

A LOOK AHEAD

PHASE I: PRELIMINARY REFORMS REPORT

Improving Achievement in the Clark County School District



Superintendent of Schools Dwight D. Jones

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SCHOOL DISTRICT

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“All our efforts have one purpose.
It is to ensure all students are ready by exit.”

— Superintendent Dwight D. Jones

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The best cities want the best services for their citizens. That includes schools. Achieving success like that only happens when a community works together. It begins with higher expectations. That means raising the bar for young people and ourselves. It means expecting more of students, staff, parents, and leaders. “Good enough” can never be good enough. Your child, my child, every child deserves the best. It is hard work to prepare students to compete at this level, but it is the right work. After all, successful schools benefit everyone. They are the engine of a healthy economy and a vibrant community.

Preparing students for a knowledge-based economy is a challenge for Clark County, the state, and nation. Nevada feels the strain of increasing worldwide competition for legalized gaming. Not surprisingly, efforts to diversify Nevada’s economy are growing (WestEd, 2005, *Student Achievement and Graduation Rates*, p. 11). Simultaneously, pressure to compete at a higher level touches every corner of our country. America is still the land of opportunity, but for the first time young people are less likely than their parents to complete high school. And in a sign of increasing competition, today the United States is the only industrialized nation in the world where this is the case (EdTrust.org, Dec 9, 2008).

Without question, the entire country is experiencing the strain of a fiscal downturn. Nowhere however is this of greater urgency than in the state of Nevada. According to the *National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)*, Nevada ranks 50th in high school graduation rate (as of June 2, 2010, *NCES* reports 51 percent of students who were high school freshmen in 2004-05 graduated on time).

Declines in high school completion rates come at a time when states like Massachusetts are producing an increasing number of college-educated citizens (according to a 2010 report from *NCES*, by 2008, 37.7 percent of 25-year olds in Massachusetts held a bachelor’s degree or higher as compared to 24.5 percent in Nevada). At precisely the time that sectors of our economy with the greatest potential for future job growth require some form of post-secondary education, too many students in Clark County struggle just to complete high school.

This leads to one inescapable conclusion. **When it comes to improving schools, if we want better results we have to do things differently.**

To do things differently takes courage. It takes courage to tell the truth and the whole truth. We may be the only large urban district to have met federal targets for three of the last four years (AMAO or Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives), but, at the same time, Nevada stands last in a state-by-state ranking on education performance (see *Education Week* and *Quality Counts 2011*, Chance-of-Success Index). What we need – what we must have – is academic excellence for every child.

To achieve that will mean stepping out. It will mean exploring new ways of doing business. In some cases, it will require us to break the mold. **To deny this is to deny the problem.**

The costs of not educating all students well are significant. The economic costs are apparent in increased needs for unemployment and welfare, health and human services, and corrections. Less

apparent are the costs of the growing distance between groups of individuals . . . between those who benefit more in our society and those who typically benefit less. The corrosive effect on our way of life created by these differences takes a heavy toll on our unity and on our hearts and minds. A district cannot call itself excellent when there is a dramatic inequity in outcomes.

In the end, of all the reasons to justify change, the most compelling is that it is **our moral responsibility**. Without improvement, children suffer. With change, the future brightens for students and our community.

I learned **valuable lessons** growing up on a farm in western Kansas. First, nothing comes easy; success takes hard work. Second, success begins with expectation.

My parents set high expectations for me and my eight siblings. I know how important that is. I have seen how too many students – rich, poor, yellow, brown, black, or white – have suffered the long-term effects of substandard education. From my experience as a teacher, principal, superintendent, and state commissioner of education, I know it is possible to ensure that all students succeed, regardless of race or socioeconomic status. I also know it is possible to eliminate achievement gaps and significantly improve achievement for all young people.

Realizing these expectations will not be easy. People will be uncomfortable. Still, at the end of the day what matters most is that we do whatever it takes to provide our children, all of our children, with the education they need to be successful. This will require risk-taking and the willingness to learn from success and failure. It will be easy for people to criticize. And it will be difficult for others to support changes while they are still taking root. Nonetheless it is vital that we

persevere. What will lead us forward is openness to a better way. **Defensiveness, resignation, and complacency will be the barriers.**

Fortunately, the Clark County School District is governed by a Board of Trustees that has taken the most important first step by recognizing the need for reform and doing something about it. I am happy to say the District has many outstanding employees. I have met excellent teachers, leaders, support personnel, and school police officers since arriving. In many cases, improving performance will simply be a matter of encouraging talented people to work together in new ways and explore opportunities in new directions. And I have found a great deal of support in the community. Parents, business leaders, and nonprofit agencies have been unequivocal in expressing support for needed change. The time is right, and there is no question in my mind that change is possible and that we can make it happen.

I am also pleased to say that **there is good reason for a certain optimism**. After all, Las Vegas is known for innovation and getting things done. Meeting the challenge we face in the Clark County School District will take the same kind of creativity. And it will take savvy. To survive and thrive in this economy, we must show an attractive return on investment. But as this paper shows, our plan positions us to do that. In the pages that follow, I explain how.

What follows is a brief overview of preliminary reforms that are underway (or will soon be launched) in the Clark County School District.

Raising the Bar

Expectations will focus on preparing students so they are “ready by exit.” Whether students enter the workforce or postsecondary education after high school, graduation should prepare them to succeed without any need for remediation.

Empowerment Schools

I support providing schools with relief from unnecessary oversight. To make this a reality, I am convening a Blue Ribbon Task Force on Empowerment to identify how to broaden the empowerment model so more schools benefit. Driving this is the conviction that greater flexibility comes in exchange for greater accountability for improved results.

Performance Zones

In addition to restructuring several departments, I am reorganizing the area service center structure into a dozen or more performance zones that are each comprised of feeder-aligned schools. This removes a bureaucratic layer, creates tighter focus, promotes a more nimble and responsive organization, and allows more targeted assistance.

Autonomous Zone

Establish a single autonomous zone to provide a refuge for schools that are academically successful. Schools in this zone will enjoy greater latitude with respect to budgeting, staffing, and program design. Oversight will be minimal.

New Schools Division

Because I am a proponent of decentralizing authority, we are designing a New Schools Division to expand innovative school models. These include empowerment schools, charter schools, and educational management organizations.

Turnaround Efforts

Federal funds are already being used to restructure several schools to improve achievement. New efforts have been launched to prepare leaders for this challenge. We will build on and expand efforts in this direction. Other innovations that are envisioned include outsourcing management.

Growth Model

By fall 2011, a system will exist to gauge how each student in Grades 3-8 progresses yearly. Data will be available, transparent, and understandable. It will help us identify pockets of excellence and take them to scale.

4-Tier Teacher Evaluation

I endorse a shift from the current binary system (that classifies teachers as either satisfactory or unsatisfactory) to a four-tiered system. The categories include highly effective, effective, minimally effective, and ineffective. An important future element of the shift is that the performance of students (i.e., academic growth) is considered during the process of teacher evaluation.

Performance Framework

The yearly academic growth of students will become the centerpiece of a school performance framework. The chief aim of this framework is to provide the kind of information that enables our staff to learn more easily from each other about what works. Ultimately, it will also provide a way for us to hold ourselves accountable for improved student performance.

Return on Investment

Plans are underway to couple the growth information from a school performance framework with financial information in a way that shines a light on schools that make exceptional growth at low expense.

Incentives

We want to recognize, support, and learn from teachers who get better-than-expected results with students. To do that, we will invite them to create curricular tools that the District then loads into an existing and growing online library of support material. Because this library is accessible to other educators, it makes it possible for one teacher to learn from another highly-successful colleague. We will monetize this by providing a small royalty every time this happens thereby encouraging the healthy collaboration that can lead to improved results with students. These teacher-produced tools are part of an “open source” arrangement so they may be easily and freely shared with teachers in other districts and states.

