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Development of a School District:
The Role and Contributions of
Clark County, Nevada School District Superintendents
1956 – 2000

By

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Introduction


Leland B. Newcomer---- 1961- 1965

James I. Mason---- 1966-1969

Kenny C. Guinn---- 1969 - 1978

Claude Perkins----1978 – 1981

Charles Silvestri ---- 1981 –1982

Robert Wentz----- 1982 – 1989

Brian M. Cram---- 1989 - 2000
Introduction

This historical work is the result of collaboration between the primary author and a significant number of graduate students in Educational Leadership, UNLV College of Education. Their efforts have added significantly to the depth and breadth of the document that follows. Then-current students in UNLV’s Educational Leadership program, part of the College of Education, conducted oral history interviews providing useful information that was included in the document. Those contributing written draft materials included: Nola Allen-Raffail, Maria Anderson, Richard Campbell, Tracy Clark, Elizabeth Goodfellow, Patrick Jacobson, Jean Lewis, Jerome Meyer, Byron Miles, Edward San Nicolas, Lawrence Russell, Tracy Schroeder and Andre Yates.

A number of former Clark County School District staff members and current community residents offered advice and assistance during the preparation of the manuscript and deserve public recognition. These include: Helene Amos, Frank Brusa, Ralph Cadwallader, John Gallifant, Leonard “Pat” Goodall, Clifford Lawrence, Robert McCord, and Dennis Ortwein.

Janet R. Carlton, former Special Collections Librarian at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, conducted extensive library research on behalf of the project and provided unending moral support. For these efforts her husband and author stands forever in her debt!

The project as originally conceived was to have extended through the superintendency of all incumbents up to the 50th anniversary year of 2005. However, the tremendous volume of material to be considered, along with the belief that recent events should be allowed to
“obtain the patina of time,” along with a greater sense of perspective, suggested a change of plans.¹ Consequently, it was decided to conclude this treatment in the 2000, the year when Dr. Brian Cram retired. Analysis of the Garcia years and those which followed remain for future treatment.

This period of study has been, for the author, “full of sound and fury” but, unlike the conclusion reached by Macbeth in Shakespeare’s work,² it has signified a great deal. The growth of the Clark County School District from 7000 students in 1956 to its enrollment of over 320,000 in 2015-16, ³when considered in the context of the social, economic, political, and educational challenges associated therewith, is a saga of immense proportions and great historical interest. The writer has addressed many of the significant issues encountered by the district and its leadership. The document demonstrates how the efforts of those involved in the educational events of the first 50 years resulted, despite challenges of daunting proportions, in a school district that ranks among America’s most interesting and progressive.

Patrick W. Carlton
Las Vegas, Nevada
2016

¹ A wise academic has counseled that, “as one approaches the present time, events cease to be historical and must be treated as political in nature.”
² “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Macbeth, Act V, Scene V, line 24ff.
R. Guild Gray 1956 – 1961

The Clark County School District’s first superintendent was a multitalented, down-to-earth man whose entire life reflected the pursuit of excellence in education. R. Guild Gray was born September 2, 1911 in Peoria, Illinois. His parents moved West when he was two years old and the family settled in Reno, Nevada. Gray attended Reno High School and the University of Nevada. There he earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Education, later earning a Master of Arts degree. Gray completed his schooling at Stanford University, where he was awarded a Doctorate in Education in 1958.

Gray did not set out to be an educator, instead entering employment at the age of 16 with the Walter Good Survey Team. Gray was responsible for helping to “put Nevada on the map”, literally. He continued employment as a surveyor until college days, where he intended to study geology. However, he quickly discovered that lab costs during the Depression exceeded his ability to pay. Consequently, he was forced to enter the workforce on a full-time basis. During that period of time he decided to major in Education. “Six years later, Gray had a degree and the promise of a job in Las Vegas, a job for which he hadn’t even applied”

In 1936 Gray was offered a job at Las Vegas High School as a teacher of Spanish. He admitted to the superintendent of Las Vegas Union School District that “I can’t teach Spanish.” He got the job anyway, because the Dean of Education at the University of Nevada had recommended him for the post to Maude Frazier, then Superintendent of Las

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
Vegas Union School District. This early assignment led to several other teaching and administrative positions that served to “round out” Gray’s career in education. These positions included service as principal of Reno High School; teacher at the University of Nevada; state Deputy Superintendent for Public Instruction; Superintendent of the Yerington School District; Director of Curriculum for Contra Costa County in California; and finally Superintendent of the Las Vegas Union School District. He also saw active duty as a Naval officer during World War II, serving in the South Pacific.

In 1953, the school board appointed Gray as superintendent of the Las Vegas Union School District. That year provided significant challenges both for Gray and the school district, including rapid changes in the size of the student body; school construction difficulties, and budget shortfalls. Local authorities had expected an enrollment of 8,800 students in area schools during the 1953-54 academic year but only 7,000 students actually appeared. This necessitated some rapid readjustments in staffing and overall deployment of personnel.

“The schools were in a hell of a shape,” said Gray. “The town was growing very rapidly because of the beginning of the [atomic] test site activity. . . . We were so short of money that … we’d have to take the textbooks from one school to another. Ninety percent of my budget was going for salaries. I only had 10 percent of the budget for all other things.” When he assumed the superintendent’s position, Gray felt that the

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8 R. Guild Gray Family, interview by Patrick W. Carlton, 7 March 2006, Las Vegas, NV (tape recording.)
11 Woyski, "Ex-Surveyor," pp. 3-4T.
classrooms were in too rough a condition to accommodate the children. He noticed cracks in the floor so big that students could lose their pencils if they dropped them. He suggested that this situation was the result of long-term differences in “world view” between officials from Southern Nevada and those in other parts of the state, these differences predicated, at least in part, upon sharply differing population growth patterns and demands for public services. With a population of 98,000 in 1955 (44,750 in the City of Las Vegas), Clark County was the most highly-inhabited area of Southern Nevada. The nearest Nevada town with a population of over 1000 was Tonopah, 200 miles to the North.

Political issues also played a large part in the financial emergency facing the schools at that time. As Gray said, “All evidence points to the conclusion that the growth of Southern Nevada was viewed with alarm in the north. The writer has concluded that the politicians in the northern counties saw a growing threat to their domination of the State, particularly those in Reno…As far as the schools were concerned, it was not until they were ready to close for lack of funds that the State took action.”

In 1955 Gray, as Superintendent of the Las Vegas Union School District, participated in the consolidation of the 14 area schools districts into a single operating entity. Inflation had, by this time, generated such a crisis within Nevada’s education structure that the state legislature was forced to take action, abolishing the 154 districts

12 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
then in existence\textsuperscript{16} and creating one district for each county. Consequently, 17 school districts were established statewide.\textsuperscript{17}

Next came the task of organizing under the newly created administrative arrangement. This was no simple task, given the several distinct cultures then making up the County. These included the population of Boulder City, a community of highly trained technical workers inhabiting a “government town,” in which there was no gambling and in which the sale of alcoholic beverages was illegal. The children of these workers almost all were college-bound. In contrast, the industrial city of Henderson, home of Basic Industries, was composed of low-cost houses built for industrial workers—a “blue collar community.” The four Moapa and Virgin Valley communities, to the Northeast of Las Vegas, were conservative and agrarian in nature, largely occupied by adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons).\textsuperscript{18} The distinctive cultures exhibited in these disparate areas would necessitate careful planning and political sensitivity on the part of the newly appointed County Superintendent.\textsuperscript{19}

A seven-member school board was created, including representatives from urban and rural areas of Clark County.\textsuperscript{20} Sets of “Guiding Principles” and “Basic Policies” were agreed upon and designed in an attempt to set at rest the concerns of representatives

\textsuperscript{16} Statutes of Nevada, (1955), c. 402, sec. 32. In 1953 the Governor had appointed the Governor’s School Survey Committee, which recommended the appointment of “professional workers” to carry out the needed study. The Division of Surveys and Field Services, George Peabody College was chosen to carry out this study. The report issued included the headline, “Administrative reorganization is urgent at the local level,” and recommended that the county should become the smallest local administrative unit. George Peabody College for Teachers, Public Education in Nevada, Digest of the Survey Report:A Report Prepared by the Division of Surveys and Field Services (Nashville, TN: George Peabody College for Teachers., 1954), p.5.


\textsuperscript{18} These communities included Overton and Logandale in Moapa Valley and Bunkerville and Mesquite in Virgin Valley. They were, and are, quite different from Las Vegas.


\textsuperscript{20} Three members were chosen from the Las Vegas Union District Board and “one board member from Boulder City, one each from Henderson and Education District Number One, which encompassed the two agricultural valleys of Moapa and Virgin…and one from all the rural districts.” Gray, “Dissertation,” p. 60.
from the different areas within the county, some of whom feared that their influence as representatives of their constituencies would be reduced. During these discussions it became clear that a County Superintendent needed to be selected as quickly as possible.

On May 30, 1955 it was decided by the school board to solicit letters of interest from any and all persons wishing to be considered for the position of County Superintendent. By June 9, when next the board met, no formal applications had been received, although Gray had indicated an interest “under certain conditions.” During an interview with the board held that evening, he requested consideration for the position on several conditions: that he would serve as executive officer to the Clark County Board of School Trustees until July 1, 1955; at the same time, he would continue in the role of superintendent of the Las Vegas Union School District; on July 1, 1955, he would assume the title of County Superintendent. His administrative relationship to the Las Vegas area was to continue until July 1, 1956; and he was to be assigned an assistant to handle some of his Union District duties, so that he could spend more time on the reorganization of the country schools. This agreement allowed time for a “get-acquainted” period. . so that if there should be dissatisfaction by either the county board or [Gray] during the year, [he] could continue to serve in the Las Vegas attendance area or have time to seek another position. Neither the superintendent nor the board felt it was permanently committed.

As a way of ensuring full and ongoing communication, it was decided to create a district advisory committee composed of the superintendents of the former districts, each

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21 External consultants Professor Edgar Morphet, U. of California at Berkeley, and Howard Dawson of the National Education Association, led these discussions. Ibid. p.66.
22 Gray believed that “any persons accepting it [the superintendency] would be in a vulnerable position. He would be working with a staff of key administrators none of whom would be his appointees. Some of these administrators were opposed to the county district organization….“ Gray, “Dissertation,” pp. 80-81.
of whom had been retained in a local supervisory capacity, along with two assistant superintendents of the Las Vegas district, the Principal of the former Paradise School District, and the state Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction.\textsuperscript{25} The council met frequently, and Superintendent Gray made it his business to consult continually with this advisory council. He reported that during this period of reorganization, “no major recommendation was made to the board by the superintendent until it had been considered by the council. . . .It became customary for the superintendent to begin a recommendation to the board with the expression, ‘It is the opinion of your advisory council. . . .’ ”\textsuperscript{26} Gray’s careful employment of the council helped generate and maintain mutual respect among the members and to reduce “special interest pleading” in the ranks. As he said, “Patience, tolerance and a spirit of compromise on the part of participants were necessary to all successful council meetings. . . .At least a majority of the members . . . shared in these characteristics and attitudes at each meeting, which resulted in positive contributions to the reorganization effort.”\textsuperscript{27}

During the interim period, extending from June 9, 1955 to the abolishment of the former districts on July 1, 1956, Gray and his advisory council, working with the Board of Trustees, developed an operating budget; planned for the construction of office space for the new administrative staff; developed an accounting system; rewrote and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p.84.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid. pp. 90 and 92.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Gray, “Dissertation,” p.106. One close observer of Dr. Gray’s administrative style said “…I got to know him personally and admired is skills. He had a lot of integrity. He was doing a balancing act, which all superintendents have to do….he had to …be a broker of a balance between board members and legislators and wheelers and dealers in the community. He did that quite well. As well as having a reputation for knowing what he was doing with employees of the school system and parents.” Theron Swainston, interview by Kim Compton, 27 April 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
consolidated the insurance policies carried by the former districts; inventoried school facilities, equipment and supplies; created personnel policies for the new district; and developed a transportation policy and operational procedures, including the “laying out” of school bus routes. They also dealt with defects in the school bonding laws which would have made it impossible to generate needed funds for the school construction program.  

All these challenges were successfully met, despite some bruised egos and long sessions of after-hours work on the part of the harried administrative staff.

During the Spring of 1957 two consultants from Stanford University submitted a proposal for administrative restructuring based on information gathered and experience gained since the creation of the consolidated district in July, 1956. The report, created by Professors William Odell and James MacConnell of Stanford University, suggested that the Board “must be able either to defend the present administrative structure or it should identify weaknesses and move toward their elimination . . . to maintain the status quo on the basis of evidence of sound economical practice or to make changes that will improve the operation and effect economies.”

The report went on to recommend that the superintendent should exercise broad oversight based upon expertise and training in a generic sense, and that it would be preferable “to assign other administrative personnel to areas of special competencies rather than giving them . . . broad responsibilities.”

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28 Ibid, pp.89-90.
30 Ibid., pp.4-5.
Following some vigorous discussions within the advisory council and Board of Trustees and the development of some necessary compromises, Gray recommended a new structure, which went into effect on July 1, 1958. This structure provided for the execution of all necessary administrative functions while reducing redundancy in function across the district. This organization became the first in a long series of modified structures adopted by CCSD between 1958 and the present day.

At the time of Dr. Gray’s appointment he was painfully aware of the growth issues plaguing Clark County. “One-fourth of the children were going to school only a half-day and another fourth were crowded into discarded army barracks and other inadequate facilities.” The nuclear test site, located just north of Las Vegas, employed approximately 10,000 workers at that time. As newly arriving employees settled in with their families, overcrowding became the norm within the schools. Enrollment in the city schools was estimated at 11,000 during the 1956 academic year; this was the largest increase that had occurred within the state since World War II. The district found that it could not support this growth due to lack of funding.

At the time of district consolidation Gray presented the board of trustees a budget of over $2 million. This budget was to be valid for only six months, beginning on July 1,

31 “… he was not long in realizing that differences of opinion in his advisory council and among the members of the board would make necessary some compromise. It was obvious there would be considerable delay in effecting some of he recommended changes.” Gray, “Dissertation,” pp. 103-4.
32 The structure included Administrative Assistants for Business, Buildings, Personnel, and Curriculum, along with one from Henderson. The latter position was apparently a compromise decision based upon political considerations and sensitivities. All these actors, plus the high school principals, became members of the Advisory Council. Gray, “Dissertation,” p.105.
1956, since the district was scheduled to first receive state funding as the newly consolidated Clark County School District beginning in 1957.36

At this time the Fremont, Tropicana and Royal-Nevada hotels were about to open. The added overcrowding generated by the influx of new employees and their families contributed to the requirement for the creation of half-day school sessions throughout the district.37 The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* wrote: “Schools of Clark County are inadequate to handle present enrollment and will be more deficient at the opening of the next education year in September [of] 1957. More classrooms are needed and improvements at some of the schools desirable.”38

Gray was able to overcome this financial crisis through generation of citizen support for the passage of school bonds and sales taxes. In 1955 he persuaded the legislation to pass a 2 percent sales tax that would make funds available for school construction.39 The next year, Gray and the school board helped to persuade voters to pass a bond issue in the amount of $10,600,000 to support the school district financially. Fewer than 15 percent of the county’s eligible voters turned out to vote on the bond issue, which was, at the time, the largest ever proposed within the state of Nevada. It passed by a 2-1 margin.40

Knowing that a large part of his budget must go toward building new schools, Gray set out to maximize the impact of the taxpayer dollar and was able to save the

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36 "6-Months School Budget of $2 Millions," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 12 January 1956, p.1. The six month budget included two sections. One portion totaled $1,710,377.91 and was accompanied by a second section covering high school support, the latter totaling $860,447.17
39 Woyski, "Ex-Surveyor," p.3T.
school district substantial money in the costs of construction of new schoolbuildings. The architects, contractors, subcontractors, school personnel, and Gray worked together to develop lower cost buildings. The group approached the process by designing a prototype using full-sized bricks. Once the prototype was completed, they determined what improvements could be made, a process which continued until all members of the team felt they had created the best possible prototype.41 “We got buildings down to $7 a square foot here,” Gray said,42 a savings of $4 to $5 a square foot. The prototype building model is still being used by the school district, enabling schools to be built quickly and at a reduced cost. Gray’s contribution to this process has saved the district millions of dollars during the last 50 years. His frugality allowed new schools to be built, books to be bought, and teachers to be hired--an enduring legacy.43

While Superintendent Gray was able to save the district money on the building of schools, the price and number of required junior high sites caused dissension within the Board of Trustees. Sherman F. Garside, school board president, felt that junior high schools could be “adequately accommodated on less land.”44 Gray argued that the board should follow national recommendations for junior high sites, which prescribed 20-acre

42 Woyski, "Ex-Surveyor," p.3T.
43 Not everyone approved of the results of the low-cost options. “The first significant administrative position I had was to be the Principal of Western High School…the third high school to be opened. It was new. It was built for 1500 students and I remember reading…that it had been built for the least cost per square foot of any school in the United States….and it showed. It was terrible. The design was terrible. The furnishings were bad. Not long after I became principal we had 3000 students in a building constructed for 1500…and I eventually had to go to a double session in order to accommodate it. …I was there all day long….it was exhausting. I recall one day a young woman came in….She said ‘the sky is falling.’ The roof is falling in.’ I said ‘it’s been going on all day long. What do you mean?’ …The roof had leaked and whole sections of the classroom [roof] was falling down.” Theron Swainston, interview by Kim Compton, 27 April 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)
parcels. The district decided to support Gray’s recommendation, that of securing the bigger sites for junior high schools. The price per acre in 1956 was $4000.\textsuperscript{45}

Gray had strong feelings about student education and did not let board members’ opinions distract him from the goal of creating a strong educational system for Clark County. Helen C. Cannon, PTA president of West Charleston School and a board member, petitioned Gray to put sidewalks in front of that elementary school. Gray indicated his belief that removing students from double sessions was much more important than the laying of sidewalks. “I’m not gonna put emphasis on any sidewalks as long as I’ve got kids on double sessions. And the audience clapped. And it embarrassed the hell out of Helen Cannon”\textsuperscript{46}

Gray was known for his “public relations lapses.” The local paper described him as being famous “for his irascible nature, strong opinions, and a singular brusqueness. He admits his intolerance—of some things. But most who know him agree he is a most benevolent despot.” Board member Sherman F. Garside wrote of Gray: “During his first years of our association I found him to be entirely too caustic with his subordinates.” Gray admitted that this was true. “Sometimes I’m very intolerant of stupidity.”\textsuperscript{47} At another point in time he said: “Of all the troubles I’ve had in this world, I think most of them have come about from me speaking my mind.”\textsuperscript{48}

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\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Woyski, "Ex-Surveyor," p.3T.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid. 3T.In another quote from the same article, Dr. Gray commented: “I’ve lost my temper at meetings so many times at some stupid ass who got up without really reasoning things out. And I would kinda let them know that I thought they were stupid. That’s not good politics. And I don’t mean that I think I know all the answers, but there’s a hell of a lot of stupidity in this world.”
\end{flushleft}
Dr. Gray made a major and lasting contribution to higher education in Southern Nevada. A local citizen offered to donate sixty acres of land as a building site for a new local university on the condition that an additional twenty acres would be purchased from the family at a cost of $35,000. “Since the University had no appropriated funds for land purchase, it sought money from private sources. An energetic citizens’ committee, headed by R. Guild Gray, a longtime public school administrator, created the Nevada Southern Campus Fund and raised more than $35,000 in 1955.”49 Through his efforts and those of Maude Frazier and numerous other public-minded citizens, during the mid-1950’s what is now the University of Nevada Las Vegas came into being. Of that accomplishment he indicated that “it was the most important thing I did in my whole life.”50

During Dr. Gray’s tenure as superintendent, student enrollment in Clark County rose from 7,000 to 30,000.51 The large number of newly arriving students brought different individual needs to Clark County schools. Gray played a pivotal role in setting up classes for the handicapped and the “mentally advanced.”52 He was also reported to be “ahead of his time” in the area of race relations. His family said of him, “He viewed people as people. It didn’t matter to him whether you were black or white. …There was a lot of pressure on him to build [a] high school on the West side, which was our black

50 Woycki, "Ex-Surveyor ",p.3T. "In the summer of 1955, Dr. R. Guild Gray began an impressive grass-roots fund-raising campaign….The campaign was a resounding success and a clear indication of support from the residents of Las Vegas. It didn’t take long before Nevada Southern collected pledges in excess of the required $35,000." “UNLV and How it Grew.”(1975, February, 2). The Nevadan, p.6.
52 Ibid.
ghetto at the time,\textsuperscript{53} and he refused . . . because he recognized that if there was a high school . . . on the West side we would have high school segregation in Clark County. By not building a high school, he caused . . . integration in the high schools. . . . \textsuperscript{54}

After a total of 21 years in education, Dr. Gray decided to seek other opportunities. He submitted his resignation to the board asking to be released from his contract effective September 1, 1961.\textsuperscript{55} On that day Gray stepped down to become vice-president of the First Western Savings and Loan Association.\textsuperscript{56} He served as State Assemblyman from 1963 to 1966, reportedly losing his job when he refused to support legislation that favored the savings and loan industry. Gray’s son, Gary, verified this account saying that “not a lot of people would do that. He felt that the bill wasn’t right.”\textsuperscript{57} Gray continued his public service as City Manager of Boulder City from 1965 to 1968, and completed his active working life as a Las Vegas-based vice-president and manager with the financial consulting firm of Burrows, Smith, and Company, headquartered in Salt Lake City. He was named a Distinguished Nevadan by the University and Community College System of Nevada in 1991, receiving this honor during the graduation exercises of UNLV. Dr. Gray was a 46-year member of, and active participant

\textsuperscript{53} “. . . segregation of the schools was . . . de facto . . . rather than de jure. It was not a deliberate plan of the school district or anyone else to create racially identifiable schools . . . economically and sociologically the community was segregated. The “west side” was a term that meant something . . . that’s where the black people were expected to live . . . The school board knew [that] if they built a school there it would be racially identifiable, but the people who lived there didn’t want to be bussed someplace. They wanted [their children] to go to school in their community.” Theron Swainston, interview by Kim Compton, 27 April 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)

\textsuperscript{54} R. Guild Gray family, interview by Patrick W. Carlton, 7 March 2006, Las Vegas, NV (tape recording).


\textsuperscript{56} Dr. Gray’s title was Vice President of Research and Planning. First Western S&L Association was the largest in Nevada, and ranked in the top 10% nationally. “Schools and the People Behind Their Names.” \textit{Las Vegas Sun Magazine}, 25 April 1982, n.p.

in, the community service work of Rotary International and the Rotary Club of Las Vegas and, in later years, published two books of fiction, poetry, and photography.

The Gray family reported that Dr. Gray “just loved Nevada” and that, in later years he took photographs and described them in poems that he personally created. In other instances he wrote a poem and then spent long periods of time seeking just the right scene to illustrate the concepts included in the writing. “He was always a teacher, always an educator…he prepared slides of the state and would talk to [students] at Gray Elementary School] about the Great Basin and the Geography of Nevada [and] Nevada’s history. Speaking of Dr. Gray’s appreciation of plain fare and the simple things of life, a family member said, “His favorite food was a pot of beans. He was extremely bright and . . . could do [many] things mentally [and] physically. . . . He was a very complicated guy with a staggering [number] of interest[s]. But he really didn’t stray very far from the pot of beans.”

