

At-Risk Indicator Review and Impact Analysis

Nevada's Pupil-Centered Funding Plan

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Introduction

Nevada’s Pupil-Centered Funding Plan (PCFP) is the first in the nation to use a machine learning–based At-Risk indicator (the Graduation Related Analytic Data [GRAD] score) to allocate funding based on students’ likelihood of not graduating.

In each even-numbered year, the Commission on School Funding is charged with reviewing the methods for identifying At-Risk pupils and reviewing and proposing revisions to the method for calculating the percentage of At-Risk pupils.¹ As part of this review, the Commission must:

- Select a third party to verify that the current calculation or algorithm accurately identifies the At-Risk population;
- Determine if a more accurate or effective method exists; and
- Receive a report from the third party with its findings.

This report presents WestEd’s analyses conducted during summer 2026 to support the Commission on School Funding’s ongoing work to review the At-Risk indicator and improve the PCFP. There are five main sections to the report.

1. The first section provides an overview of how other states identify and fund At-Risk students.
2. The second section of the report provides analyses of the relationship between eligibility for At-Risk funding and other indicators of student need.
3. The third section of the report provides analyses of the relationship between eligibility for At-Risk funding and student outcomes.
4. The fourth section of the report offers an analysis of the use of the bottom quintile of GRAD scores to identify students as At-Risk.
5. The fifth section provides a brief summary of the analysis of At-Risk funding’s impact on student outcomes.

The final section of the report provides a summary of the main findings and their implications for identifying and providing funding to support At-Risk students.

¹ Nevada Revised Statutes 387.12463.

How Other States Identify and Fund At-Risk Students

A brief examination of how other states identify and fund students considered economically disadvantaged or otherwise at risk reveals several key patterns. Most states identify students based on economic disadvantage measures such as eligibility for the federal free or reduced-price meal program or through direct certification. When it comes to funding, most states provide additional funding through a student weight or per-pupil supplement, although the size and structure of these adjustments vary considerably.

Identifying At-Risk Students

States most commonly identify At-Risk students using measures of economic disadvantage, particularly eligibility for free or reduced-price meals, participation in public benefit programs, or household income relative to the federal poverty level. Notably, 38% of states (including Nevada) that provide supplemental funding for At-Risk students rely on more than one indicator. Many states supplement measures of economic disadvantage with student characteristics such as student involvement in the foster care system; homelessness; migrant, mobile, or runaway students; English Learner students, or students with Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs). The states that rely on only a single indicator all rely on measures of economic disadvantage.

Four states incorporate academic achievement into their identification of At-Risk students. Only one of these four states uses academic achievement alone to identify students as At-Risk; the other three states, including Nevada, combine indicators of academic risk with indicators of economic disadvantage and student characteristics. Table 1 provides a summary of the different indicators that states use to identify and fund students considered economically disadvantaged or otherwise at risk.

Table 1. Indicators Used to Identify At-Risk Students

Measure used to identify/count At-Risk students	Number of states (includes DC)
Free/reduced-price lunch or other school meal eligibility	23
Foster care; homelessness; or migrant, mobile, or runaway students	16
Direct certification/public benefit participation (e.g., SNAP, TANF, Medicaid)	14
Economically disadvantaged based on household income/federal poverty-level threshold (including Title I eligibility or participation), census block data	13
English Learner status	5
Academic performance or other indicators of academic/graduation risk	4
Students with IEPs	1

Note. Numbers add up to more than 51, as many states use multiple indicators.