Human Capital

All students deserve a great teacher and all schools a great leader. To that end, we are developing better ways to attract, select, develop, and retain the best educators. These efforts include career ladders and expanded pay for performance.

Public/Private Partners

Private funding is being used to support several studies. Two are complete. This includes one on barriers to achievement. The other is a communications analysis. Both yielded valuable insights. A third that is underway (a comprehensive analysis of District operations and spending) will be ready by September 2011. A number of other public-private partnerships exist that have benefited students and staff in various ways (e.g., by providing access to high-quality professional development for teachers and leaders).

Technology

Hybrid education that combines technology-assisted remote learning with more-traditional, face-to-face education has the potential to create more-engaged learning and transform how we think about class size. This is happening in a modest and limited way now. I am working to dramatically expand its use.

Literacy

Helping children to read is the most important gift we can give them. I support more professional development that equips teachers with better skills in this arena as well as better benchmark assessments to reliably gauge proficiency through the years. I am taking steps to see that we acquire tools that are better aligned and which provide more real-time feedback to teachers, parents, and students.

In addition to elaborating on these efforts, this document establishes the foundation for future change, including policy work at the legislative level; negotiations with bargaining groups; structural reorganization of the District, with increased attention to student achievement and service to classrooms; re-evaluating the efficacy of teacher training; and engaging all stakeholders around the common mission of ensuring that all students achieve at the highest possible level.

Reform efforts described here are not a matter of simply tinkering with what we already have. In my mind, reform means recognizing new demands and contexts and employing data, current technology, and strategies to rebuild the organization in a way that improves efficiency and effectiveness and helps **ensure all students are ready by exit.**

TRUTH-TELLING, CRITICAL FRIENDS, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERS

“The organization we currently have is perfectly designed to deliver the results we currently get.”

—Michael Fullan, Author
Public comment, Aug. 2, 2007

The story of Clark County School District is a tale of two cities. As a District, we are both better and worse than described. We have pockets of excellence where students shine and head off to Ivy League universities. At the same time we have too many young people who leave school shortchanged.

While the challenges are real, I see the **promise of greatness in our schools**. Rankings tell one story, yet I see talented staff working hard to produce valuable tools and exciting learning environments. I see engaged students captivated by their studies, encouraged by their classmates, and guided by their teachers. I see newcomers to our country and the sons and daughters of immigrants who are the first in their family to graduate from high school and attend college.

Still, these islands of excellence are too few. The gaps between the highest and lowest achieving are too great. Too often, expectations of high achievement are reserved for a talented or privileged few.

The good news is this: Our educators and our infrastructure could enable CCSD to lead the nation in creating a next generation of schools. If we turn the District around, CCSD could become the poster child for how to accomplish large system change.

Like Jim Collins, the author of *Good to Great*, I often say “hope is not a strategy.” But a modicum

of hope is needed. Our faults are well-documented. We cannot and should not shirk them. We need to be transparent about our status, flaws and all. And we need help to see our blind spots. In that respect, criticism is vital and must be welcomed. But if criticism is all there is, we will not be any more successful than those who preceded us.

What we need most are **critical friends**. This means those who are willing to not just critique our schools, but also offer a hand in partnership. We need those who will join arms in helping to improve matters. In legislative chambers it means reaching across the aisle in a bipartisan spirit. It means philanthropic organizations reach out to others like them to leverage donor dollars in ways not typically seen.

It will take heavy lifting for reality to match the arc of our dreams. But there are ways that we all can contribute. That includes parents, business interests, politicians, journalists, universities, union leaders, students, and staff.

The payoff is worth it. In our little boat of a community, a leak anywhere threatens us all. Our welfare as a community is coupled to the success of all of our students. Working together, we can get there.

A BIAS FOR CHANGE AND A FOCUS FOR ACTION – FOUR HIGH-LEVERAGE POINTS

“We need to build more capacity to turn around schools. Everyone needs to get in the game: charters, unions, districts, states, nonprofits. This is hard work and very few people do it, but we have a moral obligation to save kids. States and districts need to step up and have the courage to close failing schools and let others try.”

—Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education
June 14, 2009, National Governors Symposium

Achieving greater success requires re-evaluating how well all aspects of our District’s operation provide benefit to students. In some cases, that will mean retooling and adopting completely new ways of doing business. What is needed is a laser-like focus:

- **Harness breakthrough innovation** and redefine how schooling is accomplished.
- **Fully tap the potential of a new model of schooling.**
- **Align resources to our highest priorities** and execute with precision.
- **Continue to do what works** and stop doing what does not.

I address each in turn.

Harness Innovation in Ways That Redefine Schooling

Rochester Teachers Association President Adam Urbanski had it right. “If we always do what we’ve always done we’ll always get what we’ve always got.” We need a system that supports and provides better incentives for innovation.

Clayton Christensen (author of *The Innovator’s Dilemma*) argues for two types of innovation. The first improves on existing processes. The second bravely changes an entire system. He suggests that the latter is especially important because it drives significant improvement and transforms the entire operation. In my experience, run-of-the-mill school reform consists only of the first type of innovation. When done well, process improvement yields results. While process improvement is helpful and necessary, it is not sufficient.

Bold reform requires more. It goes beyond simply providing service and support to the field. In this context, the term “field” means schools. In some cases it requires us to redefine the playing field. This

requires us to **recast what we mean by schooling** itself. This can only happen through system redesign. This is the second type of innovation Christensen describes.

Game-changing reform is needed. Anything less is like sailing to find new lands but hugging the shoreline. To find new lands you must cut across open water. Because it is risky it may be undesirable to leave a safe harbor, but it offers the greatest potential for reaching our goal. Daring leadership is required to commit the resources necessary for successful implementation. It has been said, “The challenge is not simply promoting best practices or loosening regulations but encouraging new ventures that can solve problems more effectively. More effectively addressing stubborn problems has always been the province of new entrants.” (American Enterprise Institute Resident Scholar and author Frederick M. Hess, *Future of Educational Entrepreneurship*, 2008). This is what I mean when I say we need to “redefine the playing field,” not just “serve the field.” We have to introduce substantially different models of schooling. Later, I propose a structure for “**a new model of schooling**.”

My experience convinces me that laws can be shaped to create a better climate of support for breakthrough thinking. In 2008, Colorado enacted legislation (“Schools of Innovation Act”) that created pathways for staff to explore new ways to increase student achievement. With district approval, schools were granted greater autonomy and managerial flexibility with regard to staffing, resource allocation, and programming. This included **waiver of collectively-bargained agreements** and hiring practices. This allowed principals and teachers to change schedules, coursework instruction, and delivery mechanisms to better utilize online learning and blended learning environments. Since passage of this law, ten schools and one district have embraced this opportunity. Others are pursuing the process. Staff in those schools voluntarily elected to step outside their collective bargaining agreements. In doing so, they gained greater autonomy and control over budget, staffing, and programming in return for a pledge of enhanced student achievement.

At the same time, efforts like this to create policy space and opportunities for more innovation have other benefits. One is that they can provide relief to schools from regulatory burdens (at both the state and district levels). For instance, why are waivers typically available only to charter schools? Legislation that promotes greater innovation at the school level could mean that these waivers become more-readily available to non-charter schools as well. Thus, a “Schools of Innovation Act” for Nevada could open up new pathways for different school designs. These school designs may or may not involve collective bargaining but could in various ways provide greater flexibility to schools in exchange for greater accountability for student accomplishment.

