and helps institutions fill under-enrolled sections. In an online course sharing exchange, the home institution is where the student is normally enrolled and pursues their degree while the teaching institution is where a shared course is taught.

Based on input from the two-year colleges, Board members, and feedback gathered during the strategic plan listening sessions, NSHE will explore the feasibility of developing a voluntary course sharing exchange network pilot program. By expanding course options for students and enhancing collaborations among institutions, the pilot would aim to enhance flexibility, improve resource utilization, and promote student success across the multiple NSHE institutions.

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Pillar I: Summary of Next Steps

1. Partner with NDE and develop proposed dual credit policy and procedures that will promote access, success, and completion.

2. Create a FAFSA completion campaign and issue awards to the high schools with the highest FAFSA completion rates.

3. Revise the CPL procedures and guidelines, systemize the most traditional forms of CPL when applicable (Advance Placement, CLEP, International Baccalaureate, military credit, career and technical education, etc.), provide faculty support to expand CPL beyond the most traditional forms of CPL, create user-friendly CPL systemwide inventories to promote transparency, and develop CPL reporting structures.

4. Strongly consider developing a systemwide admission application system and explore the feasibility of creating a systemwide direct admissions program.

5. Explore creating a voluntary course sharing network pilot program that will be based on using NSHE's common course numbering system.

Pillar I. Metrics

1. Total enrollment by level: including enrollment numbers and participation rates by race/ethnicity; enrollment numbers and participation rates by age; enrollment numbers and participation rates by native degree-seeking status, transfer degree-seeking status, and non-degree-seeking status; enrollment numbers and participation rates by part-time and full-time status; enrollment and participation rates by first-generation status.

2. Dual credit enrollment and participation rates by race/ethnicity, high school graduating class, and school district/county.

3. Statewide FAFSA completion rate using the FAFSA Tracker.

4. NSHE capture rate.

5. First-Time enrollment numbers and percentage rates by college readiness status (using ACT scores)

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SUCCESS THROUGH SYSTEMNESS

While access to higher education is essential, these efforts must be matched by an unwavering commitment to success. At its core, a system-level approach to student success should focus on leveraging the power of the system to remove unnecessary barriers, simplify processes for students, maximize the application of academic credit, and create opportunities to reduce cost and time to degree completion.[xxi] [xxii] In particular, NSHE should focus on creating a more streamlined and supportive system for first-generation students, as Nevada has the fourth-largest percentage of these students in the country.[xxiii] Building on these foundations, one of the most powerful policy levers that a system can activate is the creation of robust systemwide transfer and articulation pathways that optimize the transfer process, minimize credit loss, and accelerate degree completion.

NSHE has made some solid progress in the transfer and articulation space by implementing a common course numbering system, which standardizes course numbers for high enrollment equivalent courses across institutions. It also has several traditional one-to-one institution 2+2 bilateral transfer and articulation agreements on file in which one university has articulated that it will accept 60 or more hours from a community college partner when a student completes a specific associate degree program. While this has been a traditional practice that was used for decades, traditional one-to-one institution 2+2 bilateral agreements are becoming significantly less common around the country as more systems are shifting to systemwide approaches to address program transfer, especially in high enrollment programs.

While positive steps have been taken to address transfer and articulation within NSHE, it's important to recognize that during the strategic planning listening sessions, students voiced a clear need for additional measures and protections to strengthen the NSHE transfer and articulation process. Additionally, multiple Board members have reported that constituents have reached out to them expressing concerns about transfer-related issues. This feedback underscores that there is still more work to be done to ensure a seamless and effective transfer experience for all students.

When addressing transfer and articulation, it is important to distinguish the difference between a course transferring and a course transferring and satisfying a degree requirement.

Course Transfers

The course information is posted on the receiving institution's transcript BUT does not satisfy a specific degree requirement.

Course Transfers & Satisfies a Degree Requirement

The course information is posted on the receiving institution's transcript AND satisfies a specific degree requirement (General Education or Major requirement).

While it is understood that every course will not transfer and satisfy a degree requirement, with the rising costs of higher education coupled with the large first-generation student population in the state, NSHE has a moral obligation and civic duty to support strategic initiative and policy-based work that will increase the probability of courses transferring and satisfying a degree requirement.