Funding At-Risk Students

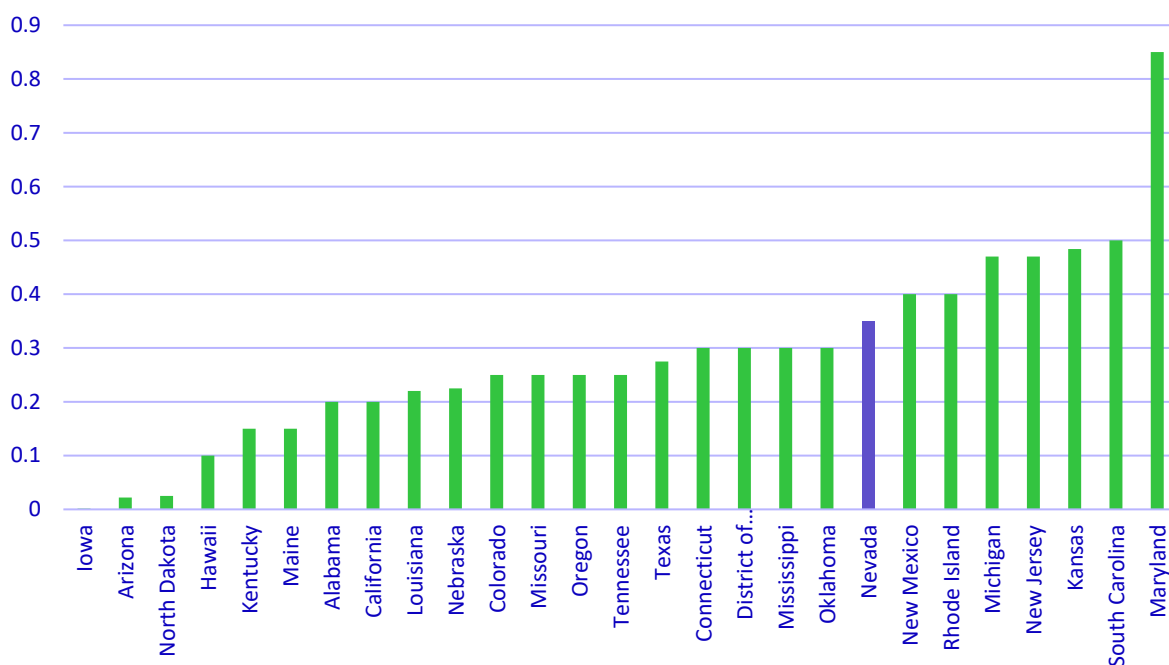
When it comes to providing funding to support At-Risk students, most states employ student-based funding formulas. Across the 50 states and Washington, DC, 31 use primarily student-based approaches to provide funding for At-Risk students. Most states that employ student-based funding for At-Risk students provide funding through a weight, but the additional funding generated through weights and funding supplements varies substantially. A few states provide At-Risk funding through a supplemental per-pupil funding amount.

At-Risk Weight Comparison by State

Many states include more than one weight for At-Risk students, most frequently based on the concentration of students within a Local Education Agency (LEA) that are identified as At-Risk. For example, Massachusetts outlines separate weights for twelve concentration groups with progressively higher per-pupil amounts as the concentration of At-Risk students increases within an LEA. Described in more detail later in this report, this approach recognizes that the cost of serving students in high-poverty LEAs may be greater than the sum of individual student needs.

To understand the range of funding provided for At-Risk students across different states, the study team calculated the per-pupil At-Risk funding amounts based on the maximum weight or funding amount provided by each state for At-Risk students (i.e., the highest weight or amount when multiple weights or amounts are provided based on different defined tiers of need). Among the 28 states that provide weighted funding for At-Risk students, the maximum weight for At-Risk students ranges from less than 1% to over 100% (Figure 1). The median (maximum) weight is about 0.26, meaning that LEAs receive roughly 26% above the applicable base amount for every At-Risk student that they serve. Nevada's current 0.35 weight therefore sits somewhat above the middle of the states with readily comparable weights but is broadly aligned with the range used in other states.

Figure 1. Maximum Weight by State for At-Risk Students



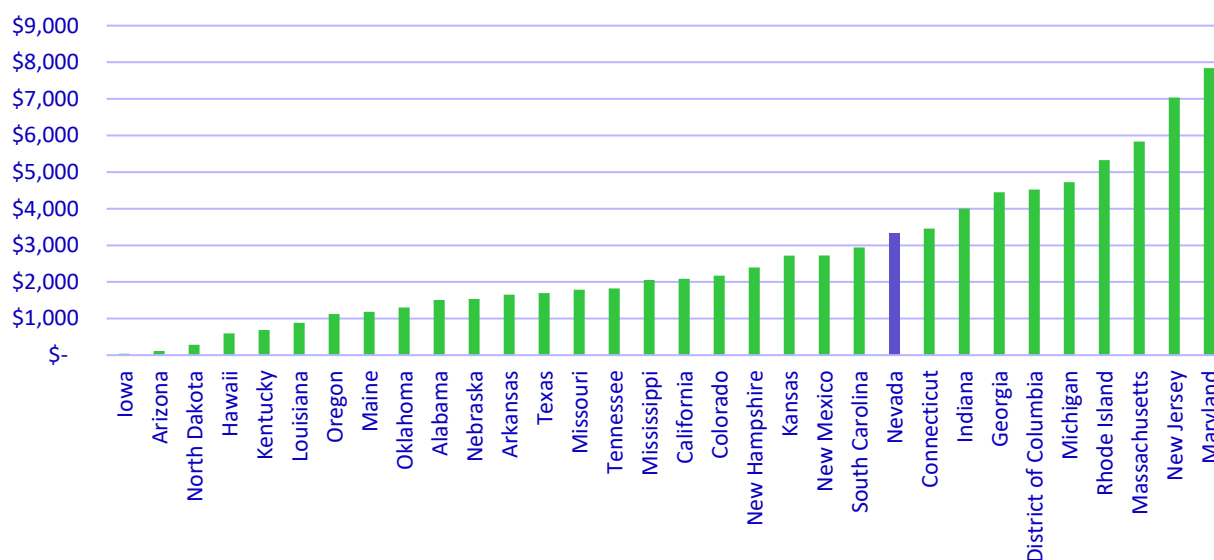
A few states are outliers. Some states provide relatively small weights, such as Iowa at .000156, Arizona at 0.022, and North Dakota at 0.025, while others provide substantially larger weights. For example, Maryland's Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 weight is 0.85.²