Dr. Gray died in 1998 at the age of 86. Friends called Gray “a Nevada legend.” As one Rotary friend, Ralph Rohay, said: “He ran a school district, he was a legislator, a banker; he was a writer and poet. He was an all-around wonderful guy.” It can be argued that the vision, energy, and political savvy Guild Gray manifested, along with the

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58 “…he was very active in the club…that was one of the highlights of his week [going] to the club [meetings]…he was proud to be a member and he respected the group….” R. Guild Gray Family, interview by Patrick W. Carlton, 7 March 2006, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording).
59 Ibid.
60 “The first superintendent I knew was R. Guild Gray; and he was characterized as the enemy to me by the teacher’s organization. . . .The teacher’s organization said that he was the one keeping us from getting a nice salary increase….I [later] got to know him personally and admired his skills. He had a lot of integrity. He was doing a balancing act, which all superintendents have to do….he had to figure out how to . . . broker a balance between board members and legislators and wheelers and dealers in the community. Theron Swainston, interview by Kim Compton, 27 April 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)
dynamic guidance he provided during the formative years of the Clark Country School District, qualify him for the designation “architect of the fledgling school district.”
Leland B. Newcomer 1961 – 1965

On December 1, 1961, Leland B. Newcomer assumed the superintendency of the Clark County School District. The Las Vegas Review-Journal reported that “Newcomer, 40, became the second superintendent of schools since the district was unified in 1956, succeeding Dr. R. Guild Gray who resigned as of September 1 to enter private enterprise.”  

Newcomer had graduated from LaVerne College (now LaVerne University) with a Bachelor’s Degree in Education and from the Claremont College Graduate School, where he received his Master’s Degree in School Administration. At the time of his appointment he was completing work for the doctorate at the University of Southern California. He had served as the Assistant Superintendent of California’s Covina Valley Unified School District prior to accepting the Clark County School District position. Prior to assuming his post, he spent a week touring the rural and urban schools scattered across the 8000 square mile district in order to become familiar with the entire geographic arrangement. “The combination of both urban and rural schools in a district is particularly challenging,” Newcomer said, “and is one of the major reasons which prompted my applying for the post.” When asked about the rapid growth of the Las Vegas valley, Newcomer answered, “Mushrooming growth and building program problems are facing nearly every school district in the nation. . .They are pressing, yes, but certainly not insurmountable.”

64 “School Headaches ‘Not Unique – Chief,” Las Vegas Review-Journal, 3 December 1961, p.3A.
65 Ibid.
Newcomer knew that he had challenges to face, and planned to address them immediately. *Time* magazine reported that, when Newcomer arrived, “...the Las Vegas system was in a jam. Almost half of the 29,000 students were on double sessions; annual teacher turnover was a disruptive 33 percent...” Newcomer told the Clark County School Board that he would take the post only if given full administrative powers free from daily meddling by board members. Newcomer promptly shoved aside a group of what he calls ‘old butts’, political types paid administrative salaries to perform mainly clerical chores. He brought in a ‘cabinet’ of five imaginative administrators, four from out of state.”\(^66\) This aggressive posture apparently caused early and ongoing tension between Newcomer and some Clark County residents.\(^67\)

Although viewed by some as aggressive and plain spoken, Newcomer offered praise when due. The new superintendent was a strong supporter of the “equal educational opportunities for all children” theory and was “most impressed” by the rural school facilities he visited.\(^68\)

Newcomer was proactive in his new position. He quickly carved “the 8000 square mile Clark County district into five sections, assigned a director to each to serve as a liaison with his office, and gave each principal a free hand to shape his own school.”\(^69\)


\(^{67}\) “...leadership in the school district at that time was [heavily] Mormon. [Newcomer] felt there was a need [for] change and began to make that change. He brought people from all over the United States who had leadership abilities and told us ‘we want a new direction in education.’ ” Frank J. Lamping, interview by Patrick Jacobson, 30 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording).


\(^{69}\) “Las Vegas’ Impressive Newcomer,” *Time*, 17 December 1965, pp. 96-97. The creation of five sections appears quite similar to the approach adopted by Supt. Carlos Garcia in 2001, when the Board of Trustees approved the reorganization of CCSD into five “areas,” each headed by an Area Superintendent who reported to Garcia. This move was motivated, at least in part, by efforts in the state legislature to reconstitute CCSD in a larger number of independent school districts, an organization similar to that existing prior to the 1956 consolidation, when Clark County included 14 separate school districts.
Newcomer had many challenges as he took control of the Clark County School District, a major one of which greeted him immediately upon his arrival—the burgeoning student population. The incredible growth of Las Vegas and the surrounding area brought an ever-increasing number of students to the district. In November 1961, a month before Newcomer took his position, a special election had been held in an attempt to pass a bond issue for $6,000,000. The funds were to be used to construct nine elementary schools and one junior high school. The bond issue was defeated, leaving 33,006 students without appropriate school buildings.70 According to the Las Vegas Review-Journal, student enrollments in the Clark County School District increased over 13 percent between 1960 and 1961.71 Meanwhile, citizen apathy contributed to ongoing difficulties in raising funds sufficient to support CCSD adequately.72

Throughout Newcomer’s tenure as superintendent, lack of funding continued to curtail the innovations that he sought. Finally, in January of 1963, the Las Vegas Review-Journal supported a new school district bond for $21 million which, at the time, was the biggest single bond issue in the state. This bond election came when more than 2,500 students were attending half-day sessions and the school district was serving 42,000 students, an increase of 10,000 students from the previous year. This bond issue, which was approved by local citizens, provided sufficient funds to meet only two-thirds of the school district’s need for additional facilities.73

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71 Ibid.
72 “Schools at that time didn’t have much direction because of the lack of [parental] interest. Most parents had a high school education, but very few had college educations…there was no real interest in education….Dr. Newcomer saw the future and said ‘we are going to build this town—we are going to move education into the foreground,’ and he did. He was one of the leaders of education at that time.” Frank J. Lamping, interview by Patrick Jacobson, 30 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording).
73 “It’s Worth the Cost,” Las Vegas Review-Journal, 27 January 1963, p.1A. In an April, 2006, communication, Dr. Newcomer said that “a year or so after we passed the $21 million bond issue, we went
Even though Newcomer took the position of superintendent with the Board of Trustees’ agreement that he was to have full administrative control, he quickly found it necessary to contend with many outside forces as he struggled to maintain control of the School District. In mid-December of 1961, just days after Newcomer had arrived, the local Civil Defense Authority raised a conflict-laden issue with significant implications for school district operations. During a discussion on December 14, board members charged the “local Civil Defense authorities with lack of leadership,” and using “panic publicity” in discussions regarding the newly-created national program for protection of civilians in case of nuclear war. Newcomer was instructed by the board to ‘frame a letter to the Nevada congressional delegation seeking ‘enlightenment on the situation’.”

This directive was based upon a recent conversation between board member Helen Phillips and Civil Defense head James T. Roberts, during which Roberts inquired about the role that the schools were going to play in civil defense planning and execution. Board member Dr. Clare Woodbury, having listened to an account of the conversation said: “you mean the head of civil defense is asking us? It seems to me it is his responsibility to tell us what our role is, not ask us what we intend to do.” His statement set a somewhat hostile tone for further board discussions. It became clear that the school board and Newcomer believed that the public should use the schools for civilian protection when necessary They then set out to determine an appropriate plan, stating that “schools should be an integrated part of a community, state, and national program for protection of civilians in case of nuclear war” but added that ‘there must be some

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right back with a $37 million bond election and it passed, I believe with a 60% yes vote. I think the first one passed by about 80%. That shows the support we had from the local community.” Leland B. Newcomer, message to author, 5 April 2006.

leadership to show us the best way.” They then reminded the public that “Education is the first objective of the school district.” The emergence of such a contentious issue so early in his tenure of office may have given Superintendent Newcomer an idea of what to expect during succeeding years in office.

A second issue requiring Newcomer to work with outside bureaucracy revolved around a series of bomb threats at the junior and senior high schools. In March of 1963, three months after Newcomer’s arrival, the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported that a series of threats had closed Clark County schools more than a dozen times since the beginning of the month. The City Attorney believed the police department was responsible for the safety of 36,000 students in the district. The police department, operating on that assumption, mandated that schools “would have to be evacuated for 24 hours following each bomb threat.” Superintendent Newcomer argued that responsibility for dealing with the bomb should be the school district’s responsibility, stating his view that the school administration should “… have complete authority over evacuation time, keeping students at a distance from the school until the search is completed.” Following discussions with Police Chief Kuykendall, an agreement was reached that the schools would only be evacuated overnight following a bomb threat. Because of the threats, the schools were losing valuable instruction time. Money was being wasted because teacher, support staff and bus driver salaries must still to be paid during closures. Superintendent Newcomer said that the students would have to make up the lost instructional time, which increased operational costs for the school district. He went on

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75 Ibid.
the point out that “for every day of evacuation the district loses $1.80 per student in the state aid formula or average daily attendance. One telephone call can cost the district $3600….”78

Assistant Superintendent Harvey Dondero said that “…the loss of food alone at Hyde Park, Western and Las Vegas [schools] was ‘up in the thousands. You can’t serve kids half prepared food the next day…and two of the incidents occurred just as lunch was starting.” 79 This series of costly events was undoubtedly a source of great concern to the cost-conscious Superintendent and Board of School Trustees, who must have breathed a sigh of relief when the “fad bomb scares” died out.

The Mormon Church was also involved in putting the school district on the front pages of local newspapers. A letter of request from the North Las Vegas Stake President and then-current Mayor of North Las Vegas, William Taylor, seeking the use of Rancho High School’s gym for a dance caused a public uproar during a July 1963 school board meeting. The Stake was, at the time, preparing a large celebration to commemorate the arrival of the first Mormon missionaries in the Las Vegas area. The only place large enough to hold the dance was the high school, since the Latter Day Saints Stake Center (now the Reed Whipple Center) was already committed for other elements of the celebration. “Deputy District Attorney John Harrington, the board’s legal adviser shook his head in an emphatic ‘no’ ” during the reading of the letter by Board President Chester Sewell.

This started a long and heated debate with Board Vice-President Walter McCall regarding the “semantics of School Board Policy 1331, the traditional church-state

separation clause.” Newcomer pushed for allowing the church to use the school as a ‘rare exception.’ The board was evenly divided at the time of the vote, leaving the decision to Atty. Harrington. His decision was in the negative and the dance was not held at the school. 80

In 1963, Newcomer believed “public pressure will force a special session of the Nevada Legislature to ease the Clark County school crisis.” He continued, “I cannot believe the people won’t wake up.” Governor Grant Sawyer had apparently promised that a $4.5 million state surplus would be made available to the Clark County School District. This did not occur. “Newcomer and Assemblyman Bernard Posin, the only representatives of the legislative delegation at the board’s public meeting on educational cutbacks, agreed [that] they’d heard so many conflicting explanations about the $4.5 million surplus that they are not sure it exists at all.” To recover from the projected shortfall, the board members “exchanged their personal priority lists concerning ways to pare a minimum of $500,000 from district operating expenses during 1963-64.” 81 While the shortfall was manageable, continued growth of Clark County’s student population added a critical dimension to the budget woes faced by the board. “The fall of 1964 is expected to see an army of new students glutting already overcrowded classrooms throughout the county.” 82 Discussion included cuts to various programs including transportation, counseling, medical checks, psychological evaluations, driver training, music and sports. Assemblyman Posin concluded that “every member of our delegation

82 Ibid.
is for the school district, but we have opposition from the North.”

In the state of Nevada the tensions between priorities in the north and south is, to this day, an on-going issue in any school district discussion.

On Thursday, August 8, 1963, the board announced a cessation of free transportation for high school students residing less than ten miles from their school. The conversation, according to local reporters, was frequently bitter in tone. At one point Superintendent Newcomer responded strongly to angry parents, saying “What do you think we’ve been doing? Just crying in the dark?” This shut off a stream of parental complaints and signaled the end of free bus transportation for those high school students affected by the 10 mile limitation. Busing for elementary and junior high schools would remain at the 2-mile limit. It was indicated that this move would save $100,000. The embittered school board said, “we have to vote now for things we’re not in favor of.” Newcomer once again brought up the idea of a special session of the Nevada State Legislature in hopes of getting more funds for the Clark County School District.

A small group of affected students staged a protest on the first day of the 1963-64 school year, walking down the median of what is now Las Vegas Boulevard from the Tropicana Hotel to their classes at Las Vegas High School (now Las Vegas Academy of the Arts). The students were accompanied by a group of parents—in cars—who supplied the walking students with “soft drinks, fruit and sandwiches.” The frustrating part was that students saw empty, or partially full busses, drive by. In response to the 10-mile

83 Ibid.
rule, Vegas Transit had put new schedules into effect that day “to pick up stranded walkers [and] reported that its business was far below expectations.”

The bus ban was employed by some angry citizens to paint Superintendent Newcomer as the villain responsible for all the ills within the school district. “In a surprisingly bitter session before the school board, Newcomer became the personal target of protesting parents. Previously they had said the board members were to blame for their transportation troubles.” Some members of the generally hostile audience used the bus issue as a way to bring forward other complaints, some of which related to the hiring of Newcomer by the Board of Trustees.” The tenor and content of these questions must have suggested to the Superintendent that his political credibility might well be in jeopardy

Though much of the meeting was vicious in tone, some members of the audience supported a plan proposed by School Services Director J.I. Glaspey and Transportation Director Richard White involving the staggering of school starting times, thus allowing all students to ride district buses. The plan would have cost the district $41,000 a year.

Newcomer and the board dismissed the suggestion, leading some members of the audience to believe that Newcomer was motivated to continue the bussing ban out of “spite.” Eventually cooler heads prevailed and bus service was restored for all students within the district.

86 Ibid.
88 Ibid. “Why was Lincoln Liston pushed aside for [Dr. J.I.] Glaspey? Why was Ross Tucker hired at $9,000 a year to spoon-feed information about the administration to the press? Why was Mr. [Harvey] Dondoro never considered for the post you now hold?”
89 Ibid.
Five months later, in March, 1964, Superintendent Newcomer and the Board of Trustees, in a valiant attempt to increase teacher salaries, upgrade school campuses, and provide sufficient school supplies at each site, published a 26.4 million dollar budget for the 1964-65 fiscal year. (The budgets for 1962-63 and 1963-64 had been $15.2 million and $19.9 million, respectively.) The budget proposal generated a public protest from the Secretary of the Reno-based Nevada Taxpayer’s Association, Ernest Newton, who said that “in the face of projected increase in the student body of 18.5 per cent, the cost of operating the school district shows an increase of 32.5 per cent for next year. This on top of a 31 per cent increase this year over 1962-63.”

Ironically, the information on the front page of the Las Vegas Review-Journal seemed to focus more on the size of the proposal, not the particulars of the document. “The 688 page budget weighing 2 lbs. 10 ½ oz., was hefted over to the school board Thursday night.” Newton focused his tirade on the teacher salary increase by stating “Whether or not the high salary schedule is ‘necessary’ in order to attract an adequate staff is the subject of unending argument. There is no statistical evidence to either support or refuse [sic] the proposition.” Newton also complained, “…while each individual teacher’s salary is going up the number of students he or she handles is going down, compounding the cost to the taxpayer.” (The new budget, if approved, would lower the pupil-teacher ratio slightly, to 22.1) The fight for appropriate funding continued to be a roadblock for Newcomer.

Newton continued to lambaste the budget throughout the beginning months of 1964. Newcomer, who had remained generally calm and professional throughout the attacks, finally retaliated by taking his side of the fight to the newspaper. The Las Vegas

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91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., p. 2.
Review-Journal reported, on March 16, 1964, that “Newcomer replied that he can defend his record budget and demonstrate that its opponents do not know what they are talking about.” Speaking of Mr. Newton, of the Taxpayer’s Association, the Superintendent said: “1. He can’t read. 2. He’s stupid. 3. Or he’s dishonest.” Despite the vicious campaign conducted against this record setting budget, on March 26, 1964 the budget was approved for the next school year. After sharp questioning and statements by members of the audience at the final budget hearing, during which Ernest Newton, of the Nevada Taxpayers Association, was accused of “not representing” the views of at least one of its members, Del Robison, the Board of Trustees passed “its biggest budget of all times before an overflow audience which could hardly contain its enthusiasm.” Newton, described as “unsmiling” and “ashen-faced”, was quoted as saying “I feel like I’ve been thrown to the wolves.” The influence of this victory for Superintendent Newcomer and the Board of Trustees, while undoubtedly satisfying, was relatively short-lived. Other challenges of a political nature soon faced them.

That some Clark County citizens were conservative and somewhat politically backward was suggested during the summer of 1964, when Mrs. Robert Bartlett, representative of the Rose Warren Elementary School Parent Club appeared at a school board meeting to complain about the content of a recently-offered summer enrichment class. A teacher at Rose Warren Elementary School, Mrs. Joyce Koontz, had showed a slide-lecture that “left children with a favorable impression of Russia.” The presentation

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94 Ibid.
96 After determining that the Reno-based Nevada Taxpayers Association had a total of 800 members, only 300 of whom resided in Southern Nevada, Board Member Del Robison is quoted as saying, “You don’t represent me.” Ibid., p.2.
was part of the Columbia Record Club’s “Panorama” travelogue series, which included a narrative by journalist Harrison Salisbury. The board watched the presentation and then supported the parent group’s views. Dr. C. W. Woodbury said, “the presentation offered the most distorted picture of Russia you could get.”98 This simple slide show unfortunately came to be viewed by some as “an outward sign of the inward deterioration of our educational system.”99 The slide show was described as the precursor to a huge communist plot in the Clark County School District. Earl Taylor, Chairman of the local Parents for American Education group as well as a candidate for the University Board of Regents, was quoted as saying “Actually, there are a number of other things upsetting us about the state of education here in Las Vegas. We’d like to see a little more patriotism in the classrooms. Since some citizens might be led to believe that Taylor and his group were ultra-right wing in their beliefs, he assured the school board that the group was part of the mainstream and proudly announced in his speech, “We do not endorse the John Birch Society.”100

Taylor broadened his criticism of the schools by complaining that the group, “had uncovered a number of other pro-Communist leanings in the Clark County School system…The group had discovered a high school textbook which indicated that citizens have no constitutional right to keep and bear firearms for private use…Also, three Las Vegas schools were using books which rendered unflattering portraits of America’s founding fathers and great leaders…Benjamin Franklin was pictured as a drunkard in one

98 Ibid. p.2.
100 The John Birch Society was an ultraconservative, anti-Communist organization in the United States. The society, founded in December of 1958, was named after an American intelligence officer killed by Communists in China in 1945. The group was the most prominent of the extreme right-wing groups active in the United States.
book, and George Washington was said never to have won a strategic battle…A text book held a reference to Lincoln’s shaggy beard.”¹⁰¹ This series of allegations, perhaps best described in present-day terms as “a tempest in a teapot,” added to the ongoing political challenges faced by Superintendent Newcomer and the Board of Trustees during that time.

Newcomer almost certainly aggravated the anti-Communist group by applying to join a group of “25 American school administrators visiting Germany, Finland, Russia and Czechoslovakia in the spring (of 1965).” The tour had been arranged by the American Association of School Administrators, a group that could hardly be described as “pro-communist.” CCSD’s Board of Trustees had decided at an earlier meeting to provide $1,500.00 in support of the Superintendent’s participation in the trip.¹⁰² Newcomer’s local opponents, apparently seeing this as an opportunity to “stir the pot,” focused on this trip as a way of returning the district’s budget challenges to public attention. One citizen said that “Mr. Newcomer is the one who has complained time and time again about what the district cannot afford. How can the district afford a trip to Russia for him?”¹⁰³

Earl J. Taylor, the Chairman of Parents for American Education, asked Newcomer directly if he had been quoted correctly in a recent newspaper article in which he had spoken favorably of Ralph Bunche.”¹⁰⁴ Newcomer had, in fact, commented

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 2. Statement by Mr. William P. Hathaway, local citizen.
¹⁰⁴ Ralph Bunche was a U.S. government official and UN diplomat who won the 1950 Nobel peace prize for his work on the United Nations Palestine Commission. Bunche was a target of the House Un-American Activities Committee. The committee was created to investigate disloyalty and subversive organizations. The committee’s methods included pressure on witnesses to name former associates, vague and sweeping accusations against individuals, and the assumption of an individual’s guilt because of association with a suspect organization. Witnesses who refused to answer were often cited for contempt of Congress. Critics
favorably on Dr. Bunche, who was then under investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee. This admission offered the opportunity to revisit anti-Communist issues raised during the previous summer. After the meeting, during which these issues were debated heatedly, Taylor said “We’re not going to let this drop. We pay their salaries and I for one want to know why we’re paying this guy (Newcomer) $125 a day to tour Europe on the district budget.”

Board President Chester T. Sewell explained that paying for the trip was “in lieu of giving him a bigger pay raise this year. Newcomer’s salary only went up $500 this year. We considered this trip as a partial salary increase . . . we think it is good for him (Newcomer) and good for the district. Newcomer’s personal political views were not discussed.

The political pressure brought by the “anti-Newcomer faction” continued when, in early 1965, Mrs. Sandy Abercrombie contacted Newcomer’s former employer, Dr. Paul Salmon, Superintendent of the Covina Valley Unified School District to gather information on Newcomer’s “ability and his loyalty to the United States. She said in the letter [that] she understood Newcomer had been ‘run out of Covina’ for nearly bankrupting the school system.” Abercrombie indicated that she planned to present the information received at the January 14th board meeting.

Paul Salmon was “succinct and positive” in his response, saying: “Dr. Newcomer was held in high regard by the community, the school board, and the staff. Far from being

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of the committee contended that it disregarded the civil liberties of its witnesses and that it consistently failed to fulfill its primary purpose, that of recommending new legislation. The committee was abolished in 1975.

106 Ibid.
run out of Covina . . . he was encouraged to remain with us. I am amazed that anyone in Las Vegas would question the loyalty of Lee Newcomer. As a combat-disabled veteran he has already sacrificed more for his country than most of us.”108 The article makes no mention of Mrs. Abercrombie’s reaction, she being “unavailable for comment.”

The continued drumbeat of political dissent generated by the “anti-Newcomers,” along with continued fiscal challenges facing CCSD, must certainly have weighed heavily upon the Superintendent’s mind during the remainder of 1965. On December 20, the Review-Journal reported under the heading “School Board Stunned” that “school board members were shocked and saddened as Dr. Leland B. Newcomer, the dynamic Superintendent of Clark County Schools notified the school board of his pending resignation.” He stated that he would be taking a job with the Newport-Mesa Unified School District in Southern California on February 1, 1966.109

School Board Chairman Chester Sewell reacted by saying that “we are losing one of the finest administrators and educators in the United States. But the way he has organized the district will enable us to go on.”110 Newcomer commented that he felt he had to spend too much time fighting for funds and resources. “The problem is not with the board. . . . They have always gone all out to support our programs. The difficulty lies with the state board of education . . . . It takes too much time to try to further the district when you have to fight with people who don’t try to understand. Logical debate is something the people [at] the state level don’t seem to understand.111

110 Ibid. The Minutes of the January 4, 1966 meeting of the CCSD Board of Trustees say: “Mrs. [Helen] Cannon moved to accept with regret Dr. L.B. Newcomer’s resignation . . . effective February 18, 1966.Later in the meeting the date was later changed to January 31, 1966.
In a later interview, conducted after accepting his new position, he said that “in California, if local people want good schools, they can get them with little or no trouble. I’ll have plenty of time to develop teachers [and] administrators. They’re what education is all about. We must have quality. Now I’ll have a chance to work toward excellence.” These comments perhaps suggest the degree of frustration he felt concerning constraints encountered in Las Vegas.\(^{112}\)

Following his service with the Newport-Mesa Unified School District, Dr. Newcomer went on to serve as president of University of Laverne, in California, a post he held for seven years. His next assignment was as Superintendent of the Grossmont Union High School District, followed by service as Superintendent/President of the Santa Clarita Community College District/College of the Canyons. He completed his period of active professional service by serving “. . . as a consultant to educational institutions as well as business and industry.”\(^{113}\)

A 1966 newspaper account said of Dr. Newcomer: “He completely transformed the Clark County District during his four years there, bringing it into national prominence as a showpiece in educational circles.”\(^{114}\) In a later publication, Newcomer was described as “providing leadership in comprehensive curriculum development and classroom teaching techniques.”\(^{115}\) Newcomer was the first superintendent that was “shrewd enough to realize that the collective conscience of Las Vegas is bothered by the

\(^{113}\) “Leland B. Newcomer, Narrative Resume,” furnished by Dr. Newcomer in April, 2006.
area’s dependence on its dubious industry.”\textsuperscript{116} He was able to “play upon that conscience to develop one of the nation’s most improved and innovation-minded school systems.”\textsuperscript{117} His yeomanlike efforts set the stage for future developments designed to make the Clark County School District a progressive and proactive educational environment.