While transfer and articulation programs and services should be designed with all students in mind, a particular focus should be placed on simplicity to better serve first-generation students and stronger alignment to better serve today's modern student, which is more mobile than ever. The rise of online education and rapid increase in dual credit programs – the latter of which is the fastest growing population in NSHE by a large margin – has

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created a need to focus transfer and articulation strategic planning through a systemwide lens rather than a regional north and south framework.

NSHE has not made substantive policy revisions in the transfer and articulation general education space in a decade and a half (January 2010). In the years since, general education transfer and articulation have become focal points of national policy reforms, with many systems implementing innovative solutions. As such, it is imperative to review the transfer and articulation best practices that have emerged in other systems in recent years and redesign NSHE transfer and articulation initiatives through a systemwide lens that will serve first-generation and transient students more effectively and efficiently.

Transfer and Articulation Best Practice	NSHE Practice	
	Yes	**No**
Common Course Numbering • Institutions use the same course numbers for equivalent courses	✔️	
General Education Package Transfers • Completion of a systemwide general education package at one institution is notated on a transcript and transfers and satisfies the general education requirements at all other institutions – regardless of if the general education was completed at a university or community college.		❌
Common General Education Nomenclature • Common systemwide nomenclature and credit hour parameters are used to define systemwide general education requirements on all degree maps to ensure that prospective students, current students, transfer students, parents and guardians, high school counselors, and academic advisors are navigating one general education program.		❌
Universally Applicable General Education Course Inventory • A systemwide general education framework includes a discipline bucket approach in which each discipline specific bucket requirement (e.g., 3 Hours of Fine Arts) includes an explicit and transparent inventory of specific courses that are universally recognized and satisfy the discipline bucket requirement throughout the system.		❌
Systemwide Program Alignment in High Enrollment Programs • In high enrollment programs, systemwide associate degrees are implemented by using pre-major and early major courses to 1) fulfill the program portion of associate of arts/science degrees and 2) satisfy specific baccalaureate degree course requirements, without the loss of credit. These transfer and satisfy the first 60 hours at any university in the state that offers the like baccalaureate program.		❌
Credit for Prior Learning Alignment • Common prior learning that has been demonstrated outside of a traditional learning environment (Advanced Placement, CLEP, International Baccalaureate, etc.) is universally recognized and transfers and applies throughout the system.		❌

These were based on a combination of practices employed by Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah.

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"The goal of transfer reform is to ensure greater transparency and increased simplicity of transfer."
-The Campaign for College Opportunity

It is understood that creating a more robust system-based approach to transfer and articulation will be a detailed and extensive project. As such, a working group will be created to identify best practices and make recommendations — with the transient and first-generation student in mind — on how to improve transfer.

EARLY COLLEGE SUCCESS

Students who experience success in the first year of college build positive momentum, and, in turn, increase the probability of future academic success.[xxiv] By contrast, students who encounter academic failures early on are significantly less likely to achieve long-term success. These early setbacks can undermine their confidence, diminish motivation, and ultimately hinder their overall progress.

"The first year of college can be a make or break for many students, and as an institution, you have the power to shape their entire experience."
-Gardner Institute

A commonly used early performance indicator, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) first-year retention rate, tracks the percentage of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking students who continue at the same institution from one fall to the next. In fall 2022, the NSHE two-year college systemwide retention rate was 60%, which was three percentage points below the national public two-year college retention rate of 63%. Likewise, NSHE universities posted a systemwide retention rate of 78% in 2022, which fell three percentage points under the national public university retention rate of 81%.[l][xxv]

When breaking down retention on the national scale, data shows that first-generation students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds are four times more likely to drop out at the end of the first year in college.[xxvi] Knowing that Nevada has a high first-generation population and many students receive need-based aid coupled with the opportunity to elevate the systemwide retention rates, a systemwide targeted focus on early college success is critical. NSHE will commit to institutional and systemwide measures to foster improvement in this respective area.