Nevada’s empowerment school model is a good start. It begins to move in this direction. It provides parents and students with a broader array of educational options. I believe we can – and need to – **do more via charter schools, online programs, blended or hybrid learning** (patterned after Rocketship Schools in San Jose, California; School of One Middle in New York City, New York; and Carpe Diem Collegiate High School in Yuma, Arizona), experiential learning activities (modeled after Denver School for Science and Technology in Colorado) or other options that have not yet been identified. All of our students deserve engaging and stimulating environments that provide a relevant and meaningful education. At the same time, these efforts will alter how we think about traditional class size and student-to-teacher ratio in ways that allow us to stretch resources without compromising student learning.

In Clark County School District, the magnet school structure and the Career and Technical Academies are both popular and academically successful. An innovative schools act for Nevada could help us move even further in this direction and would be a welcome and useful addition.

Fully Tap the Potential of a New Model of Schooling

To achieve change in schools, structures, and processes must encourage **educational entrepreneurship**. As the rest of this paper will show, our efforts will be directed toward these changes. Here I outline high-level features that begin to sketch out what is possible. I believe we need to question – and at times alter – fundamental assumptions about how schools should be structured. Then we need to move toward launching new school designs that are predicated on these features.

Features of a “New Model of Schooling” include the following:

- Because learning is what matters most in school, alter structures and processes so that **student progress toward completion is competency-based, not centered on “seat time.”** Instead, progress is based on demonstrated mastery, not on years, grades, or time spent in a specific grade level.
- Because high school students today are diverse in their interests, talents, and learning styles, **implement a road map with correspondingly diverse pathways to high school completion.** Pathways should provide alternative routes to a high school diploma. At the same time, students must have greater access to multiple ways to show what they have learned. These different ways of demonstrating competency provide teachers with data they need to gauge student proficiency. These approaches may include (but need not be limited to) better, more, and different ways to engage in credit retrieval and dropout recovery. It may include “unbundled” services that are offered in atypical settings (e.g., a storefront learning center).
- **Because personalized learning is the Holy Grail, fully utilize online computer-based solutions** to create more engaging and more customized learning environments that enable students to progress as their skill and abilities permit. Harness technology in ways that couple a robust back-end assessment system – which provides an up-to-the-minute portrait of student accomplishment and academic need – with mechanisms to prescribe learning activities that are tailored for each student. This is best seen in places like School of One Middle in New York City where mathematics assessments are used to develop personal learning plans that result in customized learning every day for every student. Utilize handhelds (such as smart phones and iPads) as a delivery platform.
- Because assessments that longitudinally bridge P-12, higher education, and the workforce can increase student confidence that they are on pace to have what is needed for success in college or the workplace, collaborate with counterparts from college and career to identify **one yardstick to gauge progress from preschool to college and workplace.**

- Because college is the new high school and postsecondary education is a passport to greater lifetime earnings, make dual-credit options and concurrent enrollment universally available so students take as many courses as needed to earn a high school diploma and postsecondary credentials. Create a more-porous boundary (P-12 to higher education) to smooth level-to-level student transitions.
- Because the way to improve achievement is to simultaneously improve (a) content; (b) teacher skill; and (c) the engagement of the student with the teacher and the content, it is vital to **retool professional development in ways that enable teachers to adapt instruction and work flow** in the places we call school (see Elmore at <http://www.uknow.gse.harvard.edu/leadership>). Couple all this with a clear set of expectations concerning responsibility. For instance, give principals the responsibility for ensuring that professional development is tailored to the specific needs of each teacher and that every teacher gets what he or she needs. Each teacher is responsible for building his or her own professional development plan.

It is auspicious that we see support emerging from the philanthropic community for initiatives like this. For instance, a generous gift of nearly \$2 million from the UCLA Foundation (in conjunction with the Lincy Foundation) that makes possible a top-to-bottom analysis of District functioning will help pave the way for this new model of schooling. So too, we see outreach and support from other well-established donors. All of these gestures are welcome and deeply appreciated.

Align Resources to Highest Priorities and Execute With Precision

Details matter when executing a plan. While central office will often say it will “let” principals implement student supports, the reality is that central office can sometimes tie the hands of principals by failing to provide clear guidance and necessary support. A more effective and useful strategy is to truly empower principals by helping them connect District vision and daily work.

For this reason, I look forward to the day when empowerment is not a 30-school subsystem in a system of 350-plus schools, but is instead a guiding set of principles for all schools. I have commissioned a Blue Ribbon Task Force on Empowerment to help clarify and extend understandings we have about empowerment.

For instance, to ensure that all students are “ready by exit,” it may be necessary to help high school principals overcome graduation barriers that exist. A lack of credit recovery opportunities may be one example. Programs may need to be customized for each school and schools may need some additional resources to provide these programs. With assistance comes one non-negotiable: it is expected that daily each school will see that every student has a written plan that outlines how he or she will arrive at graduation on time and that the school will monitor (and be prepared to report on) the progress of each individual student. In return for added resources, principals agree to assign a single caring adult to each student and to monitor and report on the success each staff member is having toward ensuring every student stays on the pathway to successful on-time graduation.

This is one example of the repositioning that will need to occur to execute a plan with precision.

Continue to Do What Works and Stop Doing What Does Not

At the heart of leading districts lies a commitment to the success of all students. For this idea to have traction, it is vital for all students to have unqualified access to high-quality education. To ensure that, certain safeguards are needed. Chief among these is the concept of “universal design.” This means creating environments that are accessible to all members of the student population and to do so to the greatest extent possible and without the need for any special adaptation.

Students come to school with a variety of backgrounds and different levels of functioning. A significant number have disabilities of one manner or another (impairments may affect mobility, hearing, vision, health, etc.). Our responsibility is to tailor the learning environment to account for the complex and varied needs of our diverse learners and to maximize the learning opportunities and outcomes for each and every learner, no matter what their challenge. As an example, we focus here on just one particular case – English language learners. While similar attention can and should be directed toward addressing the specialized needs of other student subgroups, we use this opportunity to address English language learners to make the case that the idea of “universal design” should prevail throughout the District.

A sizable portion of the student population in Clark County claims a language other than English as their native language. As a result, the academic success of many CCSD students depends in large measure on the provision of services that meet them where they are on the continuum of English language acquisition.

Applying the concept of universal design in this context, it is important that CCSD does whatever it takes to ensure the following.

- A systematic process is in place to determine how many and which English language learners (or ELL students) have language-related learning needs. It is important that we have identified the nature and extent of student need. This starts with but does not end with a home language survey. It includes an initial English language assessment on entry into school.
- Match resources to needs. Working within a needs-based, resource allocation model, funds follow academic need. A couple of key understandings provide a foundation. For one, not all academic needs are equal. For example, while the first commitment may be to help students who are not proficient to catch up, a close second is our commitment to help other students keep up and continue to move up to even higher levels of performance. With that as a backdrop, we pay particular attention to students who struggle to catch up. While these students have a significant claim to resources, it is not the case that schools serving low-achieving youngsters (who also display low growth) have an unlimited license to operate. While added and targeted assistance must be provided, it is not in perpetuity. With the infusion of added resources comes the expectation of improvement. We applaud when we see improvement materialize. When we do not, we make tough decisions about how to turn around a chronically underperforming school. At the same time, we acknowledge that significant needs can also be found in schools populated with students who are already proficient but who are not experiencing any growth or in fact may be declining in their rate of yearly growth. Because the aim here is to keep up or move up to even higher levels of achievement, the needs here may rival the needs of students who are still in the achievement basement.

- Provide tools and techniques that enable all professional staff members to meet the needs of a diverse student population. This includes equipping them with the knowledge and skills to reach every student. This means all classroom teachers and all school leaders apply the idea of universal design in their daily work.
- Finally, identify areas where we see success and where students continue to struggle. Share the success stories in ways that enable educators to learn from each other. When success is elusive, take the appropriate action to turn that around.