\textsuperscript{116} “Las Vegas’ Impressive Newcomer,” \textit{Time Magazine}, 17 December 1965, pp. 96-97. It seems ironic that this article in \textit{Time Magazine} appeared only 4 days before Newcomer announced his resignation from CCSD.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
James I. Mason 1966 – 1969

Following a nationwide search the CCSD superintendent selection committee, chaired by Dr. Thomas T. Tucker, chairman of the department of school administration at the University of Nevada, Reno, recommended the appointment of Dr. James I. Mason in April, 1966. The Chairman of the Board of school trustees said that “he was the board’s unanimous choice …. The Board believes that Dr. Mason will contribute much to the school district and will be a distinct asset to the community and the state.” Dr. Mason, 39-years old was at that time living in Ithaca, New York. He had earned his master’s degree in 1957 and his doctorate in education from the University of Pittsburgh. Mason competed against six finalists out of ten applicants for the position of superintendent and took office on July 1, 1966, with a starting salary of $28,000.

Dr. Mason had accumulated eight years of prior experience as a superintendent. During the four years preceding his appointment to the Clark County School District, he had served as the superintendent of schools in Ithaca, New York. Prior to that time he had served as Superintendent of Schools in Collingswood, N.J. Earlier, he had served as teacher and principal in the public schools. He moved to Las Vegas with his family of two daughters and his wife, a former high school mathematics teacher.

119 Ibid.
120 Ibid. p. 3. Dr. Mason’s dissertation was entitled: James Ira Mason, “Preferred Practices in Elementary Education Applied to Selected School Districts to Determine the Extent of Use and the Factors Involved.” (Ed.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1957.)
121 Ibid. 3.
122 “Oakland Picks New School Chief,” Oakland Tribune, 5 May 1969, p. F5. Dr. Mason’s Vita indicates that he was born on August 7, 1926, in Pittsburgh, PA., that he attended elementary and secondary grades in the Pittsburgh public schools, and graduated from Westinghouse High School in 1944. Following two years of service with the U.S. Army Air Corps, he entered Duquesne University, receiving a B.A. in
At the beginning of Mason’s term, the school district was experiencing modest growth. This, however, was about to change. In October, 1967, Mason met with associates of Howard Hughes to discuss the company’s plans for local expansion. At the time rumors were flying concerning massive potential property acquisitions by the Hughes Tool Company. The meeting resulted in a school population prediction which was beyond the school district’s then-current capability. An announcement by Associate Superintendent Kenny Guinn confirmed that the student population could increase by over 25 percent within one year.

School district projections predicted a population growth spurt to 93,000 students by 1973. In order to meet demands upon CCSD generated by these increases, Dr. Mason actively sought voter approval of a school bond initiative of $59.5 million, to be used for the construction of 22 new schools. These buildings would provide 95 new classrooms, as well as offering funds to support the modernization of older existing structures. Despite aggressive opposition from the Las Vegas Chapter of the NAACP education in 1950. While serving as an elementary teacher in the Wilkins County, PA, school district he completed an M.Ed. in 1952, and was appointed principal of the Churchill Elementary School in that district. In 1955 he was appointed Elementary Administrator for the schools of the Wilkins Township School District. James I. Mason, “dissertation,” 1957, p. 263.

Ibid. p.3. Dr. Mason was described as a careful dresser who owned a number of $400 suits at a time when that was a significant amount of money. Conversation with Dr. Clifford Lawrence, 9 May 2006.

Notes.

124 By the time this meeting occurred in October, 1967, the Hughes company had acquired “…the Krupp Ranch, D4-C Ranch, an option on Alamo Airways, Sands Hotel and golf course, television Channel 8, a lease on the Desert Inn Hotel and golf course, Castaways Hotel, New Frontier Hotel and North Las Vegas Air Terminal.” Mary Miller, ”Hughes’ Men, School Boss Meet,” Las Vegas Review-Journal, 13 October 1967, p.1.

125 Ibid.


127 Ibid.
and the Nevada Taxpayer’s Association, the school bond was approved with a 56 percent voter approval rate on May 21, 1968.\textsuperscript{128} At that time Governor Paul Laxalt praised Dr. Mason for his ability to promote financial stability within the Clark County School District.\textsuperscript{129}

However, all was not “a bed of roses.” During Spring 1967 Dr. Mason was forcefully confronted with teacher disgruntlement over the state of compensation within CCSD. While the state legislature was in session, CCSD teachers staged a two day walk-out in protest of legislative inattention to the need for significant salary increases. Many professionals reportedly marched to the vicinity of the Desert Inn Hotel carrying placards voicing their sentiments on the subject.\textsuperscript{130} Teachers “wanted the legislature to appropriate enough money to provide an $8000 annual starting salary. They wound up with $6800.”\textsuperscript{131} Mason obtained a court order that forced the teachers back to work after a loss of two teaching days. He said “…my first order of priority is educating the children. With teachers out on strike, how many children can you educate? I had to bring them back.”\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid. p.1.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} “In 1967, CCSD teachers went on strike and the district was closed down for …two days. I was a teacher at the time. I walked the picket line and carried a sign. We were upset that the legislature was not being responsive to teacher salary needs. What evolved from that event was collective bargaining and the landscape of the management of employees changed at that point in time with [the] establishment of a negotiated agreement, grievance process and so on.” Ralph Cadwallader, interview by Shonna Sargent, 15 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid. The teachers who participated in the walkout lost two day’s pay. One observer said that “…it was the first strike…We saw the impact that a strike could [have on] kids and the community. After that, we saw the growth of collective bargaining. We saw state laws [enacted with respect to handling of collective bargaining issues. They did institute a no-strike clause in Nevada because of that…experience. Collective bargaining—changed the whole atmosphere….It created a …confrontation[al] approach between teachers and school administrators…” Frank Brusa, interview by Douglas L. Dickerson, 9 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)
Mason’s arrival had occurred during a time of great turmoil within the community, largely generated by ongoing interracial tensions.\(^{133}\) Probably due to its small overall population statewide diversity had, in early years, not been an issue of major public concern. With the onset of World War II, however, the African American population in Nevada grew at a faster rate than that of white residents.\(^{134}\) According to census information, the African American population, which had constituted less than one percent of all Nevada residents prior to the war, grew to 4.7 percent by 1960.\(^{135}\)

It is fair to say that the Nevada state legislature was slow in addressing the issue of civil rights within the state. The first attempt to comply with the 1957 national Civil Rights Act appears to have been made by the 1959 legislature.\(^{136}\) However, it would not be until 1965, probably as a result of the leadership offered by President Lyndon B. Johnson, that civil rights legislation was implemented within the state of Nevada.\(^{137}\)

Prior to the initiation of the Hoover Dam Project in 1931, very few African Americans resided in Las Vegas. When federal contracts were granted to The Six Companies, a conglomerate that was to take the lead in the construction of the dam, over 1,000 men, none of whom were African American, were hired and given housing in the area currently known as Boulder City. In May 1931 the Colored Citizens Labor and Protective Association of Las Vegas complained that no workers present on the Six Companies payroll for the dam project were African American. Officials contended that

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\(^{133}\) [Las Vegas] was called the Mississippi of the West….in terms of racial tensions, Las Vegas was not very nice, and even into the sixties there was a lot of hostility and a lot of anger and a lot of rage around people’s perceptions of race.”.” Susan Brand, interviewed by Michelle Ricciardi, 14 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)


\(^{135}\) Ibid., p.388.

\(^{136}\) Ibid., p.389.

\(^{137}\) Ibid.
Six Companies had not hired African American workers for fear of causing racial strife among the work crews.138

Under mounting pressure, Six Companies' president W.A. Bechtel promised an increase in the number of black workers hired. Still, by 1933 only 24 African American workers had been hired and none were allowed to live in Boulder City.139. The newly arriving workers, most from the deep South, were forced to live and raise their families on the Western side of Las Vegas, in an area which came to be known as the Westside.140 Some have characterized the area as a ghetto. This area continued to grow as additional African American workers arrived to work in the magnesium manufacturing plant created just prior to Word War II.

On July 5, 1941, the U.S. Defense Plant Corporation signed an agreement with company President Howard Eells' newly formed Basic Magnesium Inc. to build a plant in what came to be known as the town of Henderson, NV. The U.S. government was to own all buildings, land, equipment and magnesium products produced. It controlled sales and production quotas, and it paid the workers, while BMI managed the operation and recruited, hired and fired them.141 Newly-arriving African American workers seeking employment in the Magnesium Plant joined others living in the Block 17 area of Las Vegas.142

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139 Ibid.
By 1966, the Westside elementary schools were completely segregated.\textsuperscript{143} It was apparent to most professional educators that the quality of education suffered as a result of this situation.\textsuperscript{144} To study the community’s needs and to formulate a plan designed to address the issue of desegregation, the Board of School Trustees and Superintendent Mason created multiple committees: a 45-member Superintendent’s Advisory Council on Integration, a 10-member staff integration committee, and a 38-member planning committee.\textsuperscript{145} The forty-five member Advisory Council on Integration consisted of many African American community leaders.

Since many community citizens, as well as some members of the Clark County School District Board of Trustees, opposed forced busing, initial plans included a policy ban on busing students as a means of fostering integration.\textsuperscript{146} During an integration committee vote on December 19, 1966, however, the ban on busing was officially removed from the plan.\textsuperscript{147} Three days later the Clark County School Trustees approved the school integration plan created by Dr. James Mason in coordination with advisory councils and CCSD staff members.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, p.15.
\textsuperscript{144} The teachers that taught in the West side schools at that time tended to be “…those who were the newest because it was considered the least desirable assignment….the [experienced] teachers would gravitate to where the homes were the most expensive…where the children would be more like they were. …you had not only racially identifiable schools, but you had schools where you had mostly new teachers, inexperienced teachers and principals in some case who were new or were not able to get other assignments….Desegregation could not take place… until black people and other minorities…were able to live any place they wanted in the community.” Theron Swainston, interview by Kim Compton, 27 April 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)
As part of the Clark County School District’s 1966 plan for integration, Mason proposed a three-stage process set to begin on January 1, 1967 and to continue through June 30, 1980. Among the components of the first stage of integration were several innovative compensatory programs. These included Project Head Start, Remedial Reading, Equal Educational Opportunities, an in-service program for elementary and junior high school staff members, Project Saturation, [a] reinforced Studies Project, and the Moapa Migrant Workers Project. The plan also proposed the creation of Prestige (Laboratory) schools. Prestige schools would be used to attract students of different races by offering special instructional designs and curricula.149

Becoming impatient with the government’s efforts for desegregation, which seemed to some citizens to be proceeding at an unacceptably “deliberate pace,” local minority residents turned to the courts for redress of their perceived grievances. Mason said “We evolved a policy and a plan, but they felt we weren’t implementing it fast enough. They brought suit.”150

In May, 1968, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., acting on behalf of six local citizens of color, filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court, claiming that then-current assignment procedures, which were characterized as the “neighborhood school policy,” constituted “a scheme and practice of [sic] segregating Negroes who by custom, habit and circumstances are relegated only to residence in certain districts in Clark County.”151

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149 Clark County School District (Nev.), James I. Mason, and Joseph Caliguri, *An Action plan for Integration*, (Las Vegas, Nev.: Clark County School District, 1966), p.4. Several of these programs were already in existence.
A local attorney, Charles Kellar, took the lead in the case, Kelly v. Mason, et al., CV-LV-1146 (D. Nev. 1968). Kellar, as President of the Las Vegas NAACP chapter and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, argued “that the CCSD was operating a racially segregated school system in violation of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution. . . .[and] that as a result of school district policies and practices, the majority of the elementary school-age African American children in the school district attended segregated schools in the area known as the West Side of Las Vegas.” In October, 1968 Judge Bruce R. Thompson, of the U.S. District Court for Nevada, ruled that the “Las Vegas elementary schools were unlawfully segregated and ordered the school board to submit [to the court] an integration plan.”

152 Charles Kellar was born in Barbados on June 11, 1909, moving with his family to New York at the age of 11. A good student, Kellar attended City College of New York and, later, St. Johns University, where he received his law degree and entered general legal practice. Successful in civil rights legislation, Kellar came to the attention of Thurgood Marshall, of the NAACP, who asked him to move to Las Vegas as the first black lawyer. After a long struggle for admission to the Nevada bar, Kellar filed his first lawsuit in 1968 dealing with equal opportunity in the schools. As he said later, “Clark County Schools had no written segregation policy, but did have an ironclad school zoning system. You could only go to a school where you lived, and you couldn’t live anywhere you couldn’t buy property or rent an apartment. I wanted it so you could live anywhere and go to any school.” The success of this suit resulted in the establishment of the Sixth Grade Centers program. Kellar continued a successful practice as a civil rights activist, dying on June 25, 2002. “Charles Kellar (1909-present): Fighting the Power,” Las Vegas Review-Journal, 2 May 1999, p.30A; Lisa Kim Bach, “Prominent Civil Rights Attorney Charles Kellar Dies at 93, Las Vegas Review-Journal, 10 July 2002. Available at www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj_home/2002/Jul-10-Wed-2002/news/19155209.htm Accessed on 14 April 2006.


Thus began a long series of court activities culminating in later years, and after Dr. Mason had left CCSD, in the promulgation of the “Sixth Grade Center” plan. This court-approved plan involved the busing of substantial numbers of children, both Black and White, to integrated schools outside their neighborhoods\(^{155}\)

In late January 1969, continued community restlessness spilled into the schools. The unrest began at Clark High School, followed by outbursts at Rancho and Western High Schools. Black and White students engaged in physical altercations, and some Black students boycotted classes and staged non-violent “sit-ins” in the school cafeterias. The “sit-ins” were reportedly “to press demands for an expanded ethnic studies programs in the schools.”\(^{156}\) Other disturbances took place in the parking lots and corridors. Police were called in to control the situation and order was quickly restored.\(^{157}\) Although denied by Dr. Mason, leaders in the community speculated that public comments he made had aggravated the students, some of whom then resorted to violence.\(^{158}\) He was charged by the Executive Secretary of the Nevada Equal Rights Commission, William E. Wynn, with making a statement that “was so unfair that it undoubtedly angered all the Negroes who saw it.” He went on to say that “Mason blamed the Black Caucus and Black community for student protests of evils that already existed two years ago and for which the school district is to blame.”\(^{159}\) This could not have pleased Dr. Mason, whose professional challenges continued throughout the Spring of 1969.

\(^{155}\) Busing had been a source of controversy since as early as December, 1966, when Mason had introduced the findings and recommendations of the several advisory groups appointed by the Board of Trustees. John Crowe, “Busing Ban Vetoed: Integration Policy Set,” \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 20 December 1966, p.2.


\(^{159}\) Ibid. p.2
In early January, 1969 the Oakland, California Public Schools advertised for a new Superintendent. Shortly thereafter Dr. Mason applied for that position, apparently seeking further professional challenges and, perhaps, feeling that he had made his maximum contribution to CCSD and should “move on.” He was selected for the new position from among a field of 80 applicants applying from throughout the nation. He accepted the offer verbally on April 30, 1969, with the understanding that a written contract would be forthcoming.\footnote{160 “Oakland Picks New School Chief,” \textit{Oakland Tribune}, 5 May 1969, p.1.} Oakland school board member Ann Corneille said that Mason’s background in “the three R’s as an elementary teacher, communicating with people and understanding of finance make him an ideal choice for Oakland.”\footnote{161 Ibid.}

Oakland newspaper sources were complimentary of Mason’s performance in Las Vegas, saying that he had “weathered a teachers’ strike, racial clashes, an integration suit and a bond election during his three years in Las Vegas….He called the police on school grounds to end violence-marked racial sit-ins, went to court to get the teachers back in their classrooms, and drew up a busing plan for integrating the schools. And the voters approved his $59.5 million bond proposal by a 6-4 margin.” The article continued, citing a “Las Vegas editor” to the effect that Mason “. . .handled everything pretty well. He didn’t come in for a lot of criticism in any of it.”\footnote{162 162 “New School Chief’s Reply on ‘Conflict,” \textit{Oakland Tribune}, 6 May 1969, p.1.}

Mason was scheduled to take the new position on July 1, 1969, but a crisis in confidence with the Board of School Trustees resulted in an earlier departure than planned. In November, 1968 the Board, upon the recommendation of Superintendent Mason, approved a contract for one million dollars worth of textbooks to be supplied by Educational Marketing and Research, (EMR) Inc., of San Diego, CA. The four-year
contract involved the delivery of 200,000 texts for CCSD use. Mason said “EMR was chosen because it was the ‘sole source’ for certain Negro history books which the district is anxious to incorporate into its secondary schools.” He went on to point out that “no bids were asked for or required on a sole source deal.” 163 Legal Counsel for the Board of Trustees Robert Petroni had already advised the board that the contract was, in his opinion, legal.

However, in early May, 1969, Ernie Newton, Executive Secretary of the Nevada Taxpayers’ Alliance, informed the board that his organization was conducting an investigation into the legality of the contract and the propriety of Dr. Mason and other members of the school district staff accepting consulting payments from EMR while the contract was being negotiated and finalized. 164 It was reported in the press that as many as 27 members of the staff, including Superintendent Mason and a group of librarians, principals and teachers had been paid varying amounts for “after hours duties by the book firm ….” 165

At a board meeting on Thursday, May 8th, David Canter, President of Parents Who Care, indicated that he had contacted District Attorney General George Franklin “requesting a special Grand Jury to ‘immediately investigate the activities of Educational Marketing and Research, Inc….’” After further discussion the Board of Trustees

164 One former CCSD administrator said that “There was a textbook scandal during [Mason’s] tenure as superintendent….people were accused of taking kickbacks from one of the big national publishers ….The school district was in a tremendous turmoil at the time.” Frank Brusa, interviewed by Douglas L. Dickerson, 9 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)
165 “27 Accepted Book Firm Cash,” Las Vegas Review-Journal, 9 May 1969, p.1. It was pointed out that consulting contracts of this type were regularly accepted by school officials so long as they did not directly relate to their full-time jobs. Ibid.
“unanimously voted to void its controversial one million dollar contract. . . in the face of ‘unanswered questions’, including possible conflicts of interest by district employees.”  

Shortly thereafter, the meeting was adjourned, to be reconvened in closed session the evening of Monday, May 12th. At that time the Board accepted Dr. Mason’s resignation, effective at once. However, on a subsequent motion, the board granted him the “. . . remainder of the week to complete his business in the district.” Personnel Director Richard F. Brown was named Acting Superintendent.

The press reported that the CCSD Board of Education had “…accepted the resignation of its district superintendent, effective immediately, so that he could get a head start on his job as Oakland Public Schools chief. . . . George Wilkinson, Clark Country board chairman said: ‘He had submitted his resignation to the board to be accepted at its pleasure. As long as he . . . wanted to move on to Oakland, we thought we’d better make a transition as soon as possible.’” Wilkinson went on to say that the board had received a letter stating that “in the eyes of Nevada law there might be a conflict of interest in Dr. Mason’s association with a book company.” The district attorney’s office indicated that “. . . it did not intend to pursue the matter.” Dr. Mason told the press that he planned to take a 10-day vacation with his family, then come right to Oakland to “assist with Oakland’s tax election.”

Dr. Mason’s troubles were not, however, at an end. The Oakland School District had, for a number of years, been in turmoil over lack of resources and unwillingness of

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167 Minutes of the Board of Trustees of CCSD, 8 May and 12 May 1969.
169 Ibid.
the taxpayers to support any tax increases in support of public education.\textsuperscript{170} Emotions were running high due to fears that staff reductions and curtailment of instructional services would be necessary if a scheduled tax increase vote scheduled for early June were to fail. It was in this tense environment that sharp disagreements arose in early May between the school board, two local teacher organizations, and community groups about the hiring procedures followed during the employment of Dr. Mason. It was argued that selection procedures employed by the board had been irregular and requests were made by the teacher organizations for a delay in the hiring process until “representatives of the three teacher organizations, the school-community councils and responsible student organizations have been consulted.”\textsuperscript{171}

The situation deteriorated during the next two weeks, culminating in an angry demonstration at a May 20\textsuperscript{th} school board meeting. The press reported that “protests over the hiring of Dr. James I. Mason … resulted last night in two arrests and police use of Mace on militants when they tried to block the Oakland Board of Education.”\textsuperscript{172} Several groups, including representatives of local teacher organizations, the Oakland Economic Development Council, the NAACP, and the Black Caucus were active in the demonstration. Major concerns were raised about lack of community consultation and involvement in the selection process.\textsuperscript{173}

During the meeting a representative of The Legal Aid Society of Alameda County (CA) “served notice … that a taxpayers’ suit has been filed seeking to void Dr. Mason’s appointment. The Suit alleged that … ’the whole hiring process was conducted in such a

\textsuperscript{170} The most recent increase in the city school tax rate ceiling had occurred in 1958. “Oakland’s Choice: 2d Rate Schools or Tax Ceiling Rise,” \textit{Oakland Tribune}, 18 May 1969, p.1.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
way as to keep the general public uninformed of what the board was doing until it was
too late to take action.\textsuperscript{174}

Apparently sensing that the situation was spinning out of control, on May 27, 1969, Dr. Mason bowed to community pressure and resigned before assuming his new job as Oakland school superintendent.\textsuperscript{175} In a letter to the board of education, Mason said “it is with a deep sense of regret that I withdraw as Superintendent-elect,” and expressed hope that his action “would help reestablish a positive and calm environment within the school district and community.” He went on to say “I have been truly impressed with and have developed strong admiration for each of you [board members]. I am confident that we would have worked as a most effective team … I shall envy the new superintendent.”\textsuperscript{176}

Dr. Mason soon left the area, returning to the East. The important work that was accomplished during his term as Superintendent has been largely overlooked, as is often the case when incumbents depart quickly. During times of significant social and political stress, attention is often quickly diverted to other actors who remain “on the scene.” Such was clearly the case in Clark County, as the pressure to address race relations in the schools became a central focus during the next several years.