² Vermont was excluded from the analysis because the total amount spent per student varies by LEA based on tax-rate calculations.

At-Risk Funding Comparison by State

However, these weight comparisons should be interpreted cautiously because the amount of funding generated by a weight is contingent on the amount of base funding and the number of students identified. Using the maximum weight provided by each state for At-Risk students multiplied by the base amount, per-pupil funding amounts for At-Risk students range from less than \$50 per pupil to several thousand dollars per pupil in some states (Figure 2). For the 33 states with a maximum per-pupil At-Risk funding amount identified (including through weights and supplemental funding amounts), the median allocation is approximately \$2,000 per eligible student. Examples include California at about \$2,000, Mississippi at about \$2,050, and Colorado at about \$2,200 per At-Risk pupil. At the high end, New Jersey provides roughly \$7,000, Maryland provides about \$7,800, and Vermont provides a maximum of over \$15,000 per At-Risk pupil. Notably, these figures are not perfect comparisons: Some states use weights while others use fixed dollar amounts, resource allocations, or more complex formulas.

Figure 2. Per-Pupil Funding by State for At-Risk Students



Nevada's 0.35 weight on its FY 2026 Statewide base of \$9,486 generates approximately \$3,320 per eligible student. That places Nevada above many other states, although it remains within the range of typical funding levels used in other states. However, Nevada is somewhat unique among other states in that it does not provide stacked weights and limits identification to only the bottom quintile of GRAD scores. Both of these factors limit the number of students that are identified as At-Risk and reduce the total amount of funding allocated to serve At-Risk students in Nevada.

Treatment of Students with Multiple Needs

As noted previously, states also differ in whether weights for At-Risk students can be stacked—that is, an economically disadvantaged student who is also an English Learner or has another identified need may generate multiple weights. More than half of states provide stacked weights for At-Risk students. California and Nevada are notable examples of states who do not stack weights (i.e., allocate funding based on unduplicated counts for student weights). California uses an unduplicated student count for its low-income, English Learner, and foster youth supplemental funding, while Nevada currently provides students with the highest applicable weight rather than stacking multiple weighted categories.

Concentration Funding

Eleven states provide additional funding when economically disadvantaged students are concentrated within a school or district, rather than relying solely on an individual student weight or supplemental funding allocation. Several states explicitly account for concentrated poverty in their At-Risk student counts. Rather than applying the same amount to every eligible student, states such as California, Colorado, Connecticut, DC, Kansas, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee provide larger amounts when economically disadvantaged students are concentrated within a district or school. The structures vary: Some add a separate concentration weight while others use sliding scales, bands, or progressively larger multipliers.

Implications

There is no single national model for At-Risk funding, but many states establish a statewide per-pupil foundation amount, provide an additional student weight—often in the 20%–30% range—and, increasingly, supplement that amount when disadvantaged students are highly concentrated within a school or district. However, substantial variation in foundation amounts, eligibility definitions, and concentration provisions and whether student weights can stack means that comparing weights alone can be misleading. A more meaningful comparison considers the foundation amount, effective weight, resulting additional dollars per student, and any concentration or stacking of provisions.

