

Testimony of Paul Dugan, Superintendent
Washoe County School District Reno, Nevada
April 26, 2006 10:00 a.m.
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Good morning - My name is Paul Dugan and I am the Superintendent of the Washoe County School District. Our school district, serving the Reno/Sparks area of Northern Nevada, has an enrollment of approximately 62,000 students with a 42% minority population, of which 30% are Hispanic. I have been fortunate to be a part of this school district for the past 23 years serving as a teacher, counselor, and school administrator, and most recently, I am completing my second year as Superintendent. It certainly is a pleasure and an honor to be here today.

In December of 2004, our Board of Trustees took a bold step and enacted a policy we call the Gateway Curriculum. This new policy requires that effective with the entering freshmen class of 2006 all students will be automatically enrolled in 4 years of math and 3 years of science and will be scheduled for a full course load of six subjects their senior year. Currently, students are only required to take 3 years of math and 2 years of science and four courses their senior year.

The School Board took this step for several compelling reasons:

1. Research has shown—particularly the work of the Education Trust—that to have any chance of success in the world of work or in post-secondary education, high school students must regularly engage in rigorous and intellectually challenging work. We believe that high school should not be a “gatekeeper,” sorting students into unequal paths, but rather, it should serve to well prepare all students for wherever their chosen career paths lead. High school should be a Gateway to success for all.
2. Secondly, the achievement gap for high poverty and minority students must close. Traditionally--and sadly--these students are too often placed in our least challenging classes and thus may face economic lifetimes of minimum wage earnings. Requiring a rigorous curriculum for all students will have the potentially greatest impact on our poor and minority students.
3. The Gateway Curriculum is not a wholesale attempt to send all students to four-year universities. However, we firmly believe that ALL students must be prepared for and access some form of post-secondary education, be it vocational training, military

experience, trade school, community college, or university studies. A high school education is not enough any more, if our students are to compete locally, nationally, and internationally.

4. Too many of our graduates are required to take remedial level college coursework because they have not been properly prepared for post-secondary studies. Our own research clearly demonstrates that completing a fourth year of math in high school, including second-year algebra, eliminates the need for this remediation. I need to emphasize that this fourth year of math need not be the traditional trigonometry or calculus. A variety of rigorous, fourth-year courses, including math related to the skilled trades or the business world, are currently under development.
5. Finally, thanks to the American Diploma Project, it is now well documented that the demands of the workplace and the requirements for post-secondary education have converged. The paradigm has shifted. All students need both post-secondary education and a job. It is not an either-or situation. All students need first and second year algebra, geometry,

statistics, and data skills. All students need strong oral and written communication skills, as well as analytical thinking and research capabilities. All students will clearly benefit from additional math and science courses.

As the Washoe County School District prepares its first group of students to take part in this new curriculum, it will be critical that both thoughtful course development and well-designed student support be adequately addressed. Furthermore, we understand very well that this is not merely a high school policy, but rather a K-12 policy that demands that those teaching at the elementary and middle school levels do all that is necessary to prepare the students for these new curriculum challenges. If we adequately address these issues, along with meaningful teacher professional development and parental support, we will have come a long way in ensuring success for our students, our school district, and the community we serve. Thank you.