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid. NAACP President Harold McCullum quoted “…from the Brown Act. ‘The people of this community do not yield sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people … do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know.’” “Mace Halts Row,” \textit{Oakland Tribune}, 21 May 1969, p.4.
\textsuperscript{175} “Oakland School Chief Quits Before Starting,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, 28 May 1969, p. 2A.
\textsuperscript{176} “Mason Resigns School Post,” \textit{Oakland Tribune}, 27 May 1969, p.1. “I shall envy he new superintendent.” Perhaps not. Dr. Mason’s withdrawal may well have saved his life. Dr. Marcus Foster, named Superintendent of Oakland’s Schools in 1970, was assassinated in 1973 by members of the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), a radical group briefly active during that period. This was the same organization that kidnapped Patty Hearst in 1974. Available at: \url{http://www.courttv.com/trials/soliah/slahistory2_ctv.html}. Accessed on 1 June 2006.
Kenny C. Guinn 1969 - 1978

Dr. Kenny C. Guinn, CCSD Superintendent of CCSD from 1969-1978, was born in Garland, Arkansas in 1936. During his youth, his family moved West to Exeter, California, where he attended high school. He graduated from Exeter High School in 1955. While in school Guinn excelled in several sports and was offered a football scholarship to University of Southern California. Following discussions with the USC football coach, who recommended that Guinn give up other sports and concentrate his efforts on football alone, the young future administrator decided rather to matriculate at Fresno City College and later at Fresno State University. There he earned baccalaureate and masters degrees in Physical Education while, in addition, performing in outstanding fashion as a member of the football team. He later completed a doctorate in School Administration from Utah State University in Logan, Utah.\textsuperscript{177} Guinn also completed courses at Stanford University, in Palo Alto, California, and at University of Nevada Las Vegas, although he holds no degrees from those institutions.

Dr. Guinn began his career in Visalia, California in 1960 teaching Math, English, and Physical Education, followed by a year in San Jose, California while taking courses at Stanford University. In 1964, he and his wife, Dema, moved to Las Vegas, where he assumed a Planning Specialist position with CCSD.\textsuperscript{178} He was appointed to the


\textsuperscript{178} Dr. Leland Newcomer recalls hiring Dr. Guinn in 1964, describing him as “an impressive young man.” Telephone conversation with the Patrick W. Carlton, 6 April 2006. Dr. Guinn indicated that his initial assignment with CCSD was as the result of placement by his advisor from Stanford University, Dr. William MacConnell, and was intended to provide young Guinn with initial administrative experience mandated for all those seeking advanced degrees at Stanford University. As mentioned earlier, Guinn transferred to Utah State University, completing the Ed.D. in 1970. Kenny C. Guinn, interview by Patrick W. Carlton, 24 May 2006, Las Vegas, NV, notes.

The Guinn family’s relocation to Las Vegas had been challenging. Dr. Guinn often told the story of his hardships in moving to Las Vegas as a 27 year-old man. Money was tight and he had difficulty in securing a loan from a local credit union, which placed a good deal of pressure on the family.\textsuperscript{179} Five years later, when serving as superintendent, he worked with the Silver State Schools Credit Union to ensure that all new teachers would be provided a “signature loan” as a way of helping new arrivals “get started.” locally\textsuperscript{180}

When Guinn became superintendent in 1969, he “inherited a racially segregated district with financial problems.”\textsuperscript{181} The school district enrolled 74,000 students in 17 elementary schools, four junior high schools, two high schools, and one vocational-technical center. In his first letter to the Board of School Trustees (September 1969), Guinn stated:

“It is with mixed emotions that I respectfully present for your approval this in-depth summary of education in the Clark County School District for 1969-1970. I am pleased in that the enclosed framework does the best for boys and girls that our financial limitations will allow. I am alarmed, however, as I view the deepening financial crises in which this District finds itself….we have increased class size alarmingly, and eliminated many programs….We all want to make progress. We sincerely hope that this document will point out to the public our strengths and our

\textsuperscript{179} Dr. Guinn described his difficulty in securing $5.25 to secure a $100 loan; $5 as a loan fee and .25 for processing the loan. Fortunately, a school district official was willing to loan him the necessary funds! .

\textsuperscript{180} Arlean Smith, interview by Nola Raffail, 15 November 2005, Las Vegas , tape recording.

\textsuperscript{181} ”Going out on his Record: School Leader steps down,” \textit{Las Vegas Sun}, 25 June 1978, p. 13. In many ways the community was still “small town” in character. As one commentator reported, describing his arrival in 1971, “it was a very, very conservative…community, rather insular in its nature….The ethnic mix was less than 20% minority. …The minority population was largely segregated. The Hispanic population [clustered] around Fremont Street…The Black population was traditionally and largely held in the West Las Vegas community. The community still had elements of segregation.” Robert S. McCord, interview by Jennifer Moore, 3 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording).
weaknesses, and that our parents will strive with us to find the resources to erase the reversals and then make every effort to advance education in Clark County.”182

Since “Guinn was hired for one year... [and the] school board wanted to see what Guinn could do”183, he followed this letter with a detailed Long-Range Program, which included the following programmatic enhancements:184

- **Curriculum Continuity** – The curriculum would be sequenced from kindergarten through twelfth grade based on new models and programs.

- **Innovation Design** – A demonstration-laboratory school would be developed to serve as a “clearinghouse” for different teaching ideas and methods to increase student interest and motivation.

- **Financial Independence** – In order to develop fiscal independence, a long-range legislative program would be needed that would expand and strengthen local autonomy and provide information to the public.

- **Integration Plan** – The District’s formal integration policy would be followed and the relationship and communication with the Negro community would continually assessed.

- **Evaluation Blueprint** – All programs would be evaluated to determine relevance and educational value.

- **District Organization** – The district organization would be analyzed and reorganized to provide a more logical, functional pattern, which would be able to accommodate the projected doubling in size within the next ten years.

- **Technical Advancement** – New multi-technical media (mainly audio-visual equipment and materials) would be utilized and a centralized center maintained for District-wide use. Teacher training would be provided to assist the inclusion of this media in instruction. A system-wide

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184 Letter, Kenny Guinn to the Clark County Board of School Trustees, September 1969.
communications center, using a major computer with terminals throughout the District, would be established to ensure the immediate transmission of educational information to all schools.

- **Facility Development** – Older buildings would be renovated to provide the same educational environment as the new schools that would be constructed to keep pace with the growing student population.

- **Community Relations** – A formal, comprehensive public relations information program would be created along with an internal communication plan to keep all citizens informed about educational programs and issues.

- **Personnel Enrichment** – [Enhancement of] Professional opportunities and status of certified and classified employees would be offered through Nevada Southern University. A salary scale would be created based on professional growth and years of experience, and a twelve-month teacher salary contract would be developed in order to increase morale and improve teacher retention.

Guinn concluded the long-range program by stating, “Success in these undertakings will require our full dedication and commitment to the challenge before us. The design for tomorrow must be flexible, and capable of modification to accept the changes created by our expanding enterprise…we can meet this challenge and be worthy of the trust placed in our hands.”

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185. The Clark County School District Program Budget for the year 1969-1970 included a listing of the personnel and instructional programs then in place:

**Elementary (Grades K-6)** – 62 schools

- Personnel – 59 Principals, 47.5 Librarians, Teachers (107 Kindergarten, 1,331.5 Regular)
- Students – between 41,710 and 44,838
- Program areas – language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, fine arts, and health/physical education
- Strategies – self-contained classrooms, team teaching, and continuous progress, non-graded and departmental

**Junior High (Grades 7-9)** – 12 schools in Las Vegas, one in Henderson, and four in outlying areas

- Personnel – 15 Principals, 16 Assistant Principals, 34 Counselors, 14 Librarians, Teachers (537 Regular, 17 Music, 24 Art, 10 Remedial Instruction, 12 Deans)
- Students – between 15,487 and 16,649
- Program areas – basic skills, concentrating on reading and math, extra-curricular activities such as sports and clubs
Although Guinn addressed many important issues in his long-range program, the one requiring his immediate attention and which involved the majority of the community was desegregation. In May 1968, Charles Kellar, an attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., had assisted Herbert Kelly Sr. and others to file a class action lawsuit against the district’s superintendent, James I. Mason, alleging “…the lack of desire on the part of the [school administration] to accomplish an integrated environment for all pupils.”

In May 1969, Dr. Mason left CCSD and was, several months later, replaced by Dr. Guinn who was, as previously mentioned, serving as Associate Superintendent for School Facilities. At that time, Clark County School District (CCSD) operated six elementary schools in West Las Vegas, the enrollments in each of which were reportedly 97 percent black. Though students in CCSD were segregated during the elementary school years, high schools and middle schools were fully integrated. Elaynne Washington, an African American student at that time, believed that the major purpose of this arrangement was “to keep schools competitive in sports.”

This statement stands in contradiction to the views voiced by a member of Supt. R. Guild

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High School (Grades 10-12) - 5 schools in Las Vegas and Henderson, three in outlying areas
- Personnel– 9 Principals, 18 Assistant Principals, 40 Counselors, 12 Librarians, Teachers (497 Regular, 13 Music, 14 Art, 35 Vocational)
- Students – between 12,874 and 13,840
- Program areas–increased social, athletic, and political activities, along with increased counseling and guidance
- Techniques– modular scheduling, phasing, continuous progress, and flexible scheduling

Special Education (All Grades)– 2 schools plus classes in other schools
- Personnel– 3 Principals, 5 Counselors, Teachers (178 Handicapped, 21 Speech Therapists, 8 Homebound)
- Students – between 1,918 and 2,061


Gray’s family, who indicated that it had been Dr. Gray’s policy, beginning in 1956, that no high or middle schools were to be built in the Westside community to prevent segregation in the upper grades.\textsuperscript{189}

In October of 1968 Judge Bruce R. Thompson, of the U.S. District Court for Nevada, determined that elementary schools in CCSD were racially segregated and ordered that an integration plan be developed and submitted by CCSD. On April 10, 1969, the school district submitted “An Action Plan for Integration of the Six Westside Elementary Schools,”\textsuperscript{190} referred to as the “freedom of choice plan.” This plan, approved by the court for the school year beginning September 1969, permitted black students to transfer to predominantly white schools elsewhere in the district, and permitted white students to transfer from these predominantly white schools to one of two “prestige” schools located in the Westside area, such schools to offer a variety of special programs and a low teacher-pupil ratio as an inducement to white enrollment.\textsuperscript{191}

During this period several racially-motivated riots occurred following, in October 1969, a “full scale riot in the city’s predominantly black west side. It hit nearly every school . . . by the end of the school year.”\textsuperscript{192} It was reported that “A dozen students were beaten today when about 20 Negro youths assaulted white students on the campus of Las Vegas High School.”\textsuperscript{193} In September 1970, the papers reported that “a score of students have been injured, 100 arrested, 300 suspended, and the young superintendent of schools here says he does not know how to end the racial turbulence tearing apart the city’s high

\textsuperscript{189} R. Guild Gray Family, interview by Patrick W. Carlton, 7 March 2006, Las Vegas, NV, tape recording.
\textsuperscript{191} “Under the voluntary integration plan, C.V.T. Gilbert and Jo Mackey schools were designated as “prestige” or “magnet” schools to attract white students.” Harvey N. Dondero, \textit{History of the Clark County Schools} (Las Vegas: Privately Printed, 1986), p.66.
\textsuperscript{192} “Racial Unrest Rips Schools in Las Vegas,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, 18 September 1970, p.31
schools. . . ‘I just wish they would give us a clue as to why they are fighting’, he said.”

A hearing was held in late August 1970 concerning the effectiveness of the “freedom of choice” plan. That December the court issued a ruling which “. . .concluded that the “freedom of choice plan” had failed to integrate elementary schools in the Clark County School District and would fail to do so in the future.” The court ordered the school district to adopt and effectuate an integration plan for the school year beginning in September 1971, one that would result in a black student enrollment of no more than 50 percent in any grade level in any elementary school in the district.

The district Board of School Trustees, opposed to Judge Thompson’s decision to, in effect, force the busing of elementary school children, appealed this ruling to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. At the same time, however, Superintendent Guinn indicated that the district would be ready no matter what the higher court decided. On February 24, 1972, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that CCSD was responsible for the segregation of West Las Vegans and ordered the school district to desegregate the six schools of West Las Vegas. Judge Thompson’s claim that “Clark County…used its power to aggravate segregation in elementary schools” was validated by the higher court. The district was ordered to desegregate by the opening of the 1972-1973 school year.

Following the court’s ruling, CCSD moved quickly to finalize its plan for desegregation. A plan was developed, with the help of the NAACP, that “would have

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195 Kelly v. Guinn, 456 F.2d 100 (9th Cir. 1972), cert. denied, 413 U.S. 919.
196 Ibid.
197 Ibid.
been fairer to African-American students.” However, the district did not accept this plan. 199 “After much deliberation and consultation with community organizations and consideration of suggestions from county residents and various business and professional groups. . .”200 the school district administration prepared and submitted a “Sixth Grade Center Plan.”201 Under this plan each Westside elementary school was to be clustered with a group of white elementary schools, with the Westside school serving as a sixth grade attendance center.”202 The plan involved busing the 3,300 students, mostly African American in background, from the six segregated schools of West Las Vegas to schools in other areas of the district while, at the same time, moving students from other parts of the district to refill the vacated West Las Vegas schools. These six schools came to be known as the ‘sixth grade centers.’203 The intent of this approach was to limit disruption to a single class of students during the process of desegregation.204 Under the plan, white children were bused to a Westside school during only one of their six elementary years,
while black children were transported to “out of area” schools for five of six years. Thus, the burden of busing fell almost entirely upon the black student population.205

Although representatives of the NAACP were clearly of the opinion that the sixth grade center plan placed an undue burden on the black community, they agreed to support the plan, lacking a better alternative.206

Three modifications to the original plan were allowed by the court. First, an additional school, Quannah McCall Elementary School, was added to the six elementary schools designated as sixth grade centers because of its proximity to the Westside and its relatively high (35%) black student population. Second, kindergarten children were allowed to attend school in their own neighborhoods. Third, schools that were already integrated because of their location in integrated housing areas were exempted from the busing plan. Children living and attending schools in outlying areas were also exempted from the sixth grade center plan.207

School Trustee David Canter and Dr. Guinn, among other school dignitaries, expressed concern about the implementation of the $1.5 million plan and the resistance it might cause.208 They hoped to place implementation of the plan on hold until an appeal could be filed with the U.S. Supreme Court.209 In April 1972, while the U.S. Senate was deliberating a bill that would prevent mandatory busing in America’s schools, Supt.

205 Harvey N. Dondero, History of the Clark County Schools, compiled and edited by Billie F. Shank (Las Vegas: privately printed, 1986), p. 68. “It was not popular with anyone. No one liked it. ‘[The] courts didn’t even think it was very good; it was just ‘well all right, it’s the best you can do; we’ll see if it will work.’ And then it worked. There was some good learning that took place.” Theron Swainston, interview by Kim Compton, 27 April 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)
207 Harvey N. Dondero, History of the Clark County Schools, compiled and edited by Billie F. Shank (Las Vegas: privately printed, 1986), pp. 67, 69. Mabel Hoggard Elementary School was converted to a sixth grade center during 1982-83, by which time its black enrollment had reached 95%.
209 "Trustees Ready to Take Bussing to Supreme Court," Las Vegas Sun, 26 February 1972, p.1.
Guinn sought a moratorium on implementation of the sixth grade center plan. At that time he expressed the view that voluntary desegregation would be a better alternative than forced or mandatory desegregation.210 The School Trustees’ position was also made clear in a statement issued by the board president, Glen C. Taylor, which stated that “Every possible appeal will be tried.” The NAACP responded by saying, “We’ll fight them every step of the way.”211

The rollercoaster ride of desegregation in Las Vegas took another turn two months later when, on June 23, 1972 President Nixon signed into law the Broomfield Amendment to the Higher Education Act which included an anti-busing provision. The amendment said that “. . . desegregation orders for the purpose of achieving a racial balance among students shall not take effect while any appeal is pending. 212 NAACP representatives expressed dismay saying, “This is a sad day and a step backwards” in the battle for equal rights. This new provision had the effect of placing an immediate moratorium on forced busing until the Supreme Court could consider the case. Preparation for local desegregation was immediately suspended.213

In a surprise turn of events, Judge Thompson, of the U.S. District Court, quickly subpoenaed the entire Clark County Board of Trustees, directing their appearance in Reno, Nevada to explain why the district had failed to implement the sixth grade plan. Glen C. Taylor, the school board president, stated the school’s position saying, “We were following what we thought the law stated.” However, Judge Thompson’s position was that the new law had no relevance to the local situation, since it had been passed after the

desegregation court order issued in the Clark County case and could not be applied retroactively. He ordered implementation of the integration plan not later than September 5, the first day of school. Otherwise the school trustees were to be charged with contempt of court.214 Fortunately, the elements of the sixth grade plan were substantially in place. One month before the school year began, Guinn announced, “I can honestly say that we have tried everything in good faith and there is nothing left to do but implement the plan.”215

The board’s decision to obey the court’s order did not eliminate the negative reaction among local white citizens, many of whom had participated in rallies and other forms of public protest as early as 1971. School absentee rates tripled that spring. The May 8, 1971, Los Angeles Times said that “An estimated 15,000 students stayed out of Las Vegas area schools Friday, apparently as part of a boycott organized by parents opposed to an integration plan involving student bussing [sic], school officials said.”216 School board meetings were filled with angry protesters. “Of course the populace was up in arms because any plan would involve busing, and busing was a bad word at the time,” reported CCSD Legal Council Robert Petroni.217 Dr. Guinn estimated that “85% of the Clark County community was against busing, but the community stood by the belief that “the court order was the law and it should be obeyed.” He went on to say “The sixth grade plan is now the law of the land and all citizens should obey it and make it function during the following year. If it is not pleasing to us during that period we should work

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216 “15,000 Skip School in Las Vegas,” Los Angeles Times, 8 May, 1971, p.23.
together to develop a new plan. People have screamed for law and order for five years. Now we have a law so let’s have order too.”²¹⁸

“At one meeting,” Dr. Guinn said, “I told them, ‘this has been ruled [upon] by the court and we need to abide by it.’”²¹⁹ Not heeding this recommendation, a citizens group calling themselves “Operation Bus Out,” supported by “Parents for Neighborhood Schools,” filed a civil suit alleging the school district’s violation of a Nevada law “which provided for a uniform system of common schools.” In response, a Nevada District court enjoined forced busing for a short time.²²⁰ Confusion reigned for several days while the question of precedence in state vs. U.S court rulings was ironed out.²²¹ During this time, CCSD legal council Robert Petroni filed an unsuccessful appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court seeking injunctive relief from the mandatory busing requirements inherent in Judge Thompson, of the U.S. District Court’s ruling.²²² The Nevada Supreme Court subsequently stayed the Nevada District Court’s ruling, clearing the way for schools to be opened in Las Vegas.²²³ The turmoil was sufficiently great that the start of the school year was postponed for ten class days.

On September 18, two weeks after the district’s scheduled school opening date, forced desegregation via busing was put in motion. Though unpopular with various elements of both the white and black community, the plan for integrating the schools in Las Vegas’ Westside proceeded without pause for the next twenty years and was judged

²²⁰ “School Desegregation in Clark County, Nevada,” Governmental Research Newsletter, Volume XII, 4, December 1973, p.3. The judge in that case was Carl Christensen.
²²³ “Nevada High Court Ruling to Allow Busing,” Los Angeles Times, 15 September 1972, p.16a.
by most knowledgeable persons to be a successful venture.\textsuperscript{224} Dr. Guinn pointed out that, because of the large number of schools involved in the plan, families couldn’t move to new neighborhoods to avoid busing, a practice then called “hedge-hopping.” Guinn said “it was the best thing for us to do. …when the plan was in place, everyone had to participate. I think it was a good plan. It turned out to be one of the longest lasting desegregation programs that’s been implemented across the nation.”\textsuperscript{225}

Implementation of the “Sixth Grade Centers” plan continued under court jurisdiction until 1977, when U.S. District Judge Thompson, “deeming the plan a success, lifted the federal court’s jurisdiction” over CCSD.\textsuperscript{226}

The Sixth Grade Centers plan continued to operate until the 1992-1993 school year, at which time CCSD returned to a system of voluntary school choice in response to complaints from the minority community concerning continued utilization of the plan.

Opinion on the success of the program during its twenty years of operation varied considerably.\textsuperscript{227}

\textsuperscript{224} “When we were under the mandate to desegregate the school board put a plan together that I think was the least disruptive to the schooling styles of the majority population…the sixth grade center plan.” Eva G. Simmons, interviewed by Vita Ishmael, 11 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording).


\textsuperscript{227} “We integrated them [the schools] with a sixth grade plan, and it went like clockwork….It worked quite well…because at that point nearly 100\% of people who lived on the west side were black, and the rest of the community was basically white and Hispanic. Today in Las Vegas, only about 20\% of the black population lives on the west side. So if people tell you that school integration doesn’t work, tell that they are wrong….It did work and it did make a difference.” Susan Brand, interviewed by Michelle Ricciardi, 14 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.) “It made a judge happy. The African American community seemed to accept it. It was grossly unfair because African American kids were bussed for 11 of their 13 years of school. Both of my children went through that and it was a very positive experience. It seemed like the
Although desegregation was the most publicized challenge that Guinn faced, he also triumphed over others. Some of his major accomplishments were that he “corrected the schools financial problems, integrated the schools, and cut the class average to 26 students.”

“He [Guinn] cajoled the Legislature out of more money for schools and brought the school district’s budget under firm control.” In addition to these accomplishments, Guinn started a Reading Improvement Program because “you don’t see good readers running rampant in the halls and assaulting other students, but you sure see a lot of non-readers and teenagers who have experienced absolutely no success in school.”

He was also successful in creating positions for teaching specialists in Reading, Mathematics, Music and Physical Education, as well as building-level librarians. All these enhancements were intended to improve the quality of instruction offered by classroom teachers.

As one former administrator said, “…I watched Dr. Guinn take this district out of the Dark Ages. We had a curriculum department that was absolutely phenomenal. We were selling curriculum all over this country…developing and selling curriculum….It was a wonderful thing.”

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231 Kenny C. Guinn, interview by Patrick W. Carlton, 24 May 2006, Las Vegas, NV, notes. Another commentator reported that “…he put some real direction into the school district. He…had a real understanding of the Clark County School District, [had] worked here as an administrator and …he made some major changes in education….He felt that the administrator controls the school and that …good administrators…could give direction to the school[s], hire good staff who could meet that direction, and involve parents and move the school district ahead.” Frank J. Lamping, interview by Patrick Jacobson, 30 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording).
232 “I became enamoured with the idea that you can really state what you want the
Another, less directly scholarly improvement championed by Dr. Guinn was the creation of a hot lunch program and, subsequently, a breakfast program for students. His rationale for this action was based upon the firm belief that students cannot be expected to learn if they have not received proper daily nourishment.233

One way Guinn accomplished so much was through his personal rapport with people of many backgrounds. Lois Tarkanian, later a member of Clark County School Board of Trustees, believed that Guinn’s exceptional rapport with educators and community members stemmed from his humble beginnings and hard work and that it was this that enabled him to achieve his success.234 “Every teacher knew they ‘belonged’ to Dr. Guinn. He made everyone feel important. When you talked with Dr. Guinn, you felt like you were the most important person around. He had charisma. He visited the classrooms regularly and really talked with the students and teachers, often offering positive criticism. You could tell he really cared about people and teachers wanted to do their best for him.”235  Years later (1983), during the first day of teacher orientation at his namesake’s junior high, one teacher remembers his warmth and caring, saying that he gave a pep talk commending the teachers on the prestige they brought to the school

outcomes to be [at] every level of education so that they’re measurable in terms of student performance….we eventually got into the issue of whether or not we should have nationally standardized tests, published by someone or [whether] we should have more localized criterion referenced tests. We realized that we had to have both….A rather deliberate and comprehensive set of criterion-referenced tests were developed and implemented. That was probably one of the golden ages of the school district… we got a lot of national attention for what we were trying to do….Some of us had a lot of invitations to go to universities and read papers and go to national conventions and give talks…We became somewhat in demand as consultants to see if there was something that other people could use, because the…nationally standardized test results [for our students] went up quite dramatically.” Theron Swainston, interview by Kim Compton, 27 April 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)


234 Lois Tarkanian, interview by Nola Raffail, 30 November 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)

235 Arlene Smith, interview by Nola Raffail, 15 November 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)
named for him and urged the teachers to get ready for another great year. The teachers were proud to be associated with him and to be teaching at Kenny C. Guinn Junior High School.  