Nevada's 0.35 At-Risk weight and approximately \$3,320 in additional per-pupil funding are broadly consistent with national practice and place Nevada above the median among states with comparable weights and per-pupil allocations. At the same time, several states provide substantially greater effective funding through larger weights, concentration-based funding, stacked student weights, or a combination of these approaches.

Accordingly, the key policy questions for Nevada are less about whether the overall level and structure of its At-Risk weight falls within the national range and more about how the State

targets and distributes that funding. These questions include how At-Risk eligibility should be determined, including the indicators used and corresponding thresholds; whether funding should increase as student need becomes more concentrated; and whether At-Risk funding should stack with funding provided through other student weights.

At-Risk Eligibility and Other Indicators of Student Need

Nevada's At-Risk designation is built on the GRAD score, a composite prediction of graduation risk rather than a direct measure of economic disadvantage. Because most other states identify At-Risk students using poverty measures, a natural question is how closely Nevada's designation tracks with those measures—and how often designated students also fall into categories the PCFP funds through a separate weight.

Students Deemed At-Risk Are More Likely to Be High Need on Other Dimensions

In 2025/26, students in the bottom quintile of the GRAD score distribution were more likely than other students to be identified as high need on other dimensions in every indicator examined: ever directly certified, free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) eligible, English Learner, student with an IEP, and ever in foster care (Table 2).

- Three quarters of At-Risk students had been directly certified, compared with 35% of other students;³
- Twenty-nine percent were English Learners, compared with 10% of non-At-Risk students;
- Twenty-two percent had an IEP, while only 12% of non-At-Risk students had an IEP; and
- Approximately 1.3% had ever been in foster care, compared with 0.3% of non-At-Risk students.⁴

Ninety-five percent of the bottom-quintile students on the GRAD score were eligible for FRPL, but so were 79% of all other students.

³ Based on 2023/24 data.

⁴ Based on 2023/24 data.

Notably, FRPL eligibility is close to universal in Nevada and therefore separates students far less sharply than the other measures. This is worth noting given that FRPL is the single most common identification criterion nationally.

The overlap with English Learner status and IEP status has also grown. The English Learner share of the bottom quintile rose from 21% in 2022/23 to 33% in 2024/25 before falling slightly to 29% in 2025/26, and the IEP share rose steadily from 18.5% to 21.8% over the same period. Because Nevada assigns each student the highest applicable weight rather than stacking weights, these students are designated as At-Risk but funded under another category. The growth in overlap is thus one of the mechanisms behind the decline in the funded At-Risk count described in the Quintile Analysis section, even as the designated count held roughly steady.

Table 2. Likelihood of Identification for Other Dimensions of Need

Indicator	At-Risk	Not At-Risk
Ever directly certified*	74.6%	34.5%
Free or reduced-price lunch eligible	95.2%	79.4%
English Learner	29.1%	10.4%
Student with an IEP	21.8%	11.9%
Ever in foster care*	1.3%	0.3%

* Direct certification and foster data are from 2023/24.

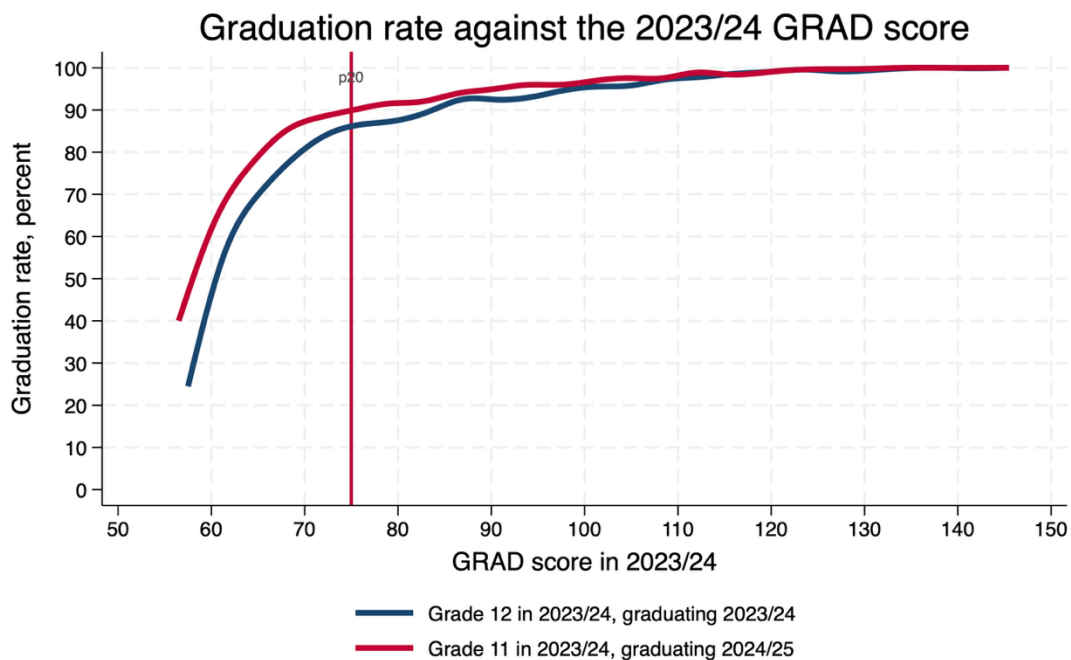
At-Risk Eligibility and Student Outcomes