Student Success Journey
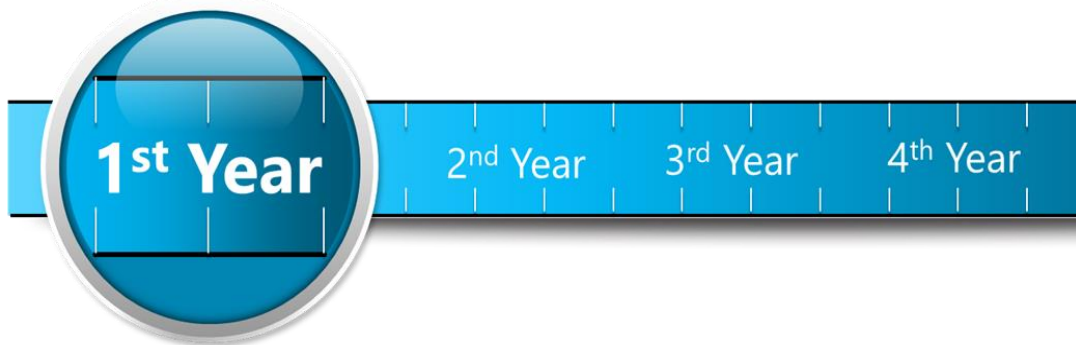
When unpacking early college success from a high-level perspective, there are two highly applicable first-year checkpoints that have been validated as critical milestones. The first milestone — completing 15 credit hours in the first semester or 30 credit hours in the first year has been linked to success at both community colleges and universities. Taking 15 credit hours the first semester has shown to have a positive impact on completion for Black and Hispanic students, first-generation college students, and students with lower levels of academic preparation.[xxvii] This proved to be beneficial among all students who worked 30 hours a week or less, which

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provides a practical takeaway that can apply when discussing course load options with students. In a related study that focused on whether increasing credit load had an impact on grades, it was found that taking a higher credit load did not have a negative impact on course grades, even among the lower-performing student groups.[xxviii] Building on this, datasets from Georgia and Wisconsin revealed that students who completed at least 30 credit hours in the first year versus those who completed less than 30 hours in the first year were retained and graduated at higher rates.[xxix] [xxx]

Given the positive outcomes linked to full-time students who enroll in robust credit loads, a systemwide focus on this area will be implemented. The percentage of first-time, full-time students who complete at least 30 credit hours in the first year will be tracked. The first-year parameter can extend beyond the traditional fall and spring semesters by including both summer school and intersessions.

The second milestone – the completion of gateway math and English courses in the first year – has also shown to positively influence completion. [xxxi] By NSHE policy, enrollment in gateway English and math courses is required in the first year to establish an expectation to achieve this milestone. Since 2021, NSHE has made significant strides in increasing first-year gateway math and English course enrollment and completion through eliminating traditional prerequisite remediation and scaling corequisite math and English support.

Although progress has been made, there is still an opportunity for growth in this area. One such avenue to help foster improvement in gateway math completion is implementing math pathways. In a system-based math pathways structure, a common alignment between general education math course requirements and majors is used at all colleges and universities to facilitate transfer, tailor math requirements around major and career needs, and promote student success.[xxxii] An NSHE Math Taskforce – which has math faculty representation from each NSHE institution – is currently participating in the University of Texas at Austin's Launch Years Initiative to implement math pathways. As part of this process, it is anticipated that a statistical general education math pathway will be implemented based on feedback from academic disciplines that will be provided through an upcoming survey. The implementation of a statistical pathway would provide an opportunity to equip students in certain programs with skills that are more pertinent to their academic and future career field and likely help increase math gateway course completion rates. Additionally, more intentional efforts will be made to provide academic advisors with professional development to ensure that they have the tools and resources to help students identify the correct gateway math course based on their areas of interest or desired program of study.

The percentage of first-time fall students enrolled in gateway courses in their first two regular semesters will be included as a metric because tracking this progress will provide an opportunity to ensure that institutions are making efforts to comply with the policy and are prioritizing it to align with the system goal.

The percentage of first-time students who complete gateway courses in their first two regular semesters will also be monitored to ensure that students are meeting this milestone. If the statistical pathway is implemented, this metric would offer valuable insights into its effectiveness in improving gateway math completion rates.