During Dr. Guinn’s term as superintendent, Lois Tarkanian taught at a school for deaf children in California. At one point, Guinn sent several teachers to the school to learn about her approach to the teaching of deaf children. She commented that, although he worked hard to improve the educational situation for all students, she believed Guinn could have done more to improve the educational experience for special education children. She qualified this statement by saying that it is very difficult for educators lacking a strong background in special education to adequately meet the needs of this student population. She stated that, overall, Guinn was a great superintendent and that he made significant and positive changes to the district during a very challenging time.  

While Dr. Guinn was superintendent of CCSD, student enrollment increased from 70,500 to 85,000. There was also a substantial increase in teaching salaries. Dr. Guinn worked to improve the teacher salary schedule, which included classes A through E (increases being based upon degrees received and educational credits earned) and upon years of teaching experience. The starting salary during the 1969-70 school year was $7,430, rising to $12,630 for teachers with 13 years of experience and a Master’s degree plus 32 credits. By the time Guinn left office in 1978, the entrance salary had increased to $10,193 per annum and reached a maximum of $20,886 for teachers with 14 years of experience.  

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236 Nola Allen, interview by Nola Raffail, 20 November 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)  
237 Lois Tarkanian, interview by Nola Raffail, 30 November 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording). Another commentator said that “…he is probably one of the truly most charming and disarming people that I have met…and I think he has a sense of seriousness to him that helped the district through incredibly difficult times [during] the desegregation period.” Robert S.McCord, interview by Jennifer Moore, 3 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording).
experience and a doctorate in a relevant field. Furthermore, arrangements had been made for the district to pay the entire cost of the teacher retirement program.

At that time the teacher work day was seven-hours in length, with a thirty-minute duty-free lunch, and the school year was 183 days in length. Students were required to attend school for 180 days. The length of day varied by grade; kindergarten – 150 minutes; grades one and two – 285 minutes; grades three through six – 300 minutes; and grades seven through twelve – 330 minutes.238

In 1978 Dr. Guinn tendered his resignation in order to enter private business. In 1980, a local middle school was named in his honor. His effective administrative work was summarized on a plaque presented to the school as part of the presentation in his honor. It stated that, while Guinn served with CCSD, he was “directly involved in the planning and opening of approximately fifty new schools, many multipurpose rooms, libraries, classrooms, food service and transportation facilities, and a program of general renovation and additions to schools.... he worked toward…employment of women and minorities in responsible positions…[developed] breakfast and hot lunch programs, girls’ athletics, music programs and, probably one of the most important elements, a systematic approach to teaching. Dr. Guinn spearheaded a successful move to increase student test scores by identifying specific student problems and implementing programs to correct them. Dr. Guinn won widespread respect [within] the community and legislature as a truthful, expert and realistic advocate for education.”239

In 1978 Dr. Guinn joined the Nevada Savings and Loan Association as Administrative Vice President. He was promoted successively to Chief Operating

239 “The Dr. Kenny C. Guinn Story” from the dedication Plaque at Kenny C. Guinn Junior High School, 10 January 1980.
Officer, Chief Executive Officer and, by 1987, Chairman of the Board. In March 1986 Southwest Gas Corporation announced its acquisition of Nevada Savings and Loan. In September of 1988, Dr. Guinn, having served as President and Chief Operating Officer of the company since 1987, was named Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of this multi-state utility and financial services concern.

During the 1994-95 academic year, Dr. Guinn asked to serve as Interim President of University of Nevada, Las Vegas, following the departure of Dr. Robert Maxson, who had assumed the Presidency of California State University, Long Beach. University Regent, later Congressman, Shelley Berkley, commented that Guinn was “...just the leader UNLV needs right now.” Another Regent, Carolyn Sparks, said “we have a man of unimpeachable integrity who is a proven champion for education, who has the background as a CEO and president of a major corporation as well as a large banking institution—and is also a proven strength in the Legislature.” By a vote of 9 to 1, Dr. Guinn was appointed by the Board of Regents. Guinn commented, “I see this as a great opportunity to help protect what so many people in this community have built up at the university.” “I think I can do the job with enthusiasm for one year.” He was

245 Regent Nancy Price, the dissenting voter, called Guinn “a ‘fine individual’” but said she could not vote for the appointment because a quick process had excluded valuable comment.” Ibid.  
246 Ibid.  
hired under a “$1 a year contract,” donating the presidential salary of $164,000 a year to be used for scholarship for UNLV students.”

Guinn began in mid-May 1994 to analyze financial difficulties then facing UNLV. By late June he presented the Regents with a plan “. . . for erasing a projected $10.5 million shortfall in UNLV’s $81 million budget . . . and recommendations for putting the university back on a sound financial footing.” He was, at that time, also “. . . expected to give Regents a critical look at the way UNLV has budgeted and spent its money in past years.”

His work set in place better financial procedures and accountability measures. Another major contribution of Dr. Guinn’s period of service was a healing of the rift between UNLV and former basketball coach Jerry Tarkanian, who agreed to drop a million dollar lawsuit filed shortly after he was ousted by then-President Maxson.

UNLV, under Guinn’s leadership, agreed to pay around $400,000 in legal fees and leave compensation in return for Tarkanian’s cooperation. Tarkanian said, “I’m happy to get it settled, and I’ll be available to do whatever I can to help the university at any time. We love the university. We always have.” President Guinn responded “Even though the Tarkanians felt . . . that their case had merit, they were willing to forgo the merits in order to provide the university with an additional spending power of $500,000 in 1994-95 and at least $1 million in 1995-96.” He went on to thank the Tarkanians for their cooperation.

248 Ibid.
250 Tarkanian had been the subject of an NCAA investigation concerning possible infractions of rules governing team operations and player behavior.
No sooner had the Tarkanian matter been settled than, in mid-August, Dr. Guinn became embroiled in a controversy over the compensation package of newly-appointed basketball coach Rollie Massamino, who had been promised, via secret contract, several hundred thousand dollars in addition to his regularly negotiated salary. Massamino resigned in October.\textsuperscript{252} At about the same time, University Vice President John Irsfeld was reassigned to the English Department by President Guinn, who was dissatisfied with Irsfeld, whose “reluctance to disclose his involvement [in the Massamino contract negotiations] was a serious situation that needs to be brought to closure.”\textsuperscript{253}

By this time Dr. Guinn may well have agreed with Shakespeare, who said, “When sorrows come they come not single spies but in battalions.”\textsuperscript{254} Problem was piled upon problem throughout his term of office. By October, Guinn was quoted as being “prepared to resign,” and the article continued “he is expected to leave his interim position no later than May [1995].”\textsuperscript{255}

To say that his term as Interim President was challenging, even tumultuous, is no exaggeration. Week in and week out Dr. Guinn dealt with a parade of complaints and issues, many financial in nature, that would have daunted a less accomplished


\textsuperscript{254} William Shakespeare, “Hamlet,” Act IV, Sc. V, l. 78.

administrator. Under his capable leadership significant positive changes were made, “including placing severe limitations on administrative spending from discretionary accounts.” While he “uncovered $10 million in shortfalls and deficits at the university…[he] said he felt comfortable with controls now in place. . . .It is the procedural process that we’re changing and formalizing.”256 He is credited with instituting administrative and policy changes that helped the university to regain its momentum as a rapidly growing urban university.257 When newly-appointed President Carol Harter assumed the position in 1995, it is likely that Dr. Guinn was quite happy to relinquish the role and to move to his next challenge.

In 1998 Dr. Guinn was elected Governor of the State of Nevada, in which role he served for two terms ending in January 2007. During that time he continued his concern for, and advocacy of, education for all young people, creating the Millennium Scholarship program which allows all Nevada students attaining a 3.0 grade point average to receive scholarship support for college study. This far-sighted action on his part may well constitute his greatest legacy to the State of Nevada. As Sig Rogich, President of the Clark County Public Education Foundation, said during the presentation of an award to Governor Guinn, “Education heroes are everywhere making a difference in the lives of children . . . .the Governor personifies the education hero.”258

256 “I have yet to see anybody that I would say may have taken money that they shouldn’t have, Guinn said.” Natalie Patton, “Regents Deny Request For UNLV Audit.,” Las Vegas Review-Journal, 3 December 1994, p.3b.
258 Sonya Padgett,” Guinn Slated to Receive Education Hero Award, Las Vegas Review-Journal, 8 September 1999, p.11A.

Claude Perkins, born in 1941, was a native of Mississippi. As a young person he was an excellent student, receiving his baccalaureate degree in political science from Mississippi Valley State College in 1964. Following three years as a high school teacher, he pursued graduate studies leading to completion of a masters degree from Purdue University and, in 1973, the doctorate from Ohio University, in Athens. In 1969 Superintendent Kenny Guinn employed twenty-seven year old Perkins as the director of the department dealing with equal educational opportunity. In 1971 Perkins was assigned as Assistant to the Superintendent and, in 1973, he was elevated to the role of Assistant Superintendent for Administrative Services. In this position he was responsible “for research, federal programs, adult and vocational education and, later, the sixth grade centers….” He occupied this position until 1978.

Claude Perkins assumed the role of CCSD’s superintendent in controversy. On June 8, 1978, the school board voted unanimously to assign the district’s top post to Dr. Perkins. Virginia Brooks Brewster offered the nomination, and Trustee Jim Dreitzler seconded the motion. Immediately, Trustee Herman Van Betten offered an amendment to the original motion, seeking to substitute the name of Thurman White, who was the CCSD Assistant Superintendent of Facilities. Trustee Janet Sobel seconded that amendment. The amendment failed by a vote of 5-2, with Van Betten and Sobel voting in favor. A vote was then taken on the main motion and Dr. Perkins was unanimously selected by a vote of the full board. Following the meeting, Dr. Perkins denied reports that he had been picked for the job one month earlier. Candidate names had been

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262 Ibid. It had been privately speculated that Kenny Guinn had hand-picked his successor and that the board meeting constituted only a necessary formality. Other applicants for the position included Ralph Cadwallader, Bruce Miller, James Embree, and Carl Shaff.
bruited about as early as March, 1978, when Dr. Guinn announced his intention to leave
the district and to become a vice president of Nevada Savings and Loan.263

Claude Perkins’ African-American background was stressed locally at the time of
his appointment as superintendent. The Las Vegas Review-Journal carried the headline
“First black school superintendent picked.”264 This, along with the fact that the board
member nominating him, Virginia Brooks Brewster, was also African American,
suggested to some the potential drawing of lines of political support and non-support
among the members of the school board.

Dr. Perkins inherited a district that was doing well. One former administrator said
that “…some good things were occurring in the district with Guinn and with Perkins.
Our norm referenced test scores were above the national average in almost every school,
so there were some very positive things taking place.”265 Here was an opportunity to
build continued instructional momentum. Dr. Perkins announced his annual goals within
days following his selection. At a time when the district served over 86,000 students,
Perkins announced his plan to elevate education standards, particularly at the secondary
level, saying “Now we allow options to children which may not be good for their
futures,” referring to then-current high school graduation requirements. “I want to look
at the possibility of taking away those options and making sure the courses we offer have
more substance.”266

Dr. Perkins went on to say that, since he recognized that students progressed at
different rates, they should be allowed to complete high school at any time between three
and six years following matriculation. “Depending on their individual needs, the highest
challenge will be provided to the best students and the highest success factor will be
provided for the other students,” he said. In an indication of things to come, Perkins also
said that there would be some administrative reorganization. He commented, “I don’t

263 “Superintendent Search has 36 Candidates”, Las Vegas Review-Journal, 7 May 1978, p. 3B.
264 Margo Fraser, “First Black School Superintendent Picked”, Las Vegas Review-Journal, 9 June
1978, p. 1A.
265 Ralph Cadwallader, interview by Shonna Sargent, 15 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape
recording.)
anticipate adding many positions, but there will be some adjustments. . . . We have to have reorganization so the goals will reflect the direction of the district.” He went on to indicate that his changes would not be major, since “. . . that’s not good for the district.”

A short blurb in the June 28, 1978 edition of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* stated that Perkins wanted to hold a special board meeting to talk about administrative reorganization of the district. This was nineteen days after his appointment to the superintendency. The meeting was, however, cancelled because Trustee Janet Sobel indicated that she could not attend due to previous commitments. When asked about the matter, Mrs. Sobel told the press that she had “. . . already made some very important professional commitments that simply couldn’t be canceled.” She went on to comment that she did not understand the need for such a rush to hold this meeting “. . . or the manner in which it was scheduled. Usually when the board has a special and important meeting we discuss a time when all board members can attend. It seems odd that the paper would report on the cancellation of a special meeting unless, perhaps, it was believed that issues of significance would be discussed…”

As it turned out, the meeting would have a great deal of significance for the district when held.

On July 5, 1979, less than a month after his appointment as superintendent, a special school board meeting was held, at which time Perkins announced that he was creating two new administrative positions and that several top administrators were being reassigned. These decisions had apparently been decided upon without consultation with or notification to, those affected. Carole Sorensen was appointed to the position of Associate Superintendent of Administration and Special Student Services, making her the first woman to hold a cabinet-level position in CCSD. Theron Swainston was named Associate Superintendent of Elementary Instruction and Ralph Cadwallader was named Associate Superintendent of Secondary Instruction. The Deputy Superintendent, John Paul, was given the newly created post of Executive Management Analyst. The position of Deputy Superintendent was eliminated.

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267 Ibid.
269 Other changes announced that evening were as follows:
within the ranks of those present, and reportedly featured “meaningful finger-pointing” and at least one “stormy exit” from the room by an affected staff member. The two trustees who had opposed Dr. Perkins’ appointment, Janet Sobel and Herman Van Betten, opposed these moves. Sobel claimed, “I think it would be irresponsible to take action on this material the same night this was [sic] presented.” She went on to say that she had requested information on the changes from Perkins earlier, but that he had refused to release it, “. . . saying he wanted to give the information to all trustees simultaneously.” Mrs. Sobel attempted, unsuccessfully, to delay board approval on the proposed changes, indicating the need for time to study the proposals. Herman Van Betten told Dr. Perkins, “We’ve seen a lot of progress in the district in the past years, and you don’t just throw away a good system unless you have a very good reason. So far all you have been able to say is that you feel comfortable with it.”

Board President Helen Cannon said she thought “it was the superintendent’s right to reorganize,” but went on to comment that he must then “accept the responsibility of being [held] accountable . . . .” Trustee Virginia Brewster supported the superintendent’s

- “Willard Beitz to be reassigned from assistant superintendent of secondary education to administrative assistant in charge of the federal programs department,
- Brian Cram, from assistant superintendent of intermediate education to principal of Western High School,
- Robert Dunsheath, from director of curriculum services to principal of Garside Junior High, and
- James Embree, from director of intermediate education to director of curriculum assessment.
- Ben Cowan, from director of pupil services to deputy associate superintendent of administrative and special student services,
- Monte Little, principal of Kermit Booker Sixth Grade Center to director of elementary education,
- Terry Mannion, principal of Garside Junior High to director of secondary education,
- Augustin Orsi, [sic] principal of Marion Cahan [Elementary] School to director of secondary curriculum services,
- Carroll Russell, coordinator of research and development to director [of] secondary education.
  Eva Simmons, principal of Lois Craig Elementary School to assistant personnel manager.


270 Ibid.
actions, saying “I have no problem taking action relying, of course, on our superintendent.”

The next day intra-board disagreement with racial overtones was reported in the press. In an article entitled “White School Trustee Attacked Over Criticism of Superintendent”, board member Virginia Brewster blasted Janet Sobel for her criticism of Dr. Perkins. Mrs. Sobel had accused Perkins of being irresponsible in the administrative changes he had made, saying that these changes “…‘damaged, if not destroyed’ the careers of several good administrators.” She felt that “…we will be accused of allowing vindictive and malicious behavior—a structural reorganization which appears to be a ploy; a technique for shuffling around personnel without having to justify the moves.”

One of the administrators who had been reassigned, Dr. Brian Cram, was particularly disturbed over his reassignment from associate superintendent to a high school principalship. Cram viewed the reassignment as a demotion, while Perkins argued that it was more a simple reallocation of personnel resources. “Some members of the school board supported Cram in his battle to regain his job, and the controversy lingered for several months.” The outcome of the “July 6 bloodletting,” as it was characterized by some in attendance, had significant and longstanding effects on morale among the local administrative force and was felt by some to have contributed in large measure to movement on the part of these personnel to organize themselves into a collective bargaining unit.

Perkins critiqued his tenure at the end of his first year of service as superintendent by saying:

We tried to place an emphasis on education and discipline. Changes that were made addressed a number of instructionally-related areas: Pupil-teacher ratios were reduced at the junior high school level in an effort to align them with the ratios at high school and elementary schools and to build better interactions between junior high students and teachers. This involved the addition of 120 teachers at that level. Money was spent to improve high school and junior high

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271 Ibid
274 The Constitution of the Clark County Association of School Administrators was adopted on December 15, 1978, approximately six months after the July administrative reorganization.
school libraries…. additional resource teachers were assigned to various schools to carry out the process of developing a uniform curriculum that included scope and sequence and that built upon prior learning experiences.275

Revisions were also made in the graduation requirements for high school students. Dr. Perkins commented that he believed “…that particular change was probably one of the most important changes that has come about in this district in quite a while.” He indicated his desire to target the secondary schools since, at that time, test scores among Clark Country students lagged behind national norms. He pointed out that achievement scores at the elementary level, on the other hand, were “…quite a bit above the national norm.”276

Dr. Perkins warned of potential financial difficulties for CCSD during 1979-80 based upon legislative belt-tightening, a perennial problem in the State of Nevada. He pointed out that the district budget, then totaling $130,685,330, could have been reduced by as much as $20 million due to proposed legislative action, a condition which would surely have caused program cuts and lay-offs among staff members.277 Fortunately for the school district, Dr. Perkins’ dire predictions did not come to pass.

Perkins also addressed the administrative reorganization that he had implemented during the previous year, pointing out that a superintendent should have the right to reorganize as he sees fit and that employees should not think that they “own a job.” He commented that he felt the same way about his own job, implying that the school board should determine job assignments and longevity. In an ominous statement, he said, “And if they want to get rid of me, they have the right to do that.”278

275 Joseph Kirby, “School Superintendent Feels He’s Doing Well”, Las Vegas Review-Journal, 1 July 1979, p. 3A

One long-time member of the staff commented favorably on the changes, indicating that “Dr. Perkins “…had the foresight and the vision to bring up the curriculum for students and the professional development opportunities for teachers. We used to say that Dr. Perkins got rid of all the basket weaving classes in every professional department and insisted that we provide development opportunities for teachers that had something to do with what they are expected to do in the classroom.” Eva G. Simmons, interviewed by Vita Ishmael, 11 March 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording).

276 Ibid.

277 Ibid.

278 Joseph Kirby, “School Superintendent feels he is doing well,” Las Vegas Review-Journal, 1 July 1979, p. 3A.
At this time of reflection, Perkins set forth his plans and desires for the future. Recognizing that the district was likely to remain overcrowded, he expressed concern about acquiring sufficient funds to support continued growth. (By that time CCSD had become the 25th largest school district in the nation). He felt that parents needed to take a more proactive role in the discipline of students and stated that the district “will not assume a babysitting posture.” He indicated his desire to reach agreements with CCSD’s three employee unions during upcoming bargaining sessions, although he expressed reservations regarding this area of school personnel relations. Perkins said, “I have some concerns about public employees having the same right to negotiate as a private labor union and also having the . . . right to vote for decision makers who, in fact, are the bosses of the whole operation (i.e. school board members).”

Six days later, on July 7, 1979, a newspaper article reported that minorities in the district were not performing well on the standardized tests then in use. Perkins stated that it was not possible to explain this situation by identifying a single causal factor. He did point out that socio-economic status played a major role in the poor performance of minority students. “Other factors, such as attendance, could be involved,” he said. Perkins went on the voice his belief that no anti-minority group bias was built into the Nevada Proficiency tests. Perkins promised that the district would analyze the tests closely and that remedial programs designed to address the problem would be put in place.

During the 1978-79 school year Perkins had come under fire from a member of the Nevada General Assembly, John Vergiels, Chairman of the Assembly’s Education Committee. Vergiels said that his committee was dissatisfied with Perkins’ performance during the legislative session and recommended that, “the school board keep Perkins locked up in the Education Center.” He characterized Dr. Perkins as “a punk beginning superintendent who acts like a bull in a china shop,” treating legislators in a dictatorial manner. Vergiels added that it was his belief that Perkins’ behavior was “a mirror to

279 Ibid.
280 “He said the proficiency test deals mainly with skills, so it would be less likely that the test is biased.…if there was any bias against minority students inherent in the test, it would probably show up in the reading and writing areas.” “Minorities Don’t Fare Well on Tests,” Las Vegas Review-Journal, 7 July 1979, n.p.
281 Ibid.
cover up basic incompetence."282 His final shot was to the effect that “There’s no Kenny Guinn here to smooth things over for the board.” This stinging rebuke could not have been pleasing to the Superintendent or the CCSD board members.283

Dr. Perkins disagreements with board member Janet Sobel continued, showing no signs of abating. On the day before the July 12, 1979 board meeting, Trustee Sobel publicly accused Perkins of violating a state law requiring the submission of proposed changes in regulations to the board for its approval prior to implementation. In early June 1979 Perkins had issued a series of changes to CCSD personnel regulations to district administrators without seeking such approval, ignoring the negative recommendation of district legal counsel. Sobel took the unusual step of providing this information to the press, announcing her intention to present documentation and other information to the board at its July 12th meeting.284

Replying to these allegations of impropriety, Dr. Perkins indicated that a “miscommunication” had occurred, that he had informed the board at a June 14th meeting that he had issued the regulations in error, and that they would be submitted to the board for their examination and approval. He “. . . admitted . . . that he was in error and that the majority of the board members accepted his explanation of how the mixup [sic] occurred. ‘I explained the problem to the board. I really don’t understand why she is bringing this up again.’”285


283 At this time Dr. Perkins’ performance and demeanor were being compared with those of his predecessor, who was viewed as having enjoyed a very successful period as superintendent despite the challenges connected with desegregation of CCSD. Perkins said that part of the reason for Dr. Guinn’s success was that “… he had a different kind of board to work with” during his term of office. Perkins went on to say that he realized that Guinn was very good at public relations, but Perkins felt he was a good communicator himself and that he knew how important public relations were. He said that he had attempted to maintain a strong program.” Ibid.

284 Assistant Legal Counsel Tom Moore had “advised Perkins not to send out the 49 revised personnel regulations until they had been approved by the board.” Moore filed a report with his superior, Legal Counsel John Petroni, in which he indicated “. . . that he had advised Perkins that state law required that 30 days public notice was required before the school board could take action on the revisions.” “Sobel accuses Perkins of Violating State Law,” Las Vegas Review-Journal, 11 July 1979, p. 4B

285 Ibid.
Sobel claimed that her concern was not predicated so much upon the fact that this violation had occurred, as upon the lack of what she viewed as an appropriate response by the board. “I think, at the very least, [that] the school board should make an attempt to understand the seriousness of this violation of law, violation of regulations and the superintendent’s refusal to accept the advice of legal counsel,” she stated.\textsuperscript{286}

Interestingly, these allegations were made public only a day before the board of trustees was to consider a salary increase and the extension of Dr. Perkins’ employment contract.