Under the PCFP, students are deemed At-Risk based on their GRAD scores, a measure designed to predict which students are most at risk of not graduating, or of not graduating on time with their cohort. This section examines how closely that prediction holds—first against graduation itself, and then against chronic absenteeism and assessment performance, outcomes observable well before students reach the end of high school. Because GRAD scores were first reported in 2023/24, the graduation analysis is limited to students who were already juniors and seniors in high school when scores became available; the other outcomes are observed for students across multiple grades.

Students at the Low End of the GRAD Score Distribution Are Most at Risk of Not Graduating

Across both cohorts examined, GRAD scores track graduation rates strongly, and the relationship is concentrated at the bottom of the distribution. Among students in Grade 11 in 2023/24 who were scheduled to graduate in 2024/25, the on-time graduation rate was 49% for students with a GRAD score between 50 and 60, 70% for students with a GRAD score between 60 and 65, and 84% for students with a GRAD score between 65 and 70 (Figure 3). The curve begins to level off at GRAD scores above approximately 70: 88% of students with GRAD scores between 70 and 75 graduated on time, 93% of students with GRAD scores between 80 and 90 graduated on time, 93% of students with GRAD scores between 80 and 90 graduated on time, and more than 98% of students scoring 100 or higher graduated on time. The Grade 12 cohort in 2023/24 shows the same shape at a lower level, ranging from 28% at the very bottom of the distribution to 99% at the top.

Figure 3. Relationship Between Graduation Rate and GRAD Score



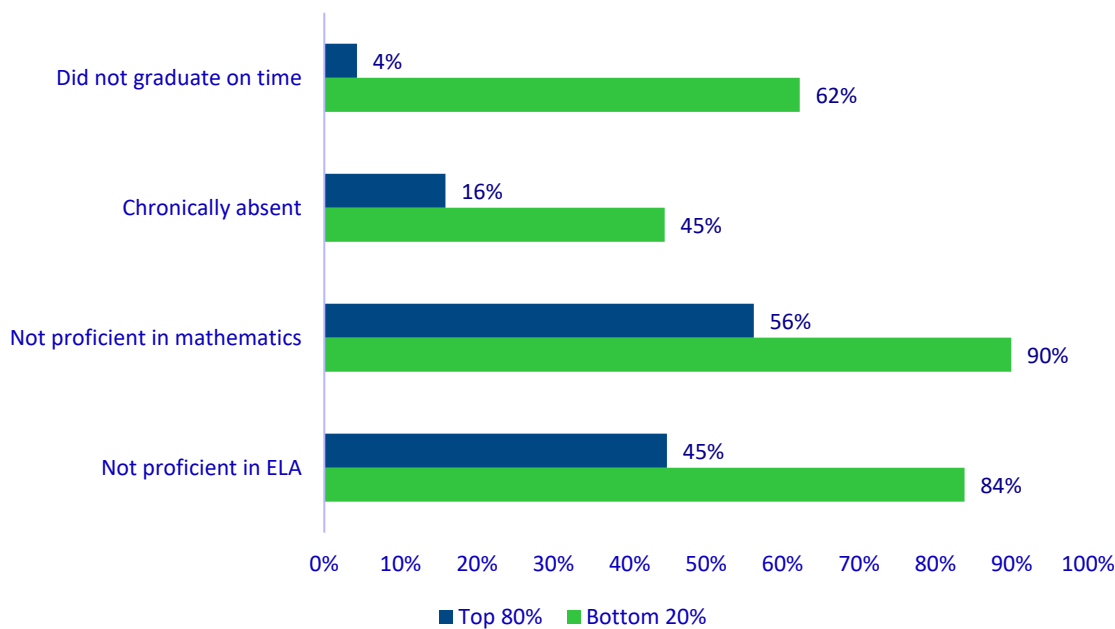
The practical implication of this analysis is that the sharpest declines in graduation likelihood occur below a GRAD score of roughly 70. At the bottom-quintile cut point used in 2023/24, a score of 75, the observed graduation rate for Grade 11 students was near 88%. Additional analyses of the relationship between students' GRAD scores in earlier grades (K–10) and students' future graduation rates will help confirm whether this trend holds when the analysis is expanded in future years.