VISION — READY BY EXIT

“We can whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.”

—Ron Edmunds, Harvard University
Educational Leadership, October 1979, p. 23

How do we ensure all students are academically successful? What will focus our efforts? This addresses those questions.

One drive consumes us. That is to ensure all students experience success in school. By success we mean all students are **“ready by exit.”** “Ready” means prepared to step into college or other postsecondary opportunities and compete without remediation. Whether students enter college or choose to enter the workforce after high school graduation, what matters most is that they have the knowledge and skills to perform and be successful in either environment.

In pursuit of that, our intent is to **maximize return on investment** for those who own our schools, namely taxpayers. Better solutions become possible when we grasp our respective roles:

- Taxpayers own the schools
- Students and parents are our clients
- Businesses and postsecondary institutions are the customers who receive our graduates
- Foundations and communities are our partners

We use key performance indicators to gauge the effect of our efforts. These include improved graduation rates and upwardly-trending student accomplishment on state and national assessments. The indicators also include dwindling achievement gaps, and they extend to leading indicators like on-level literacy rates among students in Grades 1, 3, and 5.

Specific objectives follow. Within five years (by June 2016):

- Graduation rate will reach 75 percent
- Percentage who are “ready by exit” from high school will increase each year
- College remediation rates will decline yearly
- Gaps in annual rates of academic growth for different ethnic and racial subgroups will narrow by half (based on state assessment)
- Percentage taking Advanced Placement courses and scoring 3 or above will increase yearly at each high school

- Percentage admitted to a postsecondary institution and successful in their first year will increase yearly
- Percentage exiting Grade 5 who read on-level on state assessment will reach 80 percent
- Percentage exiting Grade 3 who read on-level on state assessment will reach 80 percent
- Percentage exiting Grade 1 who read on-level on a District-developed test will reach 80 percent
- Percentage exiting Grade 8 who are proficient in Algebra I will increase yearly (as measured by a standardized end-of-course exam that is adopted and used District-wide)

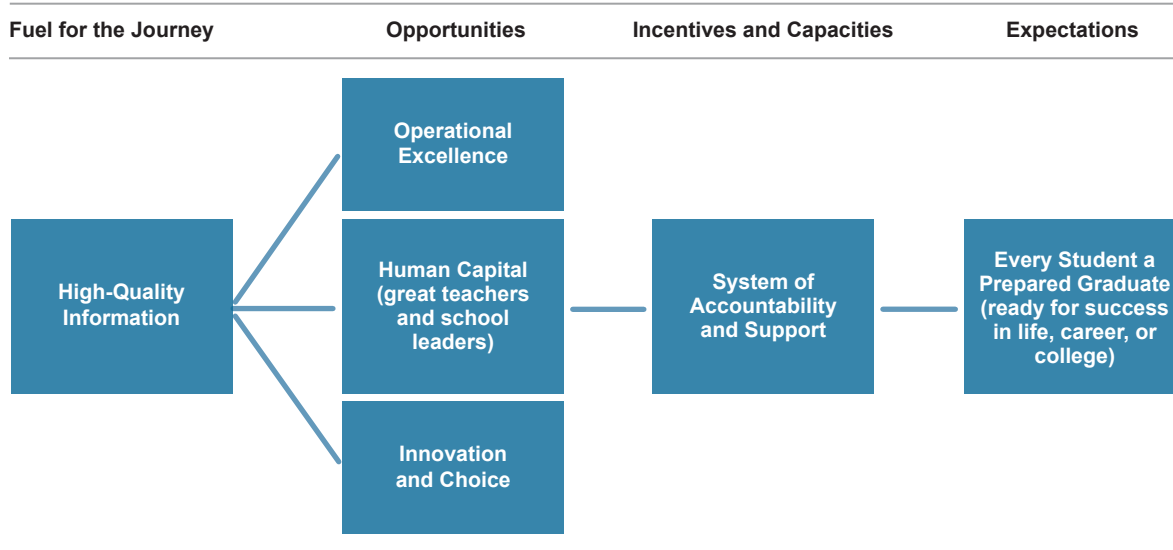
Guarded Optimism and a Conceptual Frame

It can be daunting to improve performance while decreasing resources. By some estimates, the Clark County School District faces a shortfall of \$400 million for the coming fiscal year. When compared to the \$2.1 billion budget, this represents about a 19 percent decline. Simultaneously, CCSD is under growing pressure to achieve ambitious academic performance targets. Since adoption a decade ago, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) has shifted the focus for districts across the country. While attention in the past largely focused on compliance with federal mandates, districts must now design and deliver a comprehensive education system that ensures all students achieve academic proficiency in key subjects by 2013-14. Given this backdrop of rising expectations, we have to acknowledge that budget cuts of nearly 20 percent are bound to affect classrooms at a time when resources are critically important to students and schools.

Achieving more with less will take ingenuity. It will also take a community that overlooks its differences. To survive and thrive in this economy, we must move the needle farther and faster than ever. We cannot cut our way out of an economic crisis to better results.

Schools are defined by the quality of their outputs. Yet invariably high-quality outputs are the result of healthy processes and structures. Generally, processes and structures are a mix of: (1) expectations; (2) opportunities; (3) incentives; and (4) capacities. Figure 1 illustrates this.

Figure 1: Chart showing linkages between and among functional areas



Our efforts should be judged according to clear success criteria:

- Advance our strategic purpose — prepare all students for success in a knowledge-based economy
- Ensure accountability and support — focus on continuous improvement and human capital
- Preserve universal access to education of highest quality — advance equity interests via success for all
- Provide useful results that lead to improved system performance— promote utility and sustainability
- Supply first-class education — deliver attractive return on investment and earn a reputation for quality

Organizing Principles

To achieve the mission and vision of the Clark County School District, we begin with the end in mind. That is “ready by exit.” This means there is a pathway to opportunity and postsecondary success for all students (without remediation). To that end, we organize around five principles. Taken together, these five principles create greater ownership for the academic success of each student. When viewed as an organic whole, these elements work together so that the **success of adults is defined in terms of the academic success of students.**

■ **PRINCIPLE #1: Get the optics right: Transparent data drives learning and continuous improvement.**

Improve Metrics to Gauge Growth of Students, Classes, Teachers, Principals, and Schools:

Author Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. said, “The great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, but in what direction we are moving” (1858, *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*). The federal *No Child Left Behind Act* had the proper intent but unfortunately lacked complete measures and incentives. NCLB focused on short-term increases in the percent of students who are proficient according to state assessment. As a result, no consideration was given to academic progress that students made within or between years (unless it resulted in a change of status for a student and the shift from not-yet-proficient to proficient).

A growth model creates targets for students all along the achievement spectrum. Done properly, a growth model provides transparency and shows year-to-year growth of students and classes. The aim for those who are not yet proficient is to **“catch up.”** The objective for students who are already proficient is to **“keep up.”** For those who are already keeping up, the goal is to **“move up”** into the upper end of the achievement distribution.

Extend the growth model and allow teachers to identify and learn from their more-successful colleagues:

This approach calls upon the District to capitalize on its existing capability whereby successful teachers upload to the District network lessons and curriculum material that they produce. What is novel about the extension of this idea is that each time a teacher draws on the contributions of a successful colleague, the teacher who authored the lesson (or curriculum material) receives a small sum.