Perkins received a raise and an employment extension on July 12, 1979. The amended contract was approved by a vote of 4-2, with Trustees Janet Sobel and Tom Semmens voting in the negative.\textsuperscript{287} Ms. Sobel was quoted as saying, “I do not agree with the concept of extending his contract. I don’t think Dr. Perkins is of the outstanding caliber the position requires.” She said that Perkins “required improvement in several areas, noting that she did not think he was an outstanding leader of school district employees and lacked the general ability to articulate his decisions to the school board.” She cited the fact that local administrators had formed their own union in response to the poor morale the district was experiencing.\textsuperscript{288}

The president of the school board, Dr. James Lyman, responded that Perkins had “. . . done a good job. I think he did a magnificent job during the legislative session. I think he’s an asset to the school district and to the community.” The new contractual arrangement extended Dr. Perkins’ employment until June 30, 1982 and included a salary increase of $5000, from $42,000 to $47,000.\textsuperscript{289}

In November of 1979, Perkins went to Washington, DC, to express concern over the “federal government’s increasing influence on the Clark County School District’s autonomy . . . .” Accompanied by Robert Petroni, the district’s legal counsel, Perkins spoke to several members of Congress and officials of various agencies and organizations about federal program funding arrangements. Perkins stated that federal legislation, such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Public Law 94-142 were not properly funded. He

\textsuperscript{286} Ibid. These comments suggest a significant disagreement between Mrs. Sobel and the other members of the school board regarding board procedures.

\textsuperscript{287} Trustee Helen Cannon was not present at this meeting.

\textsuperscript{288} Joseph Kirby, “Perkins Wins Raise, Pact Extension”, \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 13 July 1979, p. 5B

\textsuperscript{289} Ibid.
pointed to “restrictive and confusing regulations [that] the government sets down and the lack of sufficient federal funding to implement the programs, which results in the local district spending money designated for other areas.” He indicated that Nevada already had laws in place for the handicapped that were meeting the students’ needs. There is no indication that Perkins’ trip to and lobbying efforts in the nation’s capital produced tangible improvements in education funding regulations.

Three months later Dr. Perkins came under fire for remarks made before the state’s Senate Finance Committee. Al Zepeda, chairman of a lobbying group for the handicapped called CHANCE, criticized Perkins for saying that the handicapped are, “a plague as far as funding goes.” Former trustee Herman Van Betten, who had become a member of the Southern Nevada Association for the Handicapped, told the school board that many parents were upset, feeling that their children took a secondary role in educational matters. Perkins pointed out that the federal funds provided in support of special education children equaled $1.2 million, while “... the school district is spending [an additional] $3 million of its own money to augment these federal funds.” This was at a time when the total budget of the district was $157,950,222. Dr. Perkins said he made his statement to send the message that Nevada legislators needed to provide more money to districts in order to meet the needs of handicapped students.

In 1980 Perkins’ contract was once again renewed, this time through June 30, 1984. The contract provided him an additional $500 per year and an increase in his insurance and health benefits, along with an expense account of $5000 per year. A harbinger of things to come, the vote on the contract extension was 5–2, with one negative vote and one abstention. Clearly, Dr. Perkins did not enjoy the total support of the board of trustees, as had been true since his initial appointment.

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290 Colleen Bentley, “School Chief Perkins Airs Problems in Washington”, Las Vegas Sun, 7 November 1979, p. 15
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293 Ibid.
295 Board member Tom Semmens abstained from voting and Janet Sobel voted against the motion to extend Dr. Perkins’ contract. Ibid.
During this same timeframe, Perkins and other administrative officials expressed the desire to address the state legislature seeking repeal of Nevada’s “minimum competency testing program” This law, adopted in 1977, required student testing in the third, sixth, ninth and twelfth grades. Beginning with the 1981-82 school year, those failing the twelfth grade test would “…not receive a high school diploma.” Taking the opposing view, by a vote of 5-2, the school board instructed Perkins not to lobby for repeal of this law when the legislature convened in January, 1981. Board members expressed the view that the students of the district should be required to meet minimum graduation requirements. Board member Virginia Brewster said that “these tests are just the bare minimum, the naked minimum.” Tom Semmens pointed out that “it’s not a right for students to get a diploma, but a privilege bestowed upon them for completing the prescribed course work.”

Negative comments by state legislators concerning the quality of education being offered within CCSD cropped up in early 1981. This caused Dr. Perkins to file a pointed rejoinder. Lawmakers had “cited reports that 20 percent of he school district’s high school seniors failed a simple academic competency examination and that one-third of the entering freshman [sic] at UNLV and UNR are ‘functionally illiterate’ and cannot fill out simple forms.” Perkins replied that these complaints were “unfounded” and that “the Clark Country School District is one of the best in the country.” He said that CCSD graduates taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scored “higher than the national average,” and that they “are accepted at some of the finest colleges and military academies in the United States.”

A week later, addressing the state Senate’s Finance Committee, Perkins assigned blame for student literacy shortcomings to teacher unions and the federal government, saying “Johnny can’t read because teacher unions have too much power and the federal government will not pay for the courses it wants taught. The unionization of the educational staff has usurped the role of local boards of trustees. . . .Teacher collective

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296 Rebecca Kuzins, “Trustees Vote Not to Dilute Competency Testing”, Las Vegas Review-Journal 29 August 1980, p. 8A. During this meeting Dr. Perkins was also directed not to lobby for repeal of Nevada’s sex education act.
298 Ibid.
bargaining has had a negative effect on the education program.” He proposed removing teachers’ negotiating rights by repealing Nevada’s Employee-Management Relations Act and providing them with a starting salary of $20,000 per year. He said that teachers are required to be “…everything for everybody,” becoming involved with many areas that have nothing to do with reading, writing and mathematics, including drug abuse, teen pregnancy and environmental issues.299

Dr. Perkins’ comments were well received by some members of the Committee including Chairman Floyd Lamb, from Las Vegas, who was quoted as saying that the report Perkins submitted was “the best thing I’ve seen in all my years in the Legislature.” Senator Jim Gibson, from Henderson, NV, was also enthusiastic, commenting that “one thing we ought to look at is doing away with federal funds.” At this point Dr. Perkins hastened to point out that such a move would “cost the school district $10 million a year.” He went on to propose that the award of teacher tenure be delayed until satisfactory completion of the “… third year of teaching.” At the time CCSD teachers were eligible for tenure after serving a one-year probationary period. He then cited high teacher absenteeism as a condition that “…has hurt education in Clark County.” As might be imagined, reaction on the part of teacher representatives was considerably less positive than that of the state’s elected officials.300 To many CCSD employees it may have appeared that their “spokesman” had delivered a message that was not supportive of their needs and desires. The press reported that “…teachers’ union leaders were incensed at “anti-union” remarks made before the Nevada Senate Finance Committee.301

The controversial remarks just referenced came during the latter stages of salary negotiations between the Clark County Classroom Teachers Association (CCCTA) and CCSD. Chief negotiator Charles Silvestri was engaged in ongoing and intense discussions with the teacher’s union, led by their chief negotiator Bob Bovard. Mr. Bovard pointed to the anti-union statements made by the superintendent as evidence of a

300 Ibid.
lack of support for the teaching staff. Despite Dr. Perkins’ comments to the effect that the school board “…consider raises for the teachers one of our priorities…,” and that they wanted “…to give [teachers] the best pay raise possible without jeopardizing our program…,”

feelings of concern and unrest within the teaching ranks prevailed during Spring 1981.

As it turned out, the state legislature provided sufficient dollars to fund a substantial increase during the upcoming biennium. Meanwhile the bargaining teams were deadlocked, with the board team offering a two-year salary increase of 24%, while the teachers union sought a 32% increase. The CCCTA’s leadership had, for several months, been predicting a strike if agreement was not reached, an act that would have violated Nevada’s collective bargaining law. In August, as the deadline for negotiations approached, The Valley Times reported that “hundreds of teachers picketed the Clark County School District administration building…as talk about a teachers’ strike grew.”

In another editorial the editors urged the school board to resist the demands of the union, even at the risk of incurring a strike. “It is neither easy nor popular to say ‘no’ to school teachers…But that does not mean giving an unreasonable union the right to break the back of the taxpayers.”

By the next week Nevada’s Governor Robert List had weighed in, saying that it was “…time for public employees to undergo some ‘belt tightening’ and label[ing] talk of a strike as unthinkable and irresponsible.”

303 NRS 288.230 Legislative declaration; illegality of strikes.
1. The Legislature finds as facts:
   (a) That the services provided by the State and local government employers are of such nature that they are not and cannot be duplicated from other sources and are essential to the health, safety and welfare of the people of the State of Nevada;
   (b) That the continuity of such services is likewise essential, and their disruption incompatible with the responsibility of the State to its people; and
   (c) That every person who enters or remains in the employment of the State or a local government employer accepts the facts stated in paragraphs (a) and (b) as an essential condition of his employment.
2. The Legislature therefore declares it to be the public policy of the State of Nevada that strikes against the State or any local government employer are illegal. (Added to NRS by 1969, 1382.
At about this time Dr. Perkins made a series of statements on TV Channel 3 which raised additional unhappiness among teachers and local citizens. In an editorial dated July 29, 1981, Perkins was quoted as saying that “…I am not aware of nor am I concerned with any morale problems among the teachers….As an administrator my only duty is to pay them and provide them a place to work; providing them a daily massage and a whorehouse is not my job.” These comments were made while strike talk continued and negotiations were at a delicate state.

Things continued to unravel for Perkins during the summer of 1981. In a Las Vegas Channel 3 editorial, Valley Broadcasting Board Chairman James E. Rogers called for Dr. Perkins’ resignation. He reported that, after he and other Valley Broadcasting Editorial Board members had interviewed Perkins, teachers and school board members, they had reached the conclusion that Perkins had difficulty getting along with personnel “either below or above him” and that, “he has some real problems.” Rogers conceded that Perkins had administrative capabilities, but observed that he “has developed personality and attitude problems toward other school officials.” Rogers went on to say that “the school trustees have been ‘too passive in dealing with Dr. Perkins.’ The district should ‘go outside for new leaders. We need some fresh blood.’ ” These statements must have added to the pressures for change then being felt by the CCSD Board of School Trustees.

On August 15, 1981, Trustee Tom Semmens called for Perkins’ resignation, saying that he had, “lied to board members.” He went on to say, “If he was a man of honor at all, he would resign rather than humiliate the district any further – or we can settle this in the parking lot.” Perkins responded by saying that he would rather deal with Semmens in a private setting than to do so in the papers.

On August 28, “a majority of Clark County teachers voted to seek the superintendent’s removal”. Dr. Perkins’ negative statements on teacher-related matters made before state legislative officials were probably influential in generating this action on the part of the teaching staff. News sources also reported that “Perkins has come under considerable controversy recently

307 “Perkins Blamed for Low Teacher Morale,” The Valley Times, 18 August 1981, p.4A.
308 Mary Ann Mele, “Ch. 3 Calls For Perkins To Resign”, Las Vegas Sun, 30 July 1981, p. 7
over his handling of negotiations with the 4000 member Clark County Teachers Association. Following a contract settlement which served to avoid a teacher strike, the association membership overwhelmingly passed a resolution asking that Perkins be removed.” It was alleged that Perkins was unable to work with teachers and had no respect for their input into decision-making. Another article stated that criticism among board members had also increased in recent months based upon “…Perkins’ handling of a school bond issue and his general approach to running district affairs.

On Sunday, September 6, 1981, school board chairman James Lyman issued a signed statement in which he publicly withdrew his support for Dr. Perkins. The document said that “after the last evaluation session . . . we [the seven member board] all knew there were three members who wanted to find a new superintendent. Once I withdrew my support, it seemed obvious the handwriting was on the wall.”

One board member, speaking anonymously, stated that Perkins had the choice of either resigning or being fired. He felt that Dr. Perkins had been, “an embarrassment to the district over the last 2 ½ years.” He also said that Perkins did not have the support of 5 of the 7 members of the school board. State Senator Joe Neal defended Dr. Perkins, saying that board president Lyman was withdrawing his support, “to get pressure off his own back.” He felt that Lyman was making Perkins a scapegoat to gain the favor of the teachers.

The editors of The Valley Times decried the movement toward dismissal saying “clearly the eight months long contract fight with the teachers union took its toll of some of Dr. Perkins’ support on the board. Whatever degree of confidence he enjoyed overall with the trustees…deteriorated during the talks….Over this past weekend there were indications that Dr. Lyman now has decided to abandon Dr. Perkins…if he goes against

311 Mary Ann Mele, “Perkins Resignation Result of Controversial Tenure, Las Vegas Sun, 11 September 1981, p. 4. Ironically, the contract settlement just reached was favorable, with teachers to receive, during the biennium, “…a 24.9% salary package that carried with it 100% in insurance benefits during the first year.” Lynn Berk, “Progress Claimed in Teacher Talks,” The Valley Times, 27 August 1981, p.2A.
313 Ibid.
314 Ibid.
the Superintendent now it will appear to many that he is doing so only to save his own neck.” The editorial continued with the warning that removal of Dr. Perkins would be interpreted as the school board’s abdication of power to the teachers union.315

Commenting on Dr. Perkins’ strengths, the editors said that “Claude Perkins may not be as diplomatic or skillful in dealing with people as his predecessor…but he is a man of substance, of dedication, and of wide-ranging abilities…the teachers might not have won the pay package they did had not Perkins been so successful in pleading the financial cause of the schools before the…legislature during the past session….we think the evidence is clear that he’s been not just a good superintendent, but a darn good one and quite possibly an excellent one.”316

On the following Tuesday, September 8th, Perkins publicly admitted that he had not “. . .play[ed] the political game as he should have to keep his position. He admitted that he could not “run the Clark County School District without the support of the school board.” Dr. Perkins denied that the reason he was being pressured to resign had anything to do with his race. He went on the state his hope that “we can work out an arrangement. . . that would not hurt him professionally and would not hurt the district.”317

Black leaders met with the teachers’ union, alleging that the pressure to fire Perkins was racially motivated. One black leader, Albert Dunn said, “It’s nothing but a racist situation here. That’s all it is.” The head of the teachers’ union, Bob Bovard, said that the reason Perkins must go was not racially motivated, and that “the ‘vast majority’ of teachers couldn’t care less if he is black or white.” He went on to say that “the superintendent is arrogant.” He “likened Perkins to Richard Nixon during the Watergate era, saying the administrator has a ‘got to get him before he gets me’ attitude.”

School board member Don Faiss, a supporter of Perkins, disputed these claims, saying that “the main issue involves a power play by the teachers union.”318 He said he believed that “…the teachers are attempting to dump Perkins because he worked to weaken the

315 “Dr. Perkins Good Man: Don’t Toss Him to Wolves,” The Valley Times, 7 September 1981, p.10A.
316 Ibid.
state’s Professional Practices Act, which give teachers strong job protection….Dr. Perkins…has upheld the school board stance that the teachers’ union should not be involved in managing the schools.”\textsuperscript{319}

The next day’s afternoon newspaper announced that “Just hours before trustees were expected to fire him, Claude Perkins announced Thursday morning that he will step down as Superintendent of the Clark County School District effective Friday.” He reiterated his conviction that his ouster from the position was not racially motivated. Dr. Perkins read a prepared statement to the trustees, saying that he knew from the beginning that, “the job had little to no protection,” and that it was “. . .the prerogative of the school board to make a change of their choice.”\textsuperscript{320} His final official statement as superintendent, in the form of a prepared written document, included Perkins’ claim that “If there have been mistakes in my administration, they have been full dedication toward the improvement of educational opportunities for boys and girls in this district and striving for management efficiency which has resulted in savings for taxpayers and less attention to political realities of the job.” When asked about his future plans Dr. Perkins indicated that he would be visiting his dentist and working on his golf swing.\textsuperscript{321}

The local press commented wryly that “School superintendent Claude Perkins lost his job; the school district lost a good administrator; the school board lost any semblance of unity and cooperation; and board member Virginia Brewster lost her cool.” Mrs. Brewster had “blamed bigots on the board for forcing the superintendent’s resignation” and had called fellow board member Tom Semmens “a klansman without a hood.” The paper labeled her allegation as “totally unfounded.”\textsuperscript{322}

\textsuperscript{319} Dave Vergon, “Battlelines Drawn in School Chief Flap,” \textit{The Valley Times}, 9 September 1981, p.1A. Mr. Faiss was critical of teacher job protections saying “once a teacher is hired in Nevada and passes their [sic] probationary period, it is virtually impossible to fire them….[Perkins] believes that the school district should be able to fire a teacher if they [sic] are incompetent.” \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{320} Steve Standerfer, “School Chief Announces Resignation”, \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 10 September 1981, p. 1A Perkins pointed out that there was only one school board member remaining from the time he was first hired and that across the nation the average term of office for metropolitan area superintendents was less that three years. Dave Verbon, “School Chief Perkins Vague About Reasons for Quitting,” \textit{The Valley Times}, 11 September 1981, p.2A.


\textsuperscript{322} “Ouster of Perkins a Lamentable Affair,” \textit{The Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 13 September 1981, p.8B. Mrs. Brewster’s comments were characterized as having been “designed to appeal to the
The article went on to commend Dr. Perkins’ administrative initiatives, saying that “under his guidance, test scores for Clark County children improved, a sterner and more effective attendance policy was instituted, graduation requirements were tightened, and the district as a whole was run more efficiently.” On the other hand, it was commented, “he clashed with teachers. He clashed with other administrators. He clashed with the school board.” His no-nonsense, no backtalk approach might have been effective in getting things accomplished, but in his wake he left crushed egos and bad feelings.

Dr. Perkins made a number of important contributions and improvements during his term of office. In his closing statement on September 11, he cited the following secondary level improvements: “upgrading graduation requirements and requiring ‘more responsibility for the education of students’; toughening attendance rules, resulting in 100,000 more student days in the average school year; an improved discipline affecting dress and appearance of students; an upgrade secondary library program; class size reductions at junior high levels; increased textbook allocations; and an expansion of vocational education programs.

“At the elementary level he cited the hiring of twelve counselors, major inservice training programs, creation of a curriculum department and the reinstatement of an administration training program. He said that improvements were made in the administrative area, especially in the hiring of female administrators. Perkins also cited major areas of financial reforms and improvements.”

Claude Perkins’ departure was met with dismay in certain quarters. One editor commented that his forced resignation “…was, in our judgment, a narrow-sighted, largely black audience in attendance,” and were “irresponsible, inflammatory, and unbecoming of a public official.”

323 “[Dr. Perkins] made some horrible mistakes personally and professionally but it was his first superintendency…A huge job for a guy who didn’t have a lot of experience [at] the policy level. Robert S. McCord, interview by Jennifer Moore, 3 March 2006, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)

324 Ibid. Referring to the political difficulties he had encountered, Dr. Perkins commented recently that “Las Vegas had been labeled the ‘Mississippi of the West’ by many prominent blacks in the community and most thought that all of this turmoil was racially motivated. They may have been right since it was a highly segregated community…open housing did not happen there until, I believe, in 1965.” Claude G. Perkins, message to author, 5 June 2006.


326 Ibid.
needless ouster without sufficient cause….some members of the board have not yet served long enough to see Dr. Perkins’ administration of the schools in perspective. [He] is the only superintendent most members of the board have known…[while he] had 13 different school board members to answer to during his nearly three years in the post.\textsuperscript{327}

Mrs. Helen Cannon, President of the Board of Trustees that hired Dr. Perkins said, soon after his resignation: “Many people have asked me what I thought of Dr. Perkins. I think he is a very competent superintendent; one who is extremely knowledgeable of all the aspects of the Clark County School District and thoroughly familiar with the budget….He has a deep and firm commitment to the achievement of academic excellence by boys and girls. He is curriculum oriented….The test scores prove that good learning is going on in the schools….I was President of the board when Dr. Perkins was appointed Superintendent. I supported him then, and I support him now.”\textsuperscript{328}

Following his resignation from CCSD, Dr. Perkins served with the Nevada Department of Commerce; as founding director of the Center for Educational Leadership at Clarion University (PA); as assistant superintendent and deputy superintendent in Richmond Virginia; as Superintendent of Schools in Kansas City, Missouri;\textsuperscript{329} and, as of Spring, 2006, was serving as Associate Vice President and Dean of the Graduate School at Albany State University, in Georgia.\textsuperscript{330}

In October 2005, and following “years of campaigning by his supporters,” CCSD named an elementary school after Dr. Perkins. The 2005 Nevada State Legislature issued a joint resolution urging this recognition, and Governor Kenny Guinn, who had initially

\textsuperscript{327} “We’re Saddened by Perkins’ Departure,” \textit{The Valley Times}, 11 September 1981, p.10A. The commentary continued: “Dr. Perkins obviously was not good at playing politics. There is…a belief among knowledgeable persons within the school administration that part of his troubles stem from his early decision to remove or shift certain key LDS members of the school administration….he clearly made a mistake in not taking into consideration the enormous influence of the LDS in the school district and the community at large.”

\textsuperscript{328} “Helen Cannon Speaks Out on Teacher Salaries, Perkins,” \textit{The Valley Times}, 14 September 1981, p.10A.

\textsuperscript{329} Claude G. Perkins, message to author, 5 June 2006.

brought Dr. Perkins to the Clark County School District in 1969, “also voiced his support.”^331

Charles A. Silvestri 1981 – 1982

Shortly after Claude Perkins tendered his resignation as Superintendent of Clark County Schools, the Board of Trustees went into a closed session for twenty minutes, following which they named Charles Silvestri as the interim superintendent. Silvestri had served the district in the role of Associate Superintendent of Personnel Services and was the chief negotiator for management, conducting contract negotiations with teachers, classified employees and administrators. This board’s action proclaimed Silvestri the leader of the nation’s 24th largest school district, then serving 87,550 students.332

Fourteen days after his appointment, Silvestri stated publicly that he would not seek permanent appointment to the position, since the job was “very volatile” and he did not wish to put himself in the position of having to leave the area to seek new employment.” He called for putting the past behind and said, “let’s get on with the business of educating kids; that’s what we’re here for.” Mr. Silvestri closed by saying that he didn’t expect any drastic changes in the district – administratively or educationally – that would disrupt the educational program.333

One of Mr. Silvestri’s earliest and most trying challenges concerned relationships with the employee unions and bolstering employee morale. He indicated that there was “terrible morale when [Dr.] Perkins left” and the “unions were going wild.”334 He worked hard to remedy this situation during his term in the superintendent’s office and later in his career with CCSD, with good success.

334 Charles A. Silvestri, telephonic interview by Patrick W. Carlton, 8 June 2006, Las Vegas, NV, notes.
Silvestri’s climb to interim superintendent was arduous. Raised in Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, a coal mining and steel town, he moved to Las Vegas after a stint in the U.S. Army, along with other family members.\textsuperscript{335} Taking employment at the Mint Casino the day after he arrived, he soon enrolled at Nevada Southern University (later named the University of Nevada, Las Vegas).\textsuperscript{336} He earned a degree in social studies and, following graduation,\textsuperscript{337} was hired as a teacher with the Clark County School District. In 1965, while employed with CCSD, he earned his master’s degree from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.\textsuperscript{338} Following service as a classroom teacher, Mr. Silvestri served as department chair, then assistant to the personnel director and, in 1977, was appointed to the position of Associate Superintendent of Personnel.\textsuperscript{339}

Accounts of district business during Silvestri’s term as interim superintendent suggest that he consulted closely with the school board on matters of policy and procedure. Never hesitant about voicing his views he was, nevertheless, sensitive to the

\textsuperscript{335} Mr. Silvestri was part of an Italian-American family of ten children, including eight boys and two girls, in addition to their parents. “We had one bicycle—you can imagine the fights we used to get into to get to get that bicycle-and one baseball glove and one catcher’s mitt. It was rough-and-tumble a lot of days in our family.” All eventually migrated to the Las Vegas area. Mr. Silvestri said that all family members have been “...relatively successful in our chosen careers, and Las Vegas has been just a phenomenal place for the Silvestri family.” Charles A Silvestri, interview by Douglas Dickerson, 22 April 2005, Las Vegas, NV, tape recording.