Data conditioning will be generated to ensure that students who earned gateway course credit through CPL or dual credit are identified and included in these respective counts.

PROACTIVE STUDENT SUCCESS

Given the focus on early college success, it's imperative that NSHE ensures that each institution's actions support this effort. There are varying levels of technology, expertise, and resources throughout the system. While it is understood that many efforts have been made on campuses recently, an inventory of the use of best practices throughout the system has not been compiled or monitored. Going forward, each institution will provide a

student success action plan approved by the Chancellor and submit reports in subsequent years. The action plan – which will have more detailed instructions at a later date – will address issues such as:

- How student data is used to support student success;

- Identifying and supporting at-risk students;

- Early alerts;

- Efforts to reduce high DFWI Grade Rates;

- Summer bridge programs;

- Learning/living communities;

- Tutoring services (digital and face-to-face);

- Emergency grants;

- First-year experience courses;

- Standardized undergraduate academic advising training;

- Chatbots;

- Academic advising student assessments;

- Academic advising personnel evaluations; and

- Other efforts not addressed above.

"We need to meet the students where they are, not where we think they should be."
-Carol Cohen, Georgia State University

SUCCESS THROUGH ACADEMIC ADVISING

When looking at student success throughout the duration of a student's undergraduate academic career, academic advising is a critical element. Students who engage with advisors are more likely to be successful and build the core knowledge and attitudes that will help them continue and complete their programs.[xxxiii][xxxiv] The frequency of contact between advisors and students is also linked to increased student success. Students who meet with their advisors more have been shown to outperform their peers.[xxxv] On top of this, in a national survey, public community college and university students rated academic advising as the most important student experience area. [xxxvi] Seeing the importance of academic advising from both a student success and experience standpoint, the Board instituted a 350:1 advisor to student ratio requirement in NSHE policy, which took effect in 2023-2024. This ratio will be included as a metric to ensure that each campus is complying with the policy and that NSHE is meeting its commitment to provide a more personalized academic advising experience.

"Academic advising is the heartbeat of the institution's efforts to engage students, connect them with resources, and retain them through to graduation."
-Dr. Richard Light, Harvard Graduate School of Education

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SUCCESS THROUGH COMPLETION

Increasing IPEDS program completion – the number of students that complete a degree or certificate – will be critical to produce the educated workforce that Nevada needs. Nevada has made solid progress in this area in recent years by achieving a five-year high in one of the most recent completion counts.[xxxvii] It will be important for NSHE to build on this progress by continuing to increase IPEDS completion numbers. Along these lines, the IPEDS graduation rate will also be included as a metric.

SUCCESS THROUGH MULTIPLE LENSES

Based on feedback from two-year college presidents and Board members, it is acknowledged that measuring long-term success should also include measures that consider success outside the scope of a traditional graduation rate metric. As such, the three measures below will be included.

First, the IPEDS transfer-out rate – which includes the percentage of first-time, full-time degree-seeking, undergraduate students from the fall cohort who are known to have transferred out of the reporting institution within 150% of time to completion – will be included for two-year colleges because some students enroll at two-year colleges with transfer as their primary goal.

Second, the NSHE persistence rate – which measures the percentage of the first-time in college students (degree-seeking, undergraduate, full-time, and part-time students) who start at one NSHE institution during the fall semester of a given year and subsequently enroll at any NSHE institution or complete a degree by the following fall – will be included to track progression within the system.

Lastly, the IPEDS outcome measures – which are very similar to the Student Achievement Measure (SAM) – will be used. These metrics measure all students who enroll in a given year – including both first-time and transfer students and both part-time and full-time students – and looks at what the students have done eight years later by breaking down the percentage of students who have completed a certificate, the percentage of students who completed an associate degree, the percentage of students who completed a baccalaureate degree, the percentage of students who are currently enrolled at the starting institution, and the percentage of students who are currently enrolled at another institution. The outcomes measure also compares performance by Pell versus Non-Pell status.

When looking at the latter two metrics, the broader approach ensures that there are measures that accurately capture the diverse enrollment patterns at community colleges, where part-time students often make up a substantial portion of the student population.