Use Performance Management to Compare Class-to-Class, School-to-School to Learn From the Best:

The intent is to use academic growth as the centerpiece of a school performance framework. Certain terms might be used to characterize whether a school is excellent or not and whether it should have a continuing license to operate. Terms like “accredited with distinction,” “accredited,” “accredited with an improvement plan,” and “candidate for turnaround” are possible (these are for example purposes only). A system like this would rely chiefly – although not exclusively – on the academic growth of students over time. It would also incorporate the academic growth over time shown by various student subgroups (in that way we see whether achievement gaps are widening or whether they are closing). Done properly and if made completely transparent (protecting, of course, the confidentiality of individual student data), this provides a way for the system to learn how to improve. By providing clear signals about where we see excellence in action, teachers and principals know where they can go to learn how to improve faster. An approach like this provides not only a stamp of excellence but also a way to decide when a school should no longer have a license to operate. Over time, this system also sends signals about schools that will require more oversight and attention. This system also guides us with respect to incentives for whole staff performance as well as pay for performance for individualized performance.

Identify Where We Get Bang for Our Buck (Return on Investment):

How do we gauge when a school that is underperforming is at least moving in the right direction and in a cost-effective way? A performance framework like the one I envision can be coupled to financial information in a way that shines a light on schools that make exceptional growth at low expense. Because this machinery can compare schools of similar makeup, we will see how schools with similar student population are faring. It also highlights schools that are chronically underperforming. We can tell when other schools with a similar population have been able to deliver greater growth at lower cost. Our intent is to make a strong statement through this framework that schools will no longer have a perpetual license to operate, but need to demonstrate improvement or face intervention and turnaround.

Consider a system that identifies teachers who achieve uncommon success with students (based on the growth model). Now imagine another teacher who struggles with a similar student population. Searching the online results from the Nevada growth model, this teacher could find a school that is similar in every respect but is getting better results in terms of student growth. The teacher could identify the classroom that is having great success. The teacher can pull down lessons and tools created by these expert teachers.

Paired to this could be videos of these expert teachers. Using technology that is already available, a state-of-the-art video and audio capture device is used that combines two high-definition video cameras with two high-quality wireless microphones. This provides a 360-degree view of action in a classroom. Recordings and videos are compressed and uploaded to a secure central site. This technology can enable educators to view, comment upon, share, and tag panoramic classroom videos and artifacts. Password-protected Web-based video-sharing and management tools enable teachers to access classroom videos from any Internet-connected computer (picture an Educators' YouTube, if you will). Multiple cameras like these that are placed in the classrooms of teachers have successfully been used with students in the Denver Public Schools to digitally record and trap the minute-to-minute action of expert teachers. These are then made available for viewing by qualified others (all the while, protecting the identity of individual students).

Now imagine that this process were monetized. That is, each time one of these lessons or tools is requested, a small payment accrues to the teacher who developed and contributed the idea. This need not be funded with taxpayer money. Conceivably, private donors or philanthropy funds could be used to jump start such a system.

■ PRINCIPLE #2: Grant greater autonomy in return for greater accountability for improved results.

Restructure Around an Expanded Notion of Empowerment:

Design and implement a roadmap for a restructured district that places principals at the top of the organization, empowering them with additional resources, capacity, and support in exchange for greater accountability for enhanced student results. Decentralizing the District, empowering staff, and promoting greater autonomy drives more resources to the building level. It thereby enhances

commitment and community at the local level. By flattening the organization we remove unnecessary layers of administration and create better communication between the superintendent and each principal.

Transparent and Equitable Resource Allocation:

Create more transparent and equitable resource allocations and more efficient and effective capacity and support.

Greater Accountability for Improved Results:

I commissioned a report by Quality Leadership Resources, Inc. produced in April 2011, it is titled a “Study of the Barriers to Improved Student Achievement in Clark County School District.” It was designed to elicit from staff members their perceptions of the current situation within the District (see <http://ccsd.net/directory/superintendent/>). The intent of the study was four-fold: (1) influence decision-making about the CCSD mission; (2) work toward a common vision for the District; (3) determine key implementation strategies needed to accomplish the primary purpose and key functions; and (4) determine structures, including an organizational structure, necessary to supplement the development of a unified staff. I used it to gain a better understanding of a key concept of a noted business strategist. According to W. Edwards Deming’s “People Principle”:

- People want to be valued
- People want to learn, improve, and contribute
- People want their thinking used
- People want a defined purpose, an understanding of their function, and meaningful work

Finally, the focus was on clearly understanding who our customers are within CCSD. This analysis sought to improve the operations of the District with a clear outcome related to improving our return on investment. There are many goals, but it is a top goal to allow all schools greater autonomy in exchange for better student results. We will be looking to **reallocate funds to where they best serve students**. We want to promote and encourage significant collaboration with multiple stakeholders and the unions representing support staff, teachers, and administrators. We want to locate and eliminate redundancies and duplication of effort. The goal is to implement a restructured school district based on more-transparent and more-equitable resource allocation. We focus on improving operational and financial performance. I continue to believe that **fiscal discipline is a necessary component of driving educational change**.

The report by Quality Leadership Resources, Inc. set forth recommendations. One stands out: school administrators should have the authority to match the responsibility and accountability that they shoulder. In fact, the report showed that **site administrators welcome greater autonomy in exchange for greater accountability for improved student results**. The report recommended the development of “a consistent, unambiguous, District-wide structure – a collective understanding about decisions that are made at the central level, those that are made at the campus level, and those that are shared” (p. 13). While there are nascent signs that this is in place among some school sectors, it is not widespread or consistent. We envision empowering not just a few (30 schools at present) but all schools with greater autonomy and flexibility in return for greater accountability for enhanced student accomplishment. With guidance and support as

needed, principals and their staff members ought to have greater control over the budget and should be free to marshal the resources needed to achieve greater student results.

While schools have more freedom to marshal resources in ways that boost results, not all ventures will work out. When that happens, hard choices must be made. Close monitoring of leading indicators provide early signals about the viability of new ventures.

■ **PRINCIPLE #3: Recognize that enhanced student success depends on greater educator effectiveness.**

Enhanced academic success for students is only possible if there is a great teacher in every classroom and a great leader in every school. Accomplishing that means improving the talent pipeline and managing human capital so the District constantly upgrades talent. That happens by acquiring higher-quality talent and by growing the knowledge of existing staff.

Presently there could be a somewhat tighter connection between how students perform and how teachers are evaluated. While the concept of teacher tenure is evolving across the nation (and in Nevada teachers in this category are simply referred to as “post probationary”), it is still the case that the current teacher evaluation system rarely results in dismissal of teachers for anything other than budget cutbacks. Changes to law that remedy this are needed and welcomed and are currently under consideration in the legislature.

The simple truth is districts currently act more like employment agencies than systems that educate all students to high standards. As a result, a better connection is needed between the performance of students on one hand and the evaluation of teachers (or teacher candidates) on the other hand.

As well, in the future CCSD, is pressing forward with plans to enter into a public/private partnership with another entity, *The New Teacher Project*. Metrics like those below that have been developed by *The New Teacher Project* are needed to gauge the extent to which CCSD efforts result in improved staff effectiveness. These following metrics arise from work done by and with *The New Teacher Project*:

- Retention rate of top-quartile teachers
- Retention rate of bottom-quartile teachers

Figure 2: Talent Pipeline



Actions related to Performance-Based Training (within institutions of higher education)

Tie Evaluation of Teacher Preparation Programs to the Performance of Newly-Minted Teachers Working with P-12 Students:

A word of explanation is in order. This recommendation can be traced to work I recently performed for the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. Last year I co-chaired a National Blue Ribbon Panel that recommended wholesale changes in the preparation of new teachers. One idea formed the foundation for our recommendations. That is, there needs to be a tighter connection between the clinically-based preparation experiences of aspiring teachers and their impact on the subsequent learning of the P-12 students in their care. In a variety of ways, every recommendation from that panel emphasized the importance of defining the success of fledgling teachers (as well as the viability of their preparation programs) in terms of the effect they have in promoting greater student achievement in P-12 classrooms.