At-Risk Status Correlates with Other Student Outcomes of Interest

The At-Risk designation is also associated with student outcomes that can be observed prior to graduation (Figure 4).

In 2024/25, 45% of students designated as At-Risk were chronically absent, compared with 16% of students not designated. On the Statewide assessments, 84% of At-Risk students were not proficient in English language arts (ELA), and 90% were not proficient in mathematics. In contrast, among those not designated as At-Risk, 45% of students were not proficient in ELA, and 56% of students were not proficient in math. These differences were especially pronounced at the lowest performance level: 60% of At-Risk students scored at Level 1 in ELA, and 70% scored at Level 1 in mathematics, compared with 22% and 30%, respectively, of students not designated as At-Risk.

Figure 4. Relationship Between GRAD Score and Other Adverse Student Outcomes, 2024/25



Graduation can be observed only for students already near the end of high school, and assessment results are reported for almost all students in Grades 3 through 8, but chronic absenteeism is reported for students across all grades. On all these dimensions, the At-Risk designation reliably identifies a population at substantially elevated risk of adverse student outcomes.

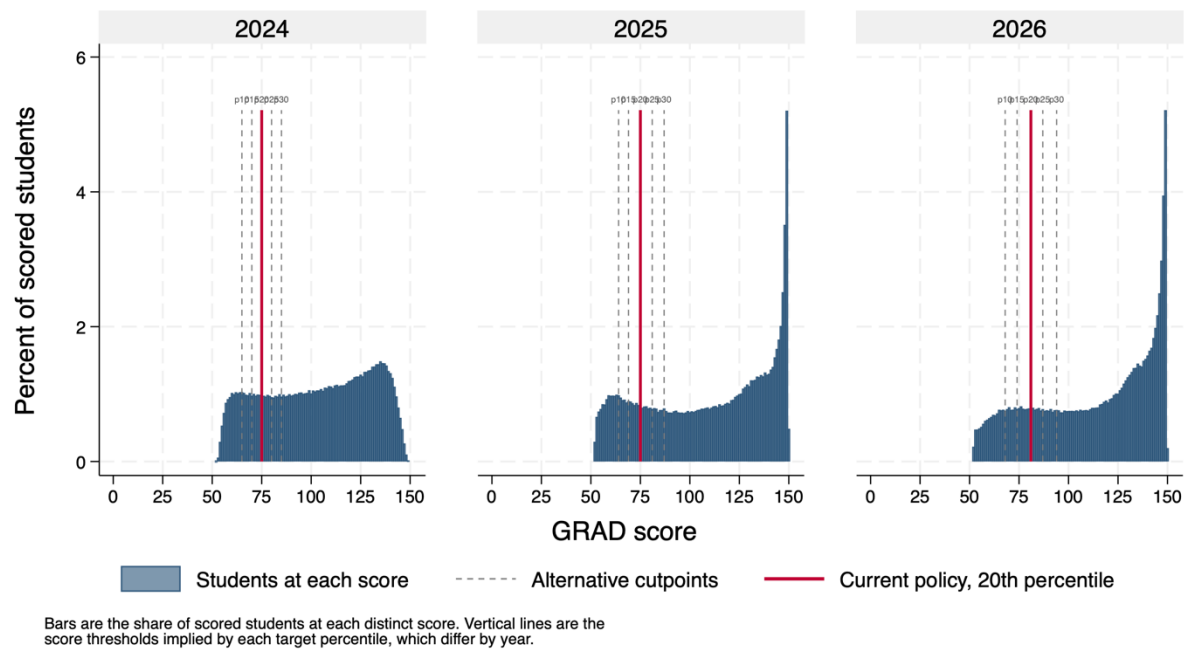
Quintile Analysis

Nevada currently defines At-Risk students as those who are in the bottom quintile of the Statewide GRAD score distribution and who are not English Learners or students with IEPs. Because the quintile is defined in relative terms, it fixes the share of students designated but not the number of students funded. The Commission on School Funding has recommended removing the quintile from the State's identification approach. This section examines how the quintile has fluctuated over the past three years and presents possible alternatives.