SUCCESS SUMMIT

Lastly, an annual or biennial student success summit – which will primarily be targeted towards academic advisors, first-year experience professionals, retention specialists, and institutional research representatives – will be held. This student success summit will provide an opportunity for NSHE to bring in presenters that have implemented high-impact proven practices from around the country and create an outlet for NSHE institutions to share effective strategies that have been employed within Nevada.

Pillar II: Summary of Next Steps

1. A working group will be created to identify best practices and make recommendations – with the transient and first-generation student in mind – on how to improve transfer.

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2. Each institution will submit a student success plan, which is subject to approval by the Chancellor, and submit student success reports in subsequent years.

3. Establish systemwide math pathways – with an anticipated statistical pathway – to better align general education math courses with majors, simplify transfer, and improve student outcomes.

4. Create a committee to plan an annual or biennial student success summit – which will primarily be targeted towards academic advisors, first-year experience professionals, and retention specialists.

Pillar II: Metrics

1. Full-time and part-time IPEDS retention rates.

2. Percentage of first-time, full-time students who complete 30 credit hours during the first year of college.

3. Percentage of first-time fall students enrolled in gateway English and math courses in their first two regular semesters AND the percentage of first-time fall students who completed gateway English and math courses in their first two regular semesters.

4. Academic advisor to student ratio (meet 350:1 ratio).

5. Number of IPEDS completers.

6. IPEDS graduation rates and transfer-out rates (the latter applies to two-year colleges only).

7. NSHE persistence rates

8. IPEDS outcome measures (similar to SAM).

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From an equity standpoint, many core success metrics disaggregated by race/ethnicity will continue to be monitored to maintain NSHE's commitment to closing equity gaps. A special focus will be placed on Black students, as some of the most significant graduation gaps on campuses exist between the overall institutional student population and the Black student population.

While there is a clear need to improve Black graduation rates at some institutions, there are other institutions that may have other performance gaps that are more pronounced. Along these lines, the demographic makeup in southern Nevada differs compared to northern Nevada. Recognizing the uniqueness of student compositions throughout NSHE, each campus will be responsible for identifying at least one sub-population in which there is a graduation performance gap and detailing efforts it is taking and plans to take in the future to close the gap.[1]

One performance gap that is often highlighted in higher education strategic planning involves the first-generation student population. While it is an important subpopulation to emphasize, there are multiple first-generation student definitions that are applied within higher education circles.   Going forward, it will be important for NSHE to establish a systemwide first-generation student definition and consistently apply it for data collection, reporting, and analysis purposes.

Lastly, the Academic, Research, and Student Affairs Council in concert with the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access Council will identify and discuss best practices that have been employed – both inside and outside of NSHE – to increase student success of underrepresented populations and close equity performance gaps.

Pillar III: Summary of Next Steps

1. Each institution will identify at least one subpopulation in which a graduation rate performance gap exists and detail the efforts it is taking and plans to take to close the gap.

2. Establish a systemwide first-generation student definition and consistently apply it in for data collection, reporting, and analysis purposes.

3. Identify and discuss best practices that have been employed – both inside and outside of NSHE – to increase student success of underrepresented populations and close equity performance gaps.

Pillar III: Metrics

1. IPEDS graduation rates by race/ethnicity, Pell status, and first-generation status

2. IPEDS part-time and full-time retention rates by race/ethnicity, Pell status, and first-generation status.

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[1] If a graduation performance gap cannot be identified due to a small cohort size, an alternative performance gap metric must be selected and submitted for approval by NSHE Academic and Student Affairs. This alternative metric will ensure meaningful evaluation of student outcomes while maintaining alignment with NSHE's focus on equity and performance improvement.

3. Persistence rates by race/ethnicity, Pell status, and first-generation status.

4. Completion rates of gateway math and English courses by race/ethnicity, Pell status, and first-generation status.

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MEETING WORKFORCE NEEDS: IN-DEMAND OCCUPATIONS

NSHE plays a vital role in addressing Nevada's workforce needs, and as part of its core function, it must prioritize producing graduates in programs that align with high-demand occupations. By focusing on strategic alignment between academic program offerings and the state's labor market demands, NSHE can ensure that more students are equipped with the skills they need to succeed and are positioned to contribute directly to the economic development of Nevada. Building on this foundation, NSHE will track the number of students who are majoring in degree programs that prepare students to work in the top in-demand occupations defined by the Office of Workforce Innovation (OWINN).   The percentage of students majoring in these programs in relation to all programs will also be tracked. By tracking these data, NSHE will be well positioned to assess how effectively institutions are guiding students into programs that match workforce needs.