That report (released November 16, 2010) was titled “Transforming Teacher Education through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers” (NCATE, www.ncate.org/Public/ResearchReports/NCATEInitiatives/BlueRibbonPanel/tabid/715/Default.aspx).

Base Accreditation of Schools of Education on the Ability of Their Graduates to Achieve Gains With P-12 Students:

The last three years have seen a change in federal laws that regulate the accrediting of teacher preparation programs in U.S. universities. The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA, P.L. 110-315, enacted in 2008) sought to strengthen the clinical components of educator preparation and thus ensure that preparation programs are meeting the needs of the P-12 school system. It further aimed at guaranteeing that preparation programs equip candidates to teach all P-12 students, including students with special needs, English language learners, and students in high-need, low-income schools. The accountability provisions within this law revamped how we determine whether preparation programs are meeting the needs of P-12 students. This law set forth criteria for states to use to measure performance of such programs (e.g., “How is the preparation program improving student learning in P-12 schools?”). This provision requires states to provide data (including, but not limited to, P-12 student achievement data) on preparation programs that will help assess the effectiveness of their programs and graduates. Greater reliance on this tool can help ensure that colleges of education that are accredited in the state of Nevada have been able to show that their graduates obtain desired achievement gains with P-12 students in real classroom settings. This data would be reported in a variety of media outlets so parents and the public at large have access to it.

Actions related to the strategy on Smart Recruitment

Attract High-Caliber Candidates:

Expand partnerships with entities that have a proven track record of providing teacher candidates who demonstrate the ability to deliver better-than-expected student results (e.g., Teach For America). Remove barriers to the entry of non-traditional candidates so alternatively certified candidates have a path to entry. Match high-performing candidates (with the best record of delivering results) with

high-need students. **Give access to high-caliber candidates to those principals of schools populated with students who struggle the most.** Deepen the pool of high-quality candidates by setting clear expectations that employment and advancement are based on improved student performance.

Select Wisely:

To increase the continuity of schools most in need of stability, buffer turnaround schools from reduction in force (this term describes what happens when staff are dismissed due to deep funding cuts). Improve recruitment by using competency-based selection techniques that call upon candidates to demonstrate the ability to deliver improved student achievement. Use standardized tools and rubrics to make sound selection decisions. Routinely and frequently provide training and norming for human resources staff and for principals.

Hire and Place:

Decisions on placement are aided through early, efficient hiring. Accelerate the hiring schedule to enable principals to get to the pool of high-quality talent early and avoid the loss of top candidates. Rely on technology to support and facilitate the effective matching of candidates and schools. Provide training for principals on selection in order to set the expectation to “hire the best regardless of seniority.”

Equip All Staff With the Same Understanding About “How We Do Business”:

Rely on District values to focus the process of orientation and development. Ensure induction reaches all staff and tailor training to subject, grade, and school. Use this training to shape and drive expectations.

Actions related to the strategy on Useful Appraisal

Reform Evaluation So It Ties Teacher Quality to Student Accomplishment:

Endorse the establishment of a four-tier system. The current system of teacher evaluation is a binary one. That is to say, even though some four-point ratings are included, in the final analysis, a teacher is either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. By contrast, consider the structure of a four-tier system:

- Highly effective
- Effective
- Minimally effective
- Ineffective

Develop High-Quality Assessment Instruments That Are Suitable for Evaluation:

Fairly and reliably differentiate teacher performance based on clear, high-quality standards and ensure that each category is well-defined and amply measured using defensible tools. While it is yet to be determined how the academic growth of students will be incorporated, growth is an important consideration in the future.

Ensure Evaluation Recommendations Are Defensible and Based on Multiple Measures:

For measurement purposes, use multiple data sources: (1) observation; (2) student performance artifacts; and (3) interview/survey.

Train Administrators and Teachers in the New Four-Tier System:

Replace the current “buffet of trainings” to a skill certification ladder.

Actions related to Customized Teacher Support

Training and Certification:

Rely on a “backward design approach” that explicitly emphasizes instructional effectiveness. Use student growth data as a primary factor in recommendation for future certification. Provide a continuous feedback and development cycle. Communicate that continued employment depends on the ability to ensure students arrive at expected learning targets.

Actions related to New Career Pathways

Use Internships and Apprenticeships to Establish New Pathways for Teachers:

Other states have more aggressively explored public-private partnerships to accomplish this aim. For instance, Project Bridge in the Boston area linked corporations like Raytheon with public school systems in Cambridge and Waltham. In an arrangement that resulted in no new costs to any participating organization, mathematics and science teachers from high schools in these communities were seconded (or loaned) to corporations in exchange for engineers who served for one year on loan. The arrangement opened new vistas to educators and enabled them to infuse their classroom instruction with specifics from a state-of-the-art corporation, all to the benefit of students. Schools directly benefited from the insights that corporate engineers brought to the classroom during their year on loan. Imagine the positive impact that a similar no-cost arrangement would have on our system in Clark County.

■ **PRINCIPLE #4: Align to what matters most and ensure that literacy remains the linchpin.**

Ensure All Youngsters Who Exit Grades 1, 3, and 5 Read At or Above Grade Level:

Based on beginning of the year assessment, intervene early and aggressively with struggling readers in each of those grades. Plans will be expected (at both the school and district levels).

Common Interim Benchmark Assessments:

Rely on a system of interim benchmark assessments (that can be used daily, weekly, monthly, and/or quarterly) to gauge whether students are on pace and to identify those requiring added support. Because CCSD schools vary in their approaches to literacy, this will require what author

Grant Wiggins describes as “standards without standardization” (Educational Leadership, v48 n5, p18-25, Feb. 1991). Provide only enough guidance for schools to embrace common goals and established processes, but then allow variance (within accepted parameters) with respect to how they accomplish those ends. Because nearly one-third of CCSD students move from school-to-school within the school year, it is important that results from these assessments be portable and credible across the District. As an example, this may well mean that the District narrows the field of diagnostic reading instruments that are used to two or at most three, and that schools within the same feeder pattern agree on the use of one.

Ensure Greater Consistency With Respect to Learning Standards and Assessments:

With common core standards and assessments coming on board in the near future, realign curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, and resources toward the new standards.

■ PRINCIPLE #5: Recognize that choice and innovation are the engines driving needed school reform.

Leverage technology to alter instructional processes and improve efficiency and effectiveness:

Hybrid forms of education which combine technology-assisted remote learning with more-traditional face-to-face education have the potential to transform how we think about class size. In a hybrid model of instruction with technology-assisted learning at its core, a sizable share of a student’s schooling is personalized (for instance, a student of world languages uses *Rosetta Stone*). Here the student-to-teacher ratio may reach 60:1 or more. This is then coupled with more face-to-face instruction in a setting with a more-traditional student-to-teacher ratio in the range of 25:1 or 30:1. Technology has been used to create a “school of one” where instruction is personalized, interest drives learning, and students advance as their skills and abilities permit. “Instead of using technology to strengthen existing education models, we should explore new ways of using technology to enhance understanding - and adapt our education system to make the most of the new technology” (*Daily*, March 7, 2011).

Expand the use of “anywhere anytime learning”:

CCSD has assembled thousands of hours of online videos making it one of the largest repositories of digital media in the nation. CCSD teachers have been creating lessons that are tied to this digital media. Because the media is searchable, teachers in CCSD can enhance their daily instruction by searching the files that are cataloged by subject, grade, and topic to locate the support material and media. These tools support a virtual high school that is scalable. Because CCSD is one of only six districts in the country with a Public Broadcasting Station onsite, “anywhere anytime learning” on a large scale becomes more than a catch-phrase.