The Bottom Quintile Has Remained Relatively Stable over Time

Between 2023/24 and 2025/26, the number of students designated as At-Risk held between 93,654 and 95,476, or roughly 20% to 21% of all students. Conversely, the funded count of At-Risk students declined due to reduced overall enrollment and because of an increase in the number of English Learners and students with IEPs in the State. At the same time, the GRAD score distribution has shifted substantially to the right over this period: The median score rose from 105 in 2023/24 to 114 in 2024/25 and 119 in 2025/26, and the share of students scoring 145 or above grew from 1.5% to 17%. The GRAD score at the 20th percentile rose accordingly, from 75 in 2023/24 and 2024/25 to 81 in 2025/26 (Figure 5).

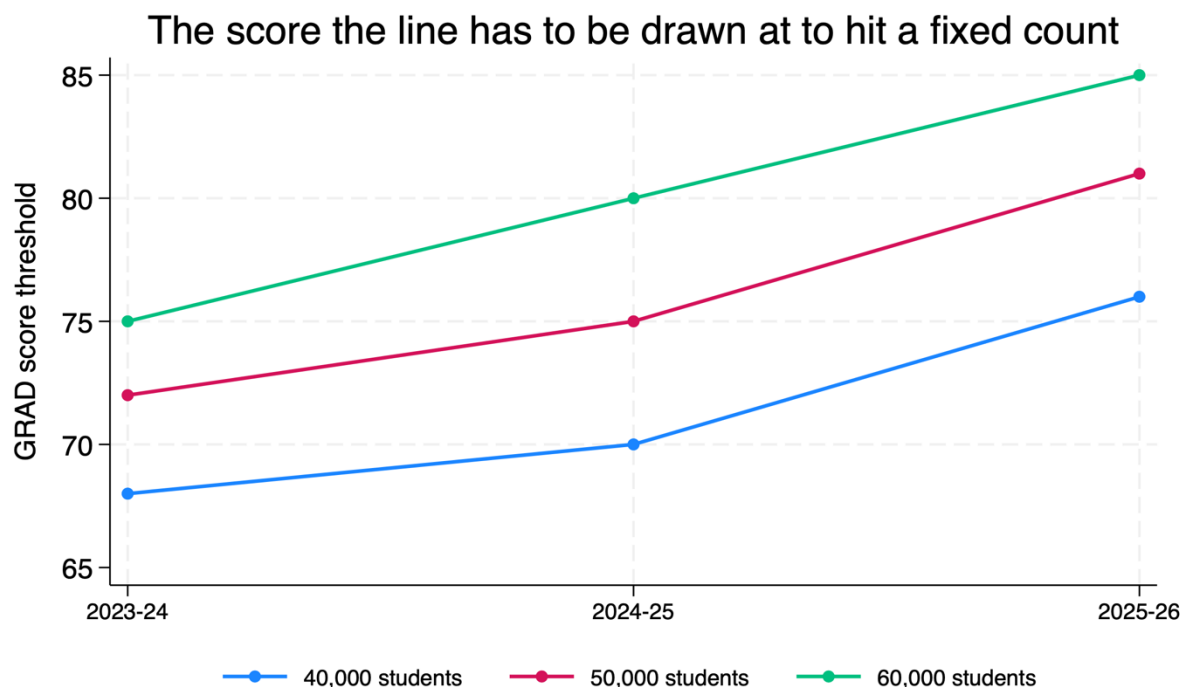
Figure 5. Distribution of GRAD Scores at Different Cut Points



Fixed Count of Students Rather than a Fixed Percentile

A straightforward alternative to using the quintile could be to fund a *fixed number* of At-Risk students each year rather than a *fixed share*. This approach would stabilize the total Statewide count of students and therefore funding for At-Risk students each year, but it would require moving the GRAD score threshold annually. As Figure 6 shows, holding the funded count at 50,000 students would have required GRAD score thresholds of 72, 75, and 81 across the three years; holding it at 60,000 would have required 75, 80, and 85; holding it at 40,000 would have required 68, 70, and 76.