In addition to tracking enrollment in degree programs aligned with in-demand occupations, NSHE will also collect data on the number of program completers in these fields. This data collection will help evaluate the full pipeline – from student entry to workforce entry – and allow for better understanding of how well institutions are contributing to meeting Nevada's workforce needs. Lastly, the percentage of degrees awarded in degree programs leading to in-demand occupations in relation to all degrees awarded will also be collected.

"An important component for companies looking to move into Nevada is ensuring that they can tap into a skilled workforce."
– Governor Joe Lombardo

ACADEMIC PROGRAM GAP ANALYSIS

NSHE will collaborate with an economist to conduct a comprehensive academic program gap analysis. This analysis will be a key resource for the workforce committee, the Board, and NSHE institutions to 1) pinpoint the most pressing workforce and economic needs, risks, and opportunities across different regions of the state, and 2) provide valuable data and insights to inform future academic program decisions and resource investments.

CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING: WORKFORCE FOCUS

The credit for prior learning (CPL) efforts noted on pages 5-6 will also support workforce development efforts. From a workforce perspective, a focus on identifying certifications, licenses, and recognized training that equates to CPL will be especially critical because there is limited activity in this space beyond recognizing military training. These data have not been collected or reported, so the groundwork will need to be established to build data collection processes and ensure consistent reporting.

WORK-BASED LEARNING

Participating in internships is recognized as one of the high-impact practices by the American Association of Colleges and Universities that significantly contributes to student success.[xxxviii] Research demonstrates that students who engage in internships earn higher grades in their final year of college, receive more job offers upon graduation, and secure employment at higher rates. [xxxix xl xli]

Equally important, internships help address workforce needs by filling critical gaps and offering businesses a channel to recruit potential employees and build sustainable talent pipelines.[xlii] Recognizing these benefits, a data infrastructure will be established to monitor and track the participation of students in internships and other work-based learning opportunities such as job shadowing and apprenticeships.

Today, individuals will need to engage in continuous reskilling and upskilling to stay competitive and adaptable in an ever-changing workforce.[xliii] While formal credentials like degrees are essential, it is important to recognize the value that non-credit career-focused courses play because they often provide an efficient and affordable way to acquire or sharpen a specialized skill. Right now, non-credit course data is not collected at the system level. With non-credit expansion projected based on skill-based workforce demands, establishing comprehensive non-credit data collection and reporting systems will be crucial to gauge activity and monitor trends. Accordingly, NSHE will collaborate with institutions to develop a process for systematically collecting and reporting these data. The non-credit courses must be organized into distinct categories, such as workforce development and career skills and health and wellness to facilitate effective measurement and evaluation.

WAGE DATA

Lastly, while Nevada's higher education costs are more affordable than in most states, pursuing a degree remains a significant financial commitment for Nevada families and students. Therefore, ensuring a strong return on student investment is essential for both transparency and accountability. NSHE is currently collaborating with the Department of Employment, Training & Rehabilitation (DETR) to integrate graduate wage data into this portion of the strategic plan. These data will highlight the percentage of NSHE graduates that are earning sustainable wages. While these data are intended to assess post-graduation success, further data refinement is necessary before they can be fully leveraged for strategic planning and measurement purposes.

Pillar IV: Next Steps

1. Identify all academic programs that are connected to the top in-demand occupations identified by OWINN.

2. Collaborate with an economist to conduct a comprehensive academic program gap analysis.

3. Focus on identifying certifications, licenses, and recognized training that can apply toward CPL.

4. Establish data infrastructure to monitor and track the participation of students in internships and other work-based learning opportunities such as job shadowing and apprenticeships.

5. Develop a process for systematically collecting and reporting non-credit course data.

Pillar IV: Metrics

1. Number of students enrolled in programs that prepare students to work in OWINN in-demand occupations AND the percentage of students enrolled in these programs in relation to all programs.