EARLY CHANGES

Plans for change are underway in these areas:

- **VISION: Raise the bar (so that postsecondary readiness is the expectation for every student)**

Change begins with vision. To achieve better results for young people, we start by raising expectations. We express it in a short phrase. We say all students will be “ready by exit.”

This shift represents a departure. While high school graduation remains an important target, to be successful today, more than a diploma is needed. Colleges and the workplaces expect students to hit the ground running. Some form of postsecondary training is becoming the new norm in the work world, especially for higher-paying jobs. To be well-educated today, a graduate of CCSD must be able to step into the workplace or postsecondary program without the need for remediation.

Some may ask what this will look like in schools. The answer is straightforward.

Conversations are changing. We see the phrase “ready by exit” in the newspaper. We hear it in the legislature. Following the rollout of the Nevada Growth Model in fall 2011, I expect we will hear it in parent-teacher conferences. The growth model will show whether a student is on pace to graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful after high school. And it will show how well each school is able to contribute to the yearly growth of students. And it will show how effectively classrooms are able to achieve this. Reports on student progress that parents receive will take a different form. They will all be geared toward the concept of “ready by exit.” Principals will use these growth displays to identify areas of strength and areas of need. Teachers will use the displays to identify students who are struggling as well as to identify colleagues who are enjoying greater success with students. These displays will also help shape and structure professional development for teachers. Parents will use displays to gauge whether students are improving at an acceptable rate, at a rate that ensures they are “ready by exit.”

Done properly, we will not only talk about the growth students make but also see greater attention paid to monthly progress. As awareness of growth increases, we expect to see acceptance of the concept build. When parents and staff embrace growth, we expect to see it embedded in teacher evaluation processes and in performance frameworks used to judge schools and the District.

- **STRUCTURE: Reorganize to achieve our goal more effectively**

Once we have the “ladder on the right wall,” we turn to structure. Presently, schools are organized into four areas that have distinct geographic boundaries. A fifth set of schools currently includes schools from throughout the District (identified as “Superintendent’s Schools”). As well, there

are option schools (sometimes called “behavior schools”) that provide alternatives for secondary students. Thus, altogether schools are in six groupings (four areas plus “Superintendent’s Schools” and option schools).

Planning is underway to reshape these into approximately a dozen or more performance zones. To this we will add one other zone called an autonomous zone. The purpose of this reconfiguration is to position schools to work more effectively and efficiently.

Recently we asked our school-based staff to provide their views on the need for change. We received this feedback from principals, teachers, and support staff that participated in surveys and focus groups in February and March 2011. This was summarized in the previously referenced April 2011 study by Quality Leadership Resources. The responses we received point to the importance of one clear vision that is articulated from the superintendent to the principals and staff in each school. What we learned from school-based staff is that, in many cases, our current structures make it difficult to execute effectively and efficiently. In part, this is because principals are too far-removed from the superintendent (as of now, each principal reports to an academic manager who reports to an area associate superintendent who reports to a deputy superintendent who reports to the superintendent). In addition to the need to provide a cleaner and more-direct line of communication, there is the need to align resources to the area of greatest need.

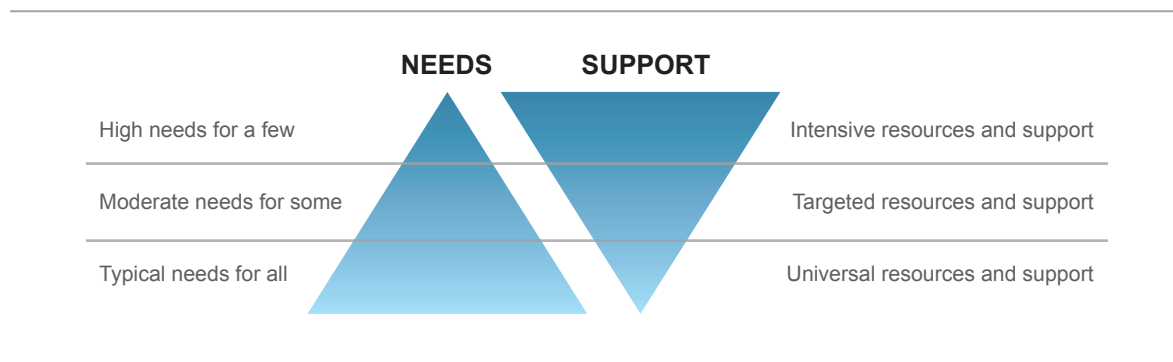
Some may ask what effect this will have and what this will look like.

In fall 2011, we will see a flatter District. The aim is to provide more mission-driven guidance and support and thus achieve a more laser-like focus on student performance. While greater detail will be provided in the next report, a significant change will soon reduce the six groupings (four areas plus superintendent schools plus option schools) into a dozen or more performance zones. All schools in each of these performance zones will be vertically aligned. Forming a cluster around a high school will be a feeder school pattern. These are clustered by academic performance (but will tend to cluster geographically).

Each performance zone will include an average of 20 to 30 schools. However, where lower-performing schools face greater challenges, fewer schools will be included in the zone. Such a zone may average 20 to 22 schools. Schools in this zone will tend to have more oversight and less autonomy. Certain benefits accrue to schools in higher-need (lower-performing) zones. **Examples include having the first opportunity to hire new talent or tap professional development funds.**

By contrast, zones with higher-performing schools will average more schools (26 to 28 schools). Schools in a higher-performing zone will tend to have less oversight and more autonomy than lower-performing schools.

In addition to a dozen or more performance zones (again, organized according to school performance and also geographically), there will be one other called an autonomous zone. The goal of the autonomous zone is to provide a way for schools within a particular performance zone to shift into

Figure 3: Graphic illustration of the relationship between needs and support

the autonomous zone. This is accomplished by achieving greater results. While specifics are under construction, this freedom may extend to budget, staffing, and program. Schools become eligible to join the autonomous zone if they meet annual performance targets. The autonomous zone would have no limit on the number of schools because the schools within this zone have already proven their ability to operate successfully (i.e., prepare exit-ready students) without a large amount of oversight.

Schools that are currently found in the empowerment model (this refers to the 30 schools now called “empowerment schools” in CCSD) will become part of the autonomous zone from the outset if they are meeting the required performance targets.

Each zone will have a single academic manager (to whom each principal in the zone reports). One principal (or possible two principals) within each zone will serve as a mentor to other principals in the zone. The zones will work directly with a deputy superintendent (rather than through an area associate superintendent), removing at least one administrative layer from the current system. The result will be a flatter organization.

The deputy superintendent (deputy) will provide leadership, guidance, and support to all principals. This will be accomplished through a quarterly meeting that the deputy has with all principals in a zone. It also will happen through the guidance that the deputy provides to the academic managers of each zone (as well to the associate superintendents). Under this arrangement, the deputy will oversee implementation of a school-performance management system. This will enable the deputy to have clearer oversight District-wide.

Each performance zone will be served (but not supervised) by a staff side group that will provide assistance on issues such as District procedures, parent issues, discipline, and overall navigation of our system (English language learners, Title I, Gifted and Talented, professional development). Under the deputy superintendent’s leadership, an academic pathway will begin with Pre-K and will continue to Twelfth Grade graduation with a goal of “ready by exit.” Key pathway checkpoints include:

- Grade 12: Graduation of students with no need for remediation
- Grade 11: AP Participation and Performance, ACT and SAT Performance
- Grade 9: On track to graduation
- Grade 8: Algebra Participation and Performance
- Grade 5: Grade Level/Advanced Reading Performance
- Grade 3: Grade Level/Advanced Reading Performance
- Grade 1: Grade Level/Advanced Reading Performance

In addition, student monitoring tools will track every student's academic status. Principals will list interventions with teacher predictions for year-end performance. A graphic illustrates how support follows need.