\textsuperscript{336} Louis Silvestri, a brother, described the day on which he and Charles, applied for admission to Nevada Southern University. As they approached the single building then in operation, now named Maude Frazier Hall, they were spied by the university register, Jewel McKay, who promptly locked the doors. “She thought we were coming to rob the place,” Louis said. The local newspaper went on to report that “Despite her reservations, she relented and allowed them to register.” Diane Russell, “Impending Retirement Doesn’t Slow Silvestri,” \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 14 August 1989, p.1B.

\textsuperscript{337} Mr. Silvestri pointed out that his degree was granted by the University of Nevada at Reno (UNR) since, in those days, Nevada Southern was a satellite campus of UNR. “We had to go to Reno ...for one semester to be awarded the bachelor’s degree.” Charles A Silvestri, interview by Douglas Dickerson, 22 April 2005, Las Vegas, NV, tape recording.

\textsuperscript{338} Commenting on his studies at UNLV he said that “Maryland Parkway was just being paved when I moved out here. It was clear out at the end of town…. [it] stopped at Flamingo Road….UNLV had one building. There were 700 students.” Charles A Silvestri, interview by Douglas Dickerson, 22 April 2005, Las Vegas, NV, tape recording.

\textsuperscript{339} Mary Ann Mele, “A Look At Silvestri’s Climb”, \textit{Las Vegas Sun}, 17 September 1981, p. 13. Other than the period during which he served as Interim Superintendent, Mr. Silvestri held the position of Associate Superintendent of Personnel or, for a time, Deputy Superintendent until his retirement from CCSD in 1989.
thoughts of board members and fellow administrators. He insured that the views of board members and administrative staff members were publicly aired during policy discussions. As an example, when announcing the details of an upcoming bond issue on December 11, 1981, Silvestri arranged for other administrators and board members to provide details of the bond issue and to deal with arguments pro and con.340

In January of 1982, while the search for a replacement for Carl Perkins continued, Mr. Silvestri was interviewed on a local television show,341 during which he said that he expected “…the new superintendent to take over his chair…by this summer.” At that time he said once more that he would not be a candidate for the permanent position. Sources from within the district had expressed hopes that he would seek a permanent appointment as superintendent.342 This was not to be.

During his participation in the television interview, Silvestri also said that he expected “…no hang-ups with the bond election slated to go before the voters in March [1982.] It was his view that the taxpayers would pass a proposed $69.5 million bond issue designed to provide for the building of additional schools.343

Silvestri’s prediction regarding success of the Spring bond issue proved to be inaccurate. On March 16, 1982, the bond initiative failed by a vote of 23,902 to 18,646. This negative outcome generated a storm of criticism aimed at then-Governor of Nevada, Robert List, who had spoken against the bond initiative shortly before the day of voting. The press reported that “angry Clark Country School District officials hung their defeated

341 Station KTNV-TV’s “Probe,” which aired on Sundays.
342 Mary Ann Mele, “Silvestri To Bid Summer Farewell,” Las Vegas Sun, 17 January 1982, p. 9
343 Ibid.
bond issue around the neck…[of the governor], charging [that] he intentionally sabotaged it at the expense of the children.”\textsuperscript{344} Board member Tom Semmens said that “The governor is grasping at straws because this is an election year and [because] of his own precarious position.” Another board member, Don Faiss, said that “List has stepped onto our turf and I think, quite possibly, he may regret that.”\textsuperscript{345}

Former governor Mike O’Callaghan was also sharply critical of List’s actions, as was List’s political advisor, Sig Rogich, both of whom felt that “[Governor] List erred by becoming involved in a local issue.” School officials speculated that List’s statements predicting that passage of the bond issue would raise property taxes helped to generate negative voter behavior, with unfortunate results. The bonds were to have been used to construct eighteen badly needed schools between 1982 and 1985.\textsuperscript{346} Governor List reacted with vigor, describing himself as “a one man truth squad” and claiming that the vote results reflected “…the will of the people, not the will of Robert List nor the will of the school board.” He went on to say that “…there are times when those in public office have to realize that they cannot always have things their own way.”\textsuperscript{347}

Clark County School officials were left with the immediate and difficult task of developing a contingency plan that included “...a choice of double sessions, year-round schools, elimination of special programs and drawing new attendance boundaries.” Mr. Silvestri pointed out that the district’s building costs would “…soon double and that

\textsuperscript{347} Ibid.
the voters [would] be asked to pay twice as much in a bond issue sometime in the future.”

The district’s budget woes were exacerbated due to the presence of a nationwide economic downturn which significantly affected the local economy. Ed Greer, Associate Superintendent of Business and Finance, reported that “the economy’s poor performance is the greatest single variable responsible for these revenue shortfalls. We predicted a continuing growth and building situation that just didn’t materialize due to high interest rates and the current recession.” At that time the district was faced “…with as much as a $3.5 million shortfall in anticipated revenue.” Possible cost-cutting approaches were immediately developed. Greer said “We will do our best to protect students, I guarantee you.” Included in cost-saving measures were cutbacks in official travel and delays in the filling of vacant positions.

As a result of difficult teachers contract talks during the summer of 1981, along with the forced resignation of Superintendent Claude Perkins, district administrators became convinced that the district’s image was suffering. In an attempt to remedy this situation, it was decided to assign Mr. Ronald Hawley, the Superintendent’s executive management assistant, the responsibility for creating and managing a high profile public relations effort. Hawley said that “during the last negotiations it became very evident that we weren’t responding well to accusations being made [by the union] and we weren’t

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350 Ibid.
making an effort to inform the public [about] what the district does. The power structure of the district had just not considered that a very high priority…."

True to his word, in July 1982 Mr. Silvestri resumed his role as Associate Superintendent of Personnel upon the appointment of Robert Wentz as Superintendent of the Clark County School District. He had dealt with many thorny issues during his ten months in office, and “…said he was relieved to step down…” after weathering such challenging times. During Mr. Silvestri’s time in the position, he oversaw efforts to pass an unsuccessful bond issue; dealt with $8.5 million dollars in shortfalls from state and federal sources; made the last all black school on the Westside a sixth-grade center; and oversaw the search for the next superintendent. Mr. Silvestri indicated that his major regret was that he was unable to get the bond issue passed. “That would be the only thing I’d like to redo,” he told the press. 352

Mr. Silvestri continued with the school district until his retirement in August 1989, by which time he bore the title of Deputy Superintendent in charge of personnel and administrative services. He was proud of the progress made during his tenure as the personnel administrator, saying “we steadily increased the numbers not only of minority teachers, but . . . the number of females that we got into administrative positions during my tenure as Associate Superintendent of Personnel.” 353

351 Steve Standerfer, “School District Attempts to Bolster Image on Airwaves”, Las Vegas Review-Journal, 1 February 1982, p. 1B. The high-profile activities of the newly created task force served to augment the efforts of Ray Willis, who carried chief responsibility for district public relations. As part of this realignment Willis was directed to report to Mr. Hawley, generating speculation that he had been “demoted.” When queried on the subject, Superintendent Silvestri stated that “there’s no attempt whatsoever to circumvent what Ray [Willis] is doing.” Ibid. In a recent conversation Mr. Willis indicated that he had, in fact, been demoted. Ray Willis, conversation with Patrick W. Carlton, 29 August 2006.
In 1999 Silvestri Middle School was named in his honor, during which ceremony his friend U.S. Senator Richard Bryan delivered the keynote address. Messages presented during the event included one from U.S. Senator Harry Reid, whose statement included the comment that Silvestri, “has been deemed to ‘exemplify the power of communication…when it comes to education.’ ” The dedicatory statement included in the printed program said that “no one is more dedicated to the betterment of education ….”

Former board of trustees member Robert Forbuss praised Silvestri, describing him as “…the glue that held everything together [during 1981-82.]”

Silvestri continued his career in private enterprise, serving with Southwest Gas as director of government affairs and community relations. He continued active in the community in the area of labor arbitration and mediation. He also served Chairman of Nevada’s Public Employees Retirement System and as a trustee of the Alexander Dawson School, located in Las Vegas. Silvestri reported fond memories of his work with CCSD. “…I was fortunate to have people working with me that were truly outstanding, dedicated people…we had terrific educators.”

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355 Diane Russell, “Impending Retirement Doesn’t Slow Silvestri,” Las Vegas Review-Journal, 14 August 1989, p 1B. A former colleague said that “Silvestri did ‘place-holding’ but also helped [keep] the board within the policy role…that was something of great merit, besides the fact that he is an incredibly trustworthy individual. He’s a fellow who has…deep roots in the early days of this place and is very well respected.” Robert S. McCord, interview by Jennifer Moore, 3 March 2006, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)
356 Charles A. Silvestri, telephonic interview by Patrick W. Carlton, 8 June 2006, Las Vegas, NV, notes.
Robert E. Wentz 1982-1989

Robert Wentz was born January 20, 1933 in Harvey, Illinois. He was raised in nearby Lanark Illinois and upon graduation from High School he accepted a basketball scholarship to attend Mississippi State University. After receiving his bachelor's degree in education in 1955, he started his teaching career in Sturgis, Mississippi where he also coached. Wentz then returned to his high school alma mater as an assistant principal. He continued his education at the University of Chicago where he received his Master's degree in educational administration in 1965, and then his Doctorate in the same field in 1970.

Wentz served as the superintendent of schools in Mishawaka, Indiana, then in 1971, was hired as the district superintendent of schools in Pomona, California, a unit serving 25,000 students. Next he assumed the superintendency of the St. Louis, Missouri school district in September 1975. At the time that Wentz arrived, the St. Louis school district enrolled approximately 100,000 students, but enrollments has fallen to about 60,000 students by the time he departed.

Dr. Wentz came to Clark County in July 1982 as the seventh superintendent of CCSD. Robert Wentz followed Claude Perkins, who had resigned under fire. He was selected for the job following a nation-wide search that attracted 78 candidates. The school district employed a consultant group from the University of Southern California in

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361 Charles Silvestri served for a single year as an interim superintendent during 1981-1982.
conducting the search. Before the school district made their final decision, four trustees visited St. Louis to investigate the Dr. Wentz's background. Upon their return, the trustees reported that they had not received any negative information about him, and that the only complaints reported were from the teacher union president and from a disgruntled school administrator. The union president stated that Wentz only did those things that the school board directed him to do, while the administrator was unhappy about a personnel hire. Neither statement was considered negative, the trustees considering it positive that the superintendent carried out the board’s directions. Overall Dr. Wentz was reported to be an outstanding administrator who delivered appropriate services to the students, had good leadership qualities, and kept the community informed.362

Even before Robert Wentz arrived, much of the agenda for his first year in the district had been set. He was facing a possible $11.5 million budget deficit, and the school district had just lost the vote on a bond issue that would prove critical for the following years. Dr. Wentz had just gone through a school district reorganization in St. Louis, which involved a reduction of 45 administrative positions. Conditions had been different since the St. Louis district had been in the process of downsizing by almost 40%, while Clark County was still growing. At the same time, CCSD was resource deficient. Teachers were anxious for a raise, new buildings were required, special programs needed to be addressed, and all of this had to be done with less money. Wentz had stated that he had no plans to reorganize the system in the first month, and that he did not want to effect change for the sake of change. He also stated that school districts

362 Lisa Riley, "Wentz Appears To Have Passing Grade", Las Vegas Sun, 3 April 1982, p. 9.
throughout the country were facing budget problems, but that Clark County's continued growth made the funding shortfalls especially hard to handle.\textsuperscript{363}

Robert Wentz officially assumed the superintendency on July 1st, 1982, but he had begun working well before that date. He initially met with Governor Robert List to discuss finance issues, and then with teacher union president Sue Strand in May. Ms. Strand's impression was that there would now be a better working relationship between the district and the teacher union.\textsuperscript{364} Ms. Strand would, however, soon leave the position of union president, and the relationship between the school district and the teacher union would be problematic for the first few years of Dr. Wentz administration.

Despite the money issues that confronted Dr. Wentz and the school district during his first year, he soon demonstrated great aspirations for the 22nd largest school district in the nation.\textsuperscript{365} He created community committees to address such issues as school overcrowding and the possibility of establishing special-interest schools or specialty schools.\textsuperscript{366} Wentz stated that he believed very strongly in setting high expectations and that this approach would provide students a better chance to achieve.\textsuperscript{367}

He was named a member of a 12 member national task force sponsored by the Twentieth Century Fund. As a member of this task force, he participated in the development of recommendations for those steps needed to place U.S. Schools among the top tier of educational institutions worldwide. Wentz visualized the Clark County School District becoming one of America's "lighthouse districts". He felt that if schools maintain

\textsuperscript{366} "Wentz Happy About Initial Study Panels", \textit{Las Vegas Sun}, 23 August 1982, p. 11.
the status quo, an atmosphere of mediocrity tends to be generated.\textsuperscript{368} Despite his progressive views, however, Wentz was faced with the reality that new program dollars were inadequate and that available dollars were barely sufficient to maintain current operations.

During his first year a report was released by Harrah's Hotel-Casino executives stating that Clark County School administrators hadn't reduced budgets despite stagnant enrollments.\textsuperscript{369} This report was necessarily damaging since the school district needed additional funds to increase programs and to build and refurbish buildings. Fortunately, shortly after this report was issued, the state legislature released favorable budget plans for the following year. The plans allowed the school district to continue functioning without serious reductions. However, the proposed budget did not include dollars for salary increases. Dr. Wentz had stated that it would be extremely difficult to convince the legislature to provide additional dollars, a fact which virtually eliminated the possibility of raises for teachers and other staff members.\textsuperscript{370} The Clark County Classroom Teachers Association, which had been seeking a 9\% raise, was now faced with the possibility of receiving no increase. The teachers planned to lobby the Legislature in an attempt to generate more money, but hopes for success were viewed as dim. Dr. Wentz suggested the possibility that some form of trigger mechanism might be

created by the legislature, one that would allow the implementation of salary increases in the event that the economy improved. Hope in this regard proves to be unfounded.371

The day after the Senate Finance Committee agreed on the education budget for the following year, Wentz met with the Clark County Association of School Administrators to deliver a 50-minute presentation on the "crisis of revenue", pointing out that the whole nation was suffering an economic crunch.372 He said that during the upcoming biennium373 it was critical for CSSD to maintain stability without losing ground, and to maintain or improve student performances outcomes. He also called for better relations among various employee groups, and for an end to internal bickering and finger pointing. "There are no superstars in a school district, just a lot of bright stars. Those bright stars have to recognize there are a lot of bright stars (out there) with them."374 He announced, as part of his plan for the future, the desire to improve media relations; to lengthen the school year to allow for coverage of the additional material that needed to be taught; and to provide continuity for the middle grades by eliminating the sixth grade centers. The latter change was to be implemented without losing integration gains made during previous years.

Wentz never abandoned his desire to serve the students of CCSD, and he set forth numerous ideas on the form this educational service should take. His colleagues and

373 The Nevada Legislature works on a bi-yearly basis, so the budget is set for two years.
374 Ibid. “…Bob Wentz…was a ‘gentleman superintendent…treated everybody as though they were someone he was really rather fond of.” Theron Swainston, interview by Kim Compton, 27 April 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)
other observers viewed him as a person of vision and conviction. During the summer of 1983, after he had served CCSD for a full year, he was named to the Governor's Commission on Education. Robert Wentz used this forum to promote his educational ideals. During the fall of his second year as superintendent, he assembled the largest advisory committee in recent memory to develop a district education plan. The committee, consisting of 200 to 300 citizens, was designed to gain broad-based community support. The committee's task was to develop a master plan for presentation to the 1984 legislation session.

While Robert Wentz's first year as Clark County Superintendent of Schools was considered successful and his popularity was high, major problems remained and others would soon appear. Among these were the issue of inadequate teacher salaries and that of overcrowded schools. Another issue related to ongoing public infighting between and among school district employees, an activity that would negatively affect public opinion. Wentz found himself in the position of coping with day-to-day problems and planning for those yet to be encountered while, at the same time, promoting his vision for CCSD's future. His success in addressing the 1982 budget crisis earned him high marks from the school board which, following his semi-annual evaluation, extended his contract for three years.

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375 “He would go out of his way to…do what he thought he could do…to keep peace in the school board and in the community and at the same time make it possible for some of us who needed to take care of the educational issues to do our job. He did that quite well. He created a buffer between the political reality and what we wanted the educational reality to be.” Theron Swainston, interview by Kim Compton, 27 April 2005, Las Vegas, NV, (tape recording.)


The biggest shortfall encountered during Wentz's first year with CCSD concerned his inability to secure those legislative appropriations needed to address special programs, to reinforce the basics, and to provide raises for the teachers. His advisory committee, which was to create an Educational Master Plan that would guide the school district through the next ten years, was in part a response to that failure. Wentz knew that he needed a great deal of money to accomplish the goals that he had set. As might be imagined, much of the inner turmoil in the district was directly related to money, or the lack thereof.

Dr. Wentz had gained a reputation as a hardworking and demanding boss. Approximately 2000 people worked on the preparation of the Master Plan. According to one administrator, Mr. Wentz worked harder on it than anyone else. Even the teacher union president, not always the largest supporter of central administration, stated that she knew that Mr. Wentz wanted improved conditions within CCSD. It was reported that he routinely worked a fifteen-hour day seven days a week. Wentz was also a strong advocate of planning. In his words, "good planning means good thinking, intense thinking." I know whenever you make errors, it's because you haven't thought something through carefully." When he Wentz was asked to identify his flaws, he responded, "I guess one is that I want a lot of thing to happen and so sometimes I bite off more than I can chew. It can be a flaw where you've got too many things going at one time."

380 Ibid
381 Ibid
Dr. Wentz dedicated a great deal of time to development of the CCSD Master Plan, which was completed in May 1984. His next task was to gain board acceptance of the plan. Later in 1984 it was announced that Las Vegas had become the twelfth fastest growing city in the United States.\(^{382}\) It was also announced shortly thereafter that some schools would have to be partially closed while asbestos was removed.\(^{383}\) Both of these news items focused greater community attention on the need to mount a successful school construction bond campaign and election.

The third year of Wentz's tenure was critical because it was a legislative appropriation year and money, as usual, was critically short. A bond issue to support new school construction was being planned for. New construction was, of course, critical as a way of coping with new enrollments and consequent overcrowded classroom conditions. At this time Wentz proposed the creation of a Deputy Superintendent's position, one that would be responsible for the entire instructional program.\(^{384}\) The availability of this position would, it was suggested, allow the Superintendent to concentrate on legislative affairs during the all-important session of that body. Those concerned about "top heavy" administration were, as might be expected, critical of this announcement. Wentz responded to their accusations by saying that, "We're still operating, in my opinion, with the leanest staff of any like-sized system in the country. Of all districts I've ever worked with, we have the leanest (administration)."\(^{385}\) In a nationwide survey it was found that Clark County served 12% more students per teacher, and 32% percent more students per

administrator than comparable districts. Although no dollar comparisons on administrative expenditures were offered, the survey showed that Clark County employed considerably fewer administrators than the national average.

Shortly thereafter the famous "A Nation at Risk" report was released.\(^\text{386}\) This report stated that Nevada was improving, but that there was still a pressing need to raise funds for educational reform and for the development of incentive programs for teachers. The report stated that one third of the states provided 8% salary increases for teachers and that North Carolina had recently approved a $300 million educational expansion budget based upon recommendations of a state-level education commission.\(^\text{387}\) Wentz considered this information as potentially useful during the upcoming legislative session. "The real test for our Legislature will be in 1985. It will call for additional resources and it will call for the Legislature to respond.\(^n\)\(^\text{388}\)

It appeared that the stage was set for CCSD to obtain badly needed operating funds.

Next the district turned its attention to securing necessary construction funds. The proposal developed involved an increase in property taxes, but was described as a "pay as you go" plan that, it was hoped, would appeal to voters. The 1982 bond election had apparently been defeated, at least in part, because of the requirement for large interest payments associated with the repayment of building loans. Under the 1984 bond proposal buildings were to be constructed and paid for as dollars become available, with no accrual of interest charges. The bond funds were to cover elementary and junior high


schools, along with some high school additions and expansions.\textsuperscript{389} Predictions were that Clark County school district would reach an enrollment of over 100,000 students between the years of 1990 and 1993. Thus, there was a definite need for new construction. It was not known at the time that growth would exceed expectations and that available schools would continue to be overcrowded.

At the time when the school district was seeking building dollars and funds to pay teachers, Dr. Wentz submitted for board consideration a series of wide-ranging initiatives with an estimated price tag of $11.2 million. It was proposed that the school day be lengthened by a total of 30 minutes by adding five minutes to each class period. The plan also called for an increase and improvement in technology and for increases in other equipment and supplies. Additional courses that would help students with special needs, and an in-house suspension program were also proposed. The master plan also addressed matters that did not bear a price tag, among them the development of special emphasis high school programs and a weighted grading system that would encourage students to take higher-level classes.\textsuperscript{390}

Before the new school year began the State Department of Education approved a plan allowing individually designed school report cards that would compare schools on the basis of standardized test scores, teacher absenteeism and other factors. Wentz opposed this measure, but it was approved.\textsuperscript{391} This report card would constitute another “brick in the wall” that was being built between the teachers and the leaders of CCSD.

This relationship was soon to reach the breaking point. Unfortunately, Dr. Wentz was apparently unaware of the magnitude of the developing problem.

While concerns about money and relations with the district teachers, along with overcrowding in the schools were currently at the forefront of Wentz's concerns and activities, he did enjoy some successes connected with his organizational vision. The first specialized high-tech education program was implemented at Chaparral High School. It was based upon the “school within a school” concept and was designed to serve about 400 students pursuing a curriculum centered on science and engineering. The program had originally been scheduled to commence at the beginning of the 1985-86 school year but, due to the availability of space and the low start up costs, it was implemented a year early. This was the first of the Magnet schools created in Clark County, one of a number to follow. Wentz had been an advocate of the specialized high school since his arrival now saw some progress in this area.