Figure 6. GRAD Score Threshold to Meet a Fixed Count



Three implementation considerations follow. First, unless Nevada moves to a stacked weight model, the State may want to set the number of *funded* At-Risk students rather than a set number of At-Risk *eligible* students. This would protect LEAs against declines in the funded count driven by shifts in how many students also generate another weight, since Nevada currently only funds the highest weight a student is eligible to receive. If enrollment continues to decline, holding the total At-Risk count constant raises the share of students designated over time. Conversely, if enrollment were to increase, the share of At-Risk students would decrease if the total At-Risk count were held constant. Therefore, if Nevada were to adopt this approach, it would want to regularly review the number of funded At-Risk students to account for any enrollment increases or increases in student need. In other words, a fixed number of funded At-Risk students may function better as a floor rather than a target. Framing it as a minimum to be revisited each biennium protects LEAs against the share of At-Risk students decreasing if enrollment increases. Finally, GRAD scores are integers, and a few thousand students may share the same threshold score. As a result, a fixed target cannot be met exactly. Nevada should account for this fact when setting any target for the number of funded At-Risk students.

Impact Analysis

As part of its ongoing support to the Commission on School Funding and the Nevada Department of Education, WestEd analyzed the impact of At-Risk status on student outcomes.

Described in more detail in the September 2026 WestEd memo titled *The Impact of At-Risk and English Learner Status in Nevada Schools*, WestEd’s analysis evaluates the impact of being labeled an At-Risk student at the beginning of the school year on subsequent measures of student performance (most often tests taken the following spring).⁵

The research design separates the impact of students’ designation as At-Risk from all of the other factors that influence student achievement by focusing on the students who are close to the At-Risk eligibility threshold, comparing outcomes for students with GRAD scores just above the threshold to those just below. This research method, called a regression discontinuity design, is able to reveal the causal impact of being designated as At-Risk for students in this narrow band. That substantial benefit comes at the cost of being unable to determine the impact of being designated as At-Risk on students with the lowest GRAD score values. The results, therefore, only apply to the students who are “barely” eligible as At-Risk.

Findings and Implications

Using data from 2021/22 through 2024/25, the research team found no impact of At-Risk status on academic or attainment indicators. The lack of measurable impacts has several potential implications. For example, the results may suggest a need for additional support for districts and schools on the use of At-Risk funding to support improved academic achievement. While systems to identify and serve some other student groups such as English Learners have been in place for decades, the At-Risk indicator is a relatively recent innovation in the State.

Consequently, there is not a large body of research and expertise on which to rely when deciding how to best serve At-Risk students. Also, unlike English Learner status, the At-Risk indicator is based on nearly 70 measures of student need and performance, which may make it less clear which interventions would be most beneficial to At-Risk students. It is also possible that the overlap between At-Risk status and other student categories that generate funding (IEP status and English Learner status), is leading to inadequate funding levels for the schools that serve students with multiple categories of need. As the State continues to discover how best to target and serve At-Risk students, it will be important to remain attentive to both technical assistance needs and funding adequacy.

⁵ At-Risk status was determined in the fall of the 2023/24 and 2024/25 school years.

Conclusion

Nevada's use of the GRAD score represents a distinctive approach to identifying students who may require additional resources and support. The analyses in this report provide evidence that the indicator is identifying students with elevated levels of need. Students designated as At-Risk are substantially more likely than other students to experience economic disadvantage, be English Learners or students with IEPs, and experience adverse educational outcomes, including chronic absenteeism, lower assessment performance, and failure to graduate on time.

Nevada's 0.35 At-Risk weight and approximately \$3,320 in additional funding per eligible student are broadly consistent with the range used nationally and above the median among states with comparable funding approaches. Nevada differs from many states, however, in its limitation of eligibility to a specified share of students and its treatment of students with multiple needs. Other states increasingly use mechanisms such as stacked weights and concentration funding to account for the cumulative or concentrated needs of students.

The impact analysis found no measurable effect of the At-Risk designation on academic achievement or attainment for students near the eligibility threshold. This finding should be considered alongside the relatively recent implementation of Nevada's At-Risk funding approach under the PCFP and the diverse needs captured by the GRAD score.

Together, the findings point to the importance of considering not only which students generate At-Risk funding and how much funding is provided but also how LEAs are supported in translating those resources into effective services and interventions. As the Commission on School Funding considers revisions to the At-Risk component of the PCFP, a central policy consideration is how to preserve the State's ability to identify students at elevated risk while refining eligibility and funding mechanisms to better align resources with student need and support improved outcomes.