■ **STRUCTURE: Create a New Schools Division**

Acting as a kind of network, this division will lead, guide, and support the work that takes place to create a new model of schooling. While some schools will join as a result of their status as “turn-around schools” (otherwise known as SIG schools or those funded by School Improvement Grants), others will be new entrants into the market. To be eligible for New School status, applicants will meet seven criteria:

- Governance structure and leadership capacity sufficient to open/operate a successful school
- Ample evidence of interest and support from parents, staff, and community members
- Evidence of a research-based educational model that has proven effective with similar student populations (or in the case of innovative proposals shows strong and compelling evidence that it would be effective)
- Demonstration that it has the capacity to serve special populations (including but not limited to special education students, talented and gifted students, and students learning English as a second language)
- Evidence of a business model that is financially sound, instruction-focused, aligned with the proposed educational program, and fiscally-sustainable
- Assurance that the school will be accessible to all students (and the composition of the student population will mirror the composition of the District at large)
- High quality charter schools and schools of innovation

■ **RESEARCH: Commission studies to gauge and improve District efficiency and effectiveness**

Three studies have been undertaken. Two are complete. The last is in process and due for completion by August 30, 2011. They include:

- Outside assessment (using survey and interview) of CCSD management talent and capacity for change and improvement. Authored by Quality Leadership Resources, Inc., and titled “Study of Barriers to Improved Student Achievement,” this is complete.

- Outside analysis of the function, structure, and processes associated with the Office of Communication. Authored by Vista Communications and titled “Communication Department Recommendations March 2011,” this was completed April 30, 2011.
- A comprehensive top-to-bottom analysis, by an outside firm, of the organizational effectiveness and efficiency of all CCSD departments and their fitness to achieve their espoused mission. This includes an assessment of the current state of the organization, benchmarked against comparable school districts; identification of opportunities for increased efficiencies and cost savings; validation of the organization’s readiness for change; and creation of a process improvement model that is aligned to the Clark County School District’s strategic aims and goals. This is due for completion by August 30, 2011.

■ **PROCESS: Broaden the use of the Empowerment Concept**

Expand budgeting flexibility that a few schools (30) currently enjoy in CCSD so that all schools have the same opportunity. To accomplish this, develop a consistent, comprehensive Districtwide system of funding for schools that reflects priority based on student need. In part, this involves increasing the freedom which exists to reallocate fiscal resources. This concerns a needs-based resource allocation model where funds follow academic need. Two key understandings provide a foundation. First, not all academic needs are equal. The first commitment is to help students who are not proficient to catch up. The second commitment is to help others keep up and continue to move to even higher levels of performance. In defining need, attention shifts within the limits of law and rule from at-risk categories (like socio-economic status and English language learners) to academic categories like unsatisfactory, partially proficient, and proficient. Students struggling to catch up to attain proficiency will have a greater claim to resources than those students who are already proficient. Similarly, those who are proficient but do not keep up have a greater claim to resources than those who keep up.

■ **INCENTIVES: Create incentives that help us learn to get better faster**

In addition to offering royalties for the most effective lesson plans, repurpose funds currently dedicated to the traditional step-and-column pay structure (which allows for pay increases based on longevity and post graduate work) to a system of merit pay that not only recognizes teacher excellence, but also provides incentives and pathways for all teachers to increase their effectiveness. In addition, build into future agreements provisions for rewarding the entire staff at schools that achieve certain performance goals. Under the present arrangement, discussions surrounding these incentives will understandably occur with teachers and their representatives.

■ **POLICY FRAMEWORK: Adopt state policy to support innovation and non-traditional solutions**

I imagine a day when legislation is passed within Nevada that promotes greater innovation and enables it to blossom and thrive in schools. Experience has shown that states have been successful in boosting student achievement by offering schools a way to gain greater staffing flexibility and hence more programming autonomy in return for greater accountability for student results. By

creating incentives and pathways for greater innovation, these laws have made it possible for staff at some schools to step outside the confines of collective bargaining. These laws also made it possible for some schools to receive waivers of the type that are typically granted to charter schools. In particular, some of these waivers will enable the staff at schools that are willing to step outside of bargaining agreements to develop new pay structures. Similar arrangements in other states (like Colorado) have led to significant and sustained improvements in student achievement.

■ **GETTING THE SIGNALS RIGHT: Connect taxpayer funds to the core business (i.e., learning)**

Presently, there is little connection between the way schools are allocated funds (based on student count) and the core function, namely student learning. Schools secure funds based on the number of students who show up at the beginning of the year, not based on the number that attained the expected learning during the year. If competency matters more than seat time, **imagine funding that was based not on the number of students who show up at the beginning of the school year, but on the number of students who successfully achieve the desired learning by the end of the year.** While this may not lead to cost savings it could “get the signals straight.” The intent is to connect resources to the core operation of the enterprise.

■ **LEADERSHIP: Develop better leaders**

Partner with foundations and/or universities to upgrade the quality of leadership preparation. Work with the Public Education Foundation and others (e.g., universities and policy researchers funded by the Lincy Foundation) to support the establishment of Leadership Academies. Based on the new performance zone concept, develop leadership teams in each of the zones.

Why leadership teams? Leadership demands more than one person can simply provide. Shared leadership creates conditions for maximizing individual and collective strengths. Shared leadership requires that others join in assuming responsibility and take action as a whole.

The leadership outcomes for this program are under development but it is certain that they will have a clear focus on increased knowledge about research-based leadership responsibilities and practices correlated with enhanced student achievement. There will be a focus on increasing knowledge and skill with respect to balancing and sharing leadership.

These Leadership Academies and leadership teams will welcome participation by teachers and fledgling and aspiring administrators, as well as practicing administrators who seek larger responsibilities.

■ **DATA: Use data more strategically**

Unify planning and activity designed to help the District migrate toward and stand up an enterprise data model (unified data structure). Move the District into an enterprise data model that will bring the many databases at CCSD under a single umbrella and remove the need for “digital ditch-digging” that seeks to lay pipes so information can flow between different databases.

■ **REORGANIZATION: First phase**

- Provide enhanced information and improve two-way communication by first altering the mission for the Office of Communication. Then resource it appropriately and re-staff it so it is able to achieve its mission. Locate the unit so it directly reports to the superintendent of schools.
- To account for the expanded role that instructional technology is expected to play in the future, reposition existing operations in a way that allows the District to make better and wider uses of technology-assisted, hybrid, and blended learning. Do so by consolidating Virtual High School and the Academy for Individualized Study within the division of Information Technology Services. Locate the division so it directly reports to the superintendent of schools.
- Reposition schools currently identified as superintendent schools so they are affiliated with newly-formed performance zones.
- Consolidate Employee Management Relations (negotiations and bargaining) under an associate superintendent. This position will directly report to the superintendent of schools.
- Finalize plans for a New Schools Division.
- The Equity and Diversity Education Department will report directly to the superintendent of schools.
- The role of the Area associate superintendents will shift so greater support is provided to schools in each performance zone.
- Other reorganization changes are pending.

CLOSURE

Our goal is clear. It is raising both the floor and the ceiling for our students. It begins with greater expectations of young people and of ourselves. How have we thought about the challenge ahead? Here I have described that it is less about finding a solution to a specific problem and more about redefining the possibilities for students, schools, and community. I have also noted that, if we are to be successful, change must be a collaborative process; trustees, employees, parents, students, and community partners have integral roles to play in reshaping our organization. We need to capitalize on existing public-private partnerships and expand them to draw in new national partners. We need to embrace our critical friends and listen carefully to critics while inviting them to join us in generating solutions. Finally, while reform necessarily means change and change is sometimes difficult, we cannot lose sight of our mission and purpose, namely service to students. All of our decisions must be tempered by how they will improve achievement and help **ensure all students are ready by exit.**