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2. Number of graduates in programs that prepare students to work in OWINN in-demand occupations and the percentage of graduates in programs that prepare students to work in OWINN in-demand occupations in relation to all graduates.

3. Number of students who participated in work-based learning activities (internships, job shadowing, apprenticeships, etc.)

4. Number of enrollments in non-credit courses and number of non-credit courses, with a focus on enrollments and courses focusing on workforce development and career skills.

5. CPL awarded through workforce-oriented learning experiences (certifications, licenses, recognized training, portfolios, etc.)

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UNR and UNLV recently elevated their research statuses from a Research II Carnagie Classification – High Research Activity institution – to a Research I Carnagie Classification – Very High Research Activity institution. It will be important for UNR and UNLV along with DRI – which has also done excellent work in the research space – to continue expanding their research portfolios. As such, total research and development expenditures – which measure the total research dollars from businesses, the federal government, non-federal governments, higher education, and non-profit organizations – will be included.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) Research Expenditure Rankings will be included as they offer a framework for assessing national-level research performance and institutional success.   Additionally, the following will be collected to gauge research productivity: doctoral degrees conferred per average annual full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate and graduate enrollment; number of research grant applications and grants received (success), and research citations.

From a solutions-focused research perspective, UNLV, UNR, and DRI will provide a brief written narrative of one or two solution-focused research projects on their campus to showcase how practical, real-world issues are being addressed through academic research. These projects will demonstrate how solution-focused research is being applied to address pressing challenges in Nevada, across the United States, and on a global scale. Additionally, a systemwide research project involving faculty collaboration across multiple NSHE campuses will be highlighted annually. This will show how NSHE is leveraging faculty strengths and expertise areas to drive innovative solutions to societal problems.

Pillar V: Next Steps

1. Each year, UNLV, UNR, and DRI will provide a brief narrative of two solution-focused research projects on their campus to showcase how practical, real-world issues are being addressed through academic research.

2. Each year, a systemwide research project involving faculty collaboration across multiple NSHE campuses will be highlighted. This will show how NSHE is leveraging faculty strengths and expertise areas to drive innovative solutions to societal problems.

Pillar V: Metrics

1. Total research and development expenditures.

2. National Science Foundation Research Expenditure Rankings.

3. Doctoral awards conferred per undergraduate and graduate (average annual full-time equivalent).

4. Number of research grant applications and grants received (success).

5. Research citations.

6. Patents

Institutions may highlight one to two areas of focus that capture campus-specific initiatives and measures within their strategic plan.
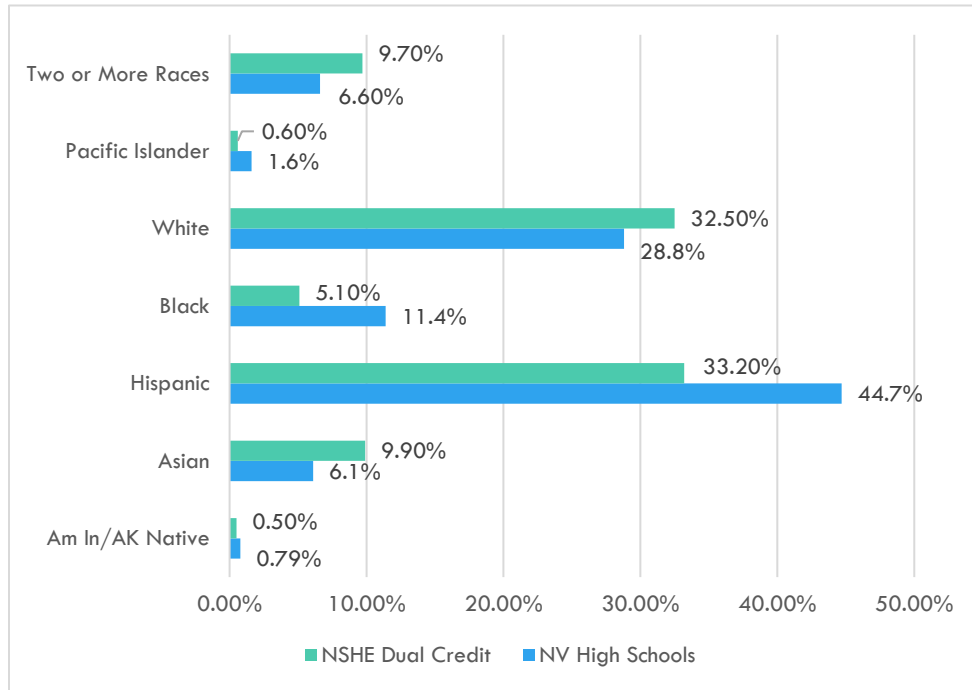
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Targets

While the goal is to generate increases in all the metrics noted above, some specific targets are included herein. It should be noted that external factors, such as economic downturns or extended low-unemployment periods, could impact the pace and extent of progress. These metrics may be revisited as needed.

Increase Dual Credit Participation Rate	
Base Goal	Aspirational Goal
Increase dual credit enrollment participation rate (percentage of Nevada high school graduates who participated in dual credit) from 26% to 34% by 2030-2031. This would meet the national average and be a systemwide all-time high for dual credit participation (since this record was collected).[xliv] [xlv]	Increase dual credit participation rate (percentage of Nevada high school graduates who participated in dual credit) from 26% to 35% by 2030-2031. This would exceed the national average. Going further, a high aspirational goal would be a 50% dual credit participation rate because this would put Nevada among leading states.

Make Dual Credit Race/Ethnicity Enrollment Proportionate to Nevada Public High School Enrollment
Reduce race/ethnicity participation gaps between the Nevada high school population and the NSHE dual credit population, with a particular focus on the most sizable gaps: Black and Hispanic Students.

Race/Ethnicity Background of Nevada High School Students Versus NSHE Dual Credit Students[xlvi] [xlvii]

Increase NSHE Capture Rate	
Base Goal	Aspirational Goal
Increase the NSHE capture rate of Nevada high school graduates that enroll at an NSHE institution within a one-year period after high school graduation from 37% to 43% (class of 2030, measured in 2030-2031). This would match the systemwide all-time high (since this metric was reported).[xlviii]	Increase the NSHE capture rate of Nevada high school graduates that enroll at an NSHE institution within a one-year period after high school graduation from 37% to 44% (class of 2030, measured in 2030-2031). This would exceed the systemwide all-time high (since this metric was reported).

Increase Systemwide Adult Student Enrollment	
Base Goal	Aspirational Goal
Increase the systemwide adult student population (age 25+) by 10% (30,908 to 34,000 students) by Fall 2031.[xlix]	Increase the systemwide adult student population (age 25+) by 24% (30,908 to 37,000 students) by Fall 2031. This would exceed the systemwide all-time high (since this metric was reported).

Increase First-Year Retention Rates: Two-Year Colleges	
Base Goal	Aspirational Goal
Increase the systemwide two-year college retention rate by three percentage points (60% to 63%) to meet the national public two-year college retention rate (Fall 2030 cohort, retention measured in Fall 2031).[xxv l xxv]	Increase the systemwide two-year college retention rate by four percentage points (60% to 64%) to exceed the national public two-year college retention rate (Fall 2030 cohort, retention measured in Fall 2031).

Increase First-Year Retention Rates: Universities	
Base Goal	Aspirational Goal
Increase the systemwide university retention rate by three percentage points (78% to 81%) to meet the national public university retention rate (Fall 2030 cohort, retention measured in Fall 2031).[xxv l]	Increase the systemwide university retention rate by four percentage points (78% to 82%) to exceed the national public university retention rate (fall 2030 cohort, retention measured in Fall 2031).

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Increase Degrees and Certificates Awarded	
Base Goal	Aspirational Goal
Increase the systemwide number of degrees and certificates awarded by 10% (22,007 to 24,200 by 2030-2031). This would be a systemwide all-time high (since this metric was reported.[xlix]	Increase the number of degrees and certificates awarded systemwide by 20% (22,007 to 26,400) by 2030-2031.

Peer-Based Targets
The institutional peer process should be reevaluated, and updated peers and aspirational peers should be identified under new criteria. Additional targets may be identified after this process is concluded.

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