It was not long before Dr. Wentz addressed the district staff at one of the largest gatherings of Clark County teachers ever assembled. The superintendent called for an end to the current adversarial relationship between school district administrators and the several employee unions. The speech was titled "Blessed are the Peacemakers", and he encouraged all educators to come together to work for common educational goals. The 35-minute speech was interrupted by applause only three times, each instance in response to comments on the need for higher teacher pay and the need for teachers to exercise a meaningful voice in educational planning. He also stated that divisive and destructive

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tactics had come to characterize the collective bargaining process, exercising a negative influence on internal district relations. Despite his clear desire to contribute to better teacher-administrator relations, his words created some very negative feelings. The teacher union president stated that she was very angry about the speech, saying that it was inappropriate at an event that was supposed to be primarily positive in tone. The president also stated that teacher morale had been on the decline due to lack of support from building administrators, threats to academic freedom in the form of school report cards, and a lack of supplies and equipment.394

At Dr. Wentz’s mid-year evaluation by the school board trustees, he received a grade of "B", which was described as an “excellent grade” by one of the trustees. During the evaluation three concerns were brought up by Wentz; the state legislative session, contract negotiations with school employees, and the growing student population.395 Those three issues would be the main focus of the district and Dr. Wentz for the remainder of the school year. Soon after this meeting with the school board, Governor Richard Bryan proposed educational funding that pleased the Clark County superintendent. Dr. Wentz had said that he was glad to see that the budget addressed the district's three top priorities: salary increases for employees, more money for special education and increased funding for specialized programs.396 However, the state legislative process was just beginning, and Dr. Wentz joined the teacher union president and the school board president to lobby legislators for a one-time 11 percent salary

payment to Nevada educators for the period of Jan. 1, 1985 to June 30, 1985. This was part of the Governor’s proposal, but the Speaker of the State Assembly stated that the funds that were to be used for the salary payment would very likely be cut, and that while he realized the money would boost the teacher's morale, it wouldn't create any programs or buy any books for children. Dr. Wentz described the position held by the Legislature as “unconscionable”. 397

By now the frustration of the teaching staff had reached an all-time high. After negotiations with the school district did not end the way the teacher union had hoped, their leaders set out to apply political pressure in support of their economic goals. They announced that the members were unhappy with the school district's treatment of teachers, and then indicated union opposition to the current school bond proposal. The union president stated that they were “holding the bond issue hostage”, indicating that they had wanted to determine whether the school district would deal with the teachers as professionals, but that the district turned them down. 398 The president went on to say that the bond proposal called for fancy programs that would cost a good deal more and would affect only a minimal number of students; and that the money should, rather, be spent on the basic necessities affecting most students. In response Wentz said, "We want to create the best situation we can for our staff, and the bond issue and the contract negotiations are totally separate." 399

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399 Ibid.
In the month that followed, a survey concerning the bond issue was conducted. 70% of the respondents said that they would support the initiative. The vote for the bond issue was only a month away, and public feeling was very positive. Nevertheless, when the vote took place on the 7th of May, 1985, the bond election failed by 905 votes. The teachers had taken a position, and it ended up making a difference. This would give the teachers a great deal of leverage during future negotiations.

On his July 1985 evaluation, Dr. Wentz received a B+ from the board if trustees, an indication that they were still pleased with his performance. This would be the highest grade that he would receive. He was then faced with the necessity to create another bond proposal. Wentz felt that the success of the initiative would hinge on the support of the teachers.

At the beginning of Wentz’s fourth year as the superintendent of CCSD, the district population reached 90,000 students, and the school district and teachers agreed during negotiations to a 13.4% wage and benefit increase. Clark County had now become the 19th-largest school district in the nation. Its overall growth since 1971 was the largest recorded by the Educational Research Service during that time period. This rapid growth led to the creation of several year-round schools, along with the installation of numerous portable classrooms. Needless to say, the bond proposal was now of highest priority.

West Las Vegas residents raised another issue at the beginning of the 1985-1986 school year, that of the sixth grade centers and the busing of their children to different

parts of the district. Under the current program, Westside students were bused to schools in other areas for 11 of their 12 years in public school. While in sixth grade students from other areas of the district were bused to the centers, which were located in the Westside area. The district had initiated the court-approved busing plan in 1972. At that time census figures showed that most black students lived in West Las Vegas. By 1985 more than half of the Las Vegas black population no longer lived on the Westside.404 Many people attended a three-hour forum during which proposals to end the busing program were presented. Dr. Wentz had stated during his first year as the district superintendent that he had favored discontinuation of the sixth-grade centers, but the issue had not been addressed since that time. Lacking any alternate plans for addressing the issue, Wentz successfully defended those policies and procedures then in place. The busing issue would lie dormant until his tenure as superintendent ended.

At the beginning of his fourth year as superintendent, Dr. Wentz received a 10% raise.405 Dissension arose during the school board meeting at which the raise was enacted. Roseann Cox charged that the board and the superintendent were not meeting the needs of the community. She also stated that people were "seething with anger" because the board was not responsive to the public.406 The School Board dismissed the statements, but the public perception of the School Board set forth during the meetings would continue to influence major issues.

Dr. Wentz’s next effort was directed to preparing for another bond election designed to generate needed construction dollars. The teachers union took a “wait and

405 Wentz had previously stated that he would not concern himself with raising his own salary until the teachers gained one themselves.
see” approach to the matter. The Union President, Chris Giunchigliani, stated that discussions among the organization’s members would be held prior to a decision on whether or not to support the bond initiative. She expressed the view that teachers deserved respect for withholding support for the May bond proposal. She said that they had taken a risk, but in the long run their credibility had been enhanced.⁴⁰⁷

At an October 1985 award ceremony held at Las Vegas High School, Dr. Wentz touted the bond proposal saying, "We have 91,563 bright-eyed, intelligent young people who will sit in your seats and lead this community, this state, and this nation. And they will do so because you will say ‘yes’ to them on December 10."⁴⁰⁸ Later that year the 3-year bond was passed, and construction began immediately.

1986 brought new administrative challenges. The first came in March when a citizen protest arose concerning the “forced” resignation of Nils G. Bayles, the Principal at Valley High School. Wentz addressed the allegations, saying that the principal had submitted his resignation and that it was the principal's intention to retire at the end of the school year. He did concede that some personality differences had arisen, but said that Mr. Bayles was not 'forced' to resign.⁴⁰⁹

The next difficulty concerned new contract negotiations with the teacher union. In March the teachers issued a brochure outlining their position and expectations. The school district's response was that the teachers should not expect more than a 5% salary

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⁴⁰⁸ Carol Cling, "Bond Issue Support Urged at High School Celebration", Las Vegas Review-Journal, 30 October 1985, p. B4. Dr. Wentz often took advantage of public opportunities to lobby on current issues. Much of the time if was effective.
increase. A short time later the union placed a full-page ad in the Review-Journal arguing that sufficient dollars were available to provide a significant raise. The union spokesman said, "Quite simply, the ad is our response to the contention of district officials that they are unable to give teacher's more that a 1 percent raise." Dr. Wentz responded to this statement by saying, "The lesson has never been learned, you don't succeed by shooting down someone else. You do it by building up." The school district offered the teacher's a 1.6% raise for the next year, while the teachers were sought a 23% raise. Wentz showed his frustration saying, "This move indicates they don't want good relations. They want to play this game."  

Soon after the Union ad appeared, a state 'report card' was released assigning low grades on local teacher pay, and class size. These were, of course, the very issues that the teacher union was addressing. In May 1986, the State Board of Education released a list of priorities that would be sent to the legislature. The list included a 14% pay increase for teachers during the following two years, along with reduced class sizes. The Clark County School District Board of trustees had not yet released its own list of priorities. During the summer contract negotiations between the teachers and the school district broke down. Following three days of negotiations, the two sides were far apart with the school district offering the teachers a 3.6% raise in salary. A spokesman for the teacher union stated that the district negotiation team had displayed 'no integrity' during the negotiations.

412 Ibid.
Eventually the teachers accepted a settlement of a 6.22 salary increase along with a 1% increase in benefits.\footnote{Sean Whaley, "Teachers' Pact Talks Break Off", \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 21 June 1986, p. B1.}

Dr. Wentz received “good press” during 1986 based upon dramatic improvements in student test scores during the previous decade. In each grade level tested during 1985 and 1986, district students scored above the 50th percentile, or national average.\footnote{Sean Whaley, "Student Test Results Dramatically Improve", \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 4 March 1986} This was a definite high point in Wentz’s tenure with CCSD. Unfortunately, the positive press generated by this report would soon contribute to one of his greatest disappointments.

During 1986 Dr. Wentz received a positive Board evaluation, and was considered for a contract extension. Following this evaluation, he cited the goals that he wished to pursue within the district during the upcoming years. These included the continued improvement of reading and math skills, further implementation of the distinguished scholars program, and the development of programs to challenge all students, including those in occupational tracks. Topping his list was securing adequate funding from the state Legislature to satisfy both program goals and the needs of district employees.\footnote{Sean Whaley, "Trustees to Consider Extending Wentz Pact", \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 17 June 1986, p. B1.} He received an extension through the 1988-89 school year. Six months later and following another positive evaluation, he received a 5% pay raise, along with another vote of confidence.\footnote{Sean Whaley, "Wentz Receives Positive Evaluation", \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 17 December 1986, p. 6B. Since 1987 was to be a legislative year, the issue of salary increases would soon be once again “front and center.”} In January 1987 Wentz was named one of 100 outstanding school managers in North America. The honor was announced in the \textit{Executive Educator}, a magazine for school professionals. Dr. Wentz was designated as one of "The Executive
Educator 100", a “blue-ribbon listing similar to the Fortune 500 or the Forbes 400 for business and industry.”  

In early 1987 it was time to deal with the Legislature again. The Governor issued his budget request for the next two years, one that would require CCSD to reduce its expenditures by $10 million. The school district immediately developed plans to seek legislative reconsideration of the proposed budget as a way to secure funds so desperately needed. In May 1987 a door-to-door campaign was undertaken to gain public support for a tax increase, one designed to raise funds that would help reduce the financial shortfall. This campaign enjoyed a broad base of support within the teacher union, the board of trustees, and the Nevada State Education Association. Dr. Wentz stated that, "Legislators should at least consider additional revenues and keep their campaign promises to make education the number one priority." It would take a year to do, but eventually Wentz and the school district would come reach an agreement with the teacher union that would provide the teachers a 38% raise over the next three years.

1987 proved to be one of Dr. Wentz’s most difficult periods of CCSD service. In February an investigation revealed that testing results for 10 elementary schools had been inflated. A validation test was used to confirm that the students were given extra help on the standardized tests as a way of improving their test scores. The earlier cause for celebration now became a source of district embarrassment. Teachers had reportedly been provided lists of test-based vocabulary words by their principals and instructed to 'teach to the test'. Wentz's response was that, "it is neither time nor cost effective to

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spend time discussing the extent and details of a problem in the past. What we believe is the most professional approach is to acknowledge our problem and correct it.”\(^{423}\) Wentz provided recommendations aimed at preventing a reoccurrence of the situation.\(^{424}\)

During the summer following the end of Dr. Wentz’s fifth year, questions were raised about his continued service as Superintendent of the Clark County School District. Wentz and some board members speculated that the teacher union was behind the effort to have him removed, saying that “…the effort, if successful, would be a ‘power coup’ to replace the three individuals who are directly responsible for education in the district….It would be a signal that the union runs the district, [and] not the Board of Education.”\(^{425}\) The union Executive Director, Joe Lamarca, said that he advocated the removal of Dr. Wentz, but he denied actively trying to oust him. Several school board trustees voiced their concerns about the way the test score inflation issue was handled, and how Dr. Wentz dealt with the resignation of the Valley High School principal.\(^{426}\) Other groups spoke out in support of Wentz, among them the Las Vegas Area Council PTA, and the NAACP.\(^{427}\) During his next evaluation Wentz, was, for the first time, to experience serious debate among trustees about his future with the district.\(^{428}\) He survived the evaluation without major damage and, at his next evaluation in December 1987, received

another favorable report. At that time he started developing plans for an additional bond election.429

In 1987 the district had shown the biggest growth in 14 years. The school district now enrolled over 100,000 students. More schools were needed.430 By the end of the year Wentz had achieved what some have said was his biggest accomplishment during his time in Southern Nevada. He was able to successfully engineer a $674 million building bond election. These bond funds would help the school district meet the additional growth that would soon come.431

While it is true that serving as superintendent of one of the nation's largest school districts involved many activities that bear little relationship to the daily life of the schoolteacher, Dr. Wentz never forgot his roots. His desire was, first and foremost, to provide services to students. As part of this ongoing commitment he created a committee that developed a five-year plan for the district, one that would prioritize the needs of the district and propose ways to address those priorities. Wentz said that the highest priorities established by the planning team involved getting children in early grades off to a good start and helping "at-risk" children. There were also proposals to lengthen the school year and the school day.432

Dr. Wentz had always wanted to work more directly with the administrators that ran the various divisions. It was for this reason that he had eliminated the deputy

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superintendent position two years earlier following the retirement of the incumbent.\footnote{\textit{School Hierarchy May Change}, \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 25 March 1986, p. B4.} Wentz was a dedicated educator who, due to the nature of the work, was required to play a highly political role, one that he might have preferred to avoid.

By the year 1988 Bob Wentz had, perhaps surprisingly, gained the support of the Clark County Classroom Teacher's Association. This was the same teacher's union that had called for his resignation during the previous year. A spokesman for the union, Joe Lamarca, said publicly that the relationship with Wentz had greatly improved during the previous 6 months. This came immediately following an agreement for a 38 percent teacher salary increase.\footnote{Sean Whaley, "Teacher' Group Supporting Wentz", \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 26 May 1988, p. C1.} This newfound support did not come without sacrifice. Some board members were happy with the new relationship with the teacher union, but others were displeased. One trustee, Jan Biggerstaff, said "he has seven bosses with seven different sets of expectations. There is no way he can please everyone." Another board member, Lucille Lusk, was very unhappy with the teacher salary settlement. She said it had been reached in closed session without public comment, and accused the teachers of blackmail by using their support for the school bond issue to influence salary negotiations.

Other board members were displeased with Wentz over a vote on promotions. In a closed session the board had asked Dr. Wentz to withdraw several names from consideration so that a vote could be avoided, but he apparently insisted a public vote. This caused problems within the Jewish and Hispanic communities, both of which had raised questions about the way people were being selected for promotion.\footnote{Ibid. The board voted 4-2 to deny the promotions and to initiate a review of the process.} Some board
members were sufficiently upset that they were ready to remove Dr. Wentz from office, but because of the upcoming school bond election, deferred action on the matter. Still another board member, Dan Newburn, had become upset over communications between Wentz and the board of trustees. Newburn felt that “…he had not been kept up to date on the status of the bond election, which was about due weeks away.”

Dr. Wentz was due for his next board evaluation during the summer of 1988, and it was assumed that many of the concerns just mentioned would be addressed then. In anticipation of Wentz's evaluation, many people voiced their support. This support came from all parts of the community. When evaluation time arrived, it was conducted behind closed door. Dr. Wentz received a favorable, but split vote of 4-3 and his contract was extended through June of 1990. The state Public Service Commission chairman spoke out on Wentz's behalf, saying that "Bob Wentz, I think, is one of the most hard-working people I've ever met.”

This event proved to be the beginning of the end of Wentz’s tenure in Clark County. Two of the four board members who had supported him in the retention vote were to leave the board at the end of the year, eroding much of his support. Wentz, however, announced plans to continue working on district projects, and to begin preparations for the 1989 Legislative session. About a month later another of Dr. Wentz's proposals exacerbated his bad relations with the school board still further. He had sought permission to effect an administrative realignment which would have created

436 Ibid.
four deputy superintendent positions.\textsuperscript{441} This brought immediate opposition from community minority groups.\textsuperscript{442} The board, concerned about the wisdom of this move, first delayed and subsequently disapproved the proposal. Dr. Wentz’s failure to communicate with the board was given as the reason for denial of the proposal.\textsuperscript{443}

In November 1988, two new members to the board of trustees were elected. At that point Dr. Wentz lost much of the support that he had received to date. In April 1989, the school board accepted his resignation. Dr. Wentz stated that the reason that he had resigned was, "primarily because I believe that for the future development of the district I have done all that I can do." Wentz also said that he and the board had a difference in philosophy. He commented that there was a nationwide problem of school boards meddling in daily school operations. Boards, he felt, should develop good policy, but then should give administration the freedom to implement it, he said.\textsuperscript{444}

In June Robert Wentz accepted a position as the superintendent of the Wake County Public School System in Raleigh N.C., a system with 61,000 students located in the Research Triangle of North Carolina. He served there for four and a half years, retiring in December 1994. Later he returned to southern Nevada where he passed away.

\textsuperscript{441} The proposal showed “…Associate Superintendents Charles Silvestri, Thurman White and Paul Goodwin moving into three of the new deputy superintendent jobs. The fourth deputy superintendent would be Linda Litttell, who is director of the school and community partnership program….The administrative realignment is one of the recommendations to come out of the district’s lengthy strategic planning process.” “Realignment of School District Leadership Eyed”, \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 20 August 1988, p. C10.

\textsuperscript{442} “Spokemen for both the Coalition of Jewish Clark County School District Employees and Hispanics in Politics said Wednesday that Clark Country School District Superintendent Robert Wentz should have opened the promotional opportunities to all interested people instead of choosing people without formal competition.” Diane Russell, "Minority Groups Oppose Reorganization Proposal", \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 25 August 1988, p. B12.


following a long illness, on November 29th 2000. Robert Wentz served for 40 years in public education. He was remembered as an exceptional individual in his personal characteristics, including a strong work ethic and integrity.\textsuperscript{445} "He was just a nice, nice man who did a very good job," said Thalia Dondero, a regent for Nevada's higher education system. "The growth was just starting to really take off at the time, and he handled it very well."\textsuperscript{446} Former school board trustee Lucille Lusk said that, "He had his own vision for the district, and some people agreed with it and some didn't. That's what makes rocky times."\textsuperscript{447} Dr. Wentz characterized the 1986 incident, in which elementary school students' achievement test scores were inflated to show better performance, as the emotional low point of his tenure. He was credited with increasing the number of district appointments of racial minority members and as helping push through school bond issues that supported school construction well into the 1990's. He initiated the CCSD magnet school program, one that became a major success, and he saw the district grow to over 100,000 students. Coming from a modest background, through hard work and intense focus Robert Wentz morphed into a highly respected educator. He aspired to the greatest heights for the students he served, and he served the Clark County School District well.

\textbf{Brian M. Cram}

\textsuperscript{446} Ibid
\textsuperscript{447} Ibid
Dr. Brian Manning Cram was born in Las Vegas in 1939 and is a product of the Clark County Education system. He attended Fifth Street Elementary School in his early years and graduated from Las Vegas High School, now known as the Las Vegas Academy. It has been stated often in the press that he is the son of a school custodian with Cram himself remarking in an interview, “In one generation, my family leaped from school custodian to school superintendent. My parents understood the powerful locomotive [that] education was…” Cram earned an undergraduate degree in Psychology from the University of Utah, following which he was awarded a Master of Arts in Educational Administration from Arizona State University in 1962. It was from that same University that Cram received the Doctor of Education degree, with honors, in 1967.

Cram began his teaching career in Phoenix, Arizona but soon returned to Las Vegas as Assistant Principal of Clark High School. He served at Clark HS during the next eight years, four of those years as the Principal. His career advanced when he moved to the ‘Ed Shed’ in 1973, the nickname irreverently assigned to the CCSD (Clark County

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448 Dr. Brian Manning Cram Resume as provided by the Clark County School District, 2006. Hereafter “Cram Resume”
451 Cram Resume.
453 Cram Resume.
School District) Administrative offices on Flamingo Road, having been named Assistant Superintendent of Intermediate Education.  

In June of 1978, Claude Perkins was promoted to Superintendent of CCSD and, twenty-seven days into his administration, reassigned the incumbents of fourteen major administrative positions during a special school board meeting. Brian Cram was included in that major reshuffling during which he was reassigned to the position of Principal of Western High School. Cram did not go quietly and was outspoken in responding to his “demotion.” The controversy lingered for several months.

Dr. Cram served as Principal of Western HS for the next eleven years. During those years Dr. Cram built a reputation as a competent and innovative administrator. In 1989 he was appointed Superintendent of CCSD, the seventh person to serve in that capacity. Dr. Cram served as the CCSD Superintendent from 1989 to 2000, During that decade he witnessed a continuation of rapid population growth in the Valley, along with all the problems that accompany such an influx of new residents. These problems included increased crime, overcrowded schools, the requirement to secure funds to provide “enough schools teachers, facilities and equipment to serve the influx of new students.” Since many of the challenges he faced are connected with the growth of the Las Vegas area, some observers have labeled Cram the “growth Superintendent.”

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454 The Edward E. Greer Education Center, located at 2832 E. Flamingo Avenue Rd., has also been called “the Taj Mahal” by those questioning the substantial costs associated with construction of the building, and “Fort Fumble” by those with questions about the wisdom of certain administrative actions.


457 Charles Silvestri served as Interim Superintendent during 1981-82, but did not seek permanent appointment to the post.


However, other issues of a less predictable nature also served to define and characterize his administration.

On the opening day of the 1990 school year, gang violence erupted at Eldorado High School. Donnie Lee Bolden was shot and killed in the school cafeteria only minutes before classes began. This tragedy had come on the heels of the emergence of a “gang” and crime problem within the Las Vegas valley, one which plagued area schools during the late 80’s. The “gang” problem unfortunately manifested itself at local high school evening athletic events. In response to this, games were rescheduled to the afternoon, causing a predictable drop in attendance. These crime-related issues helped to define the early Cram administration. During the fall of 1990, the district “implemented the use of hand-held metal detectors at high school football games” and security cameras were installed at Eldorado during Christmas break, with more added to other area schools throughout the rest of the 1990-91 school year. While crime did not entirely cease in area schools, there were no additional shooting deaths on CCSD campuses. By the year 2000 thirty District schools had been equipped with surveillance cameras and alarms and all new school buildings built would have such systems installed.

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462 Ibid.


In 1989, the same year Cram was named Superintendent of CCSD, Robert “Bob” Miller was elected Governor of Nevada. Miller remained in office for the next decade (the state’s longest-serving Governor). His tenure of office ran concurrently with that of Brian Cram. During the 1989 legislative session, Governor Miller fought for and won the support needed to reduce class size in Nevada schools in grades one and two. During the 1990-91 and 1991-92 school years a pupil-teacher ratio of 16 to 1 was mandated by the legislature and Cram filled 858 new teacher positions, opened 18 new schools and was quoted in USA Today as saying, “Each year, we build (the equivalent of) a reasonably sized school district….Las year, we were enrolling enough kids in one week to fill an elementary school” During that year CCSD received 5,945 teacher applications, of which 14% were accepted. This favorable hiring situation did not continue.

By the beginning of the 1991 school year, Cram had achieved notable successes and had received a raise along with a contract extension until 1995, 1988 bond money to support new school construction was available, and the district was able to hire new personnel from a large pool of applications. Unfortunately, a state wide recession and a group called the Westside Action Alliance Korps -- Uplifting People (WAAK-UP), an organization committed to changing then –current local bussing practices, were to require much of Dr. Cram’s attention during 1992.

466 Information obtained from the Official Biography released by the Governor’s Office at: web site http://www.ufomind.com/area51/people/miller/ref/miller_bio.html (accessed 8 February 2007).
468 Pat Ordovensky, “Viva Las Vegas?? City Growth Spurs An Education Boom// New Schools Can’t Be Built Fast Enough,” USA TODAY, 29 August 1991, p.1D.
469 Ibid.
The economic recession which occurred during 1991-92 threw the legislative budget process into a tailspin. Rather than raising taxes, Gov. Miller cut $173 million from the state budget request. In addition, plans for a 3rd grade class-size reduction and a promised 4% raise for state employees were placed on the “chopping block.”

In January 1992, Gov. Miller asked Nevada’s seventeen school districts to make voluntary 2% budget cuts. Cram responded that the requested cut could be made but that plans for the enactment of class-size reductions in the 3rd grade would have to be scrapped. During this same time frame, “Miller told the districts their cooperation in helping him erase the state’s $119 million deficit would not be forgotten when the Legislature convened again in 1993.” This statement was apparently taken to heart by Cram.

In March a group of approximately 40 Westside black parents held a meeting with school district officials seeking an end to the bussing of the children living in the Westside area of Las Vegas, a practice in place since the desegregation ruling of 1972. The meeting was organized by Marzette Lewis who shortly thereafter organized the group called WAAK-UP. In an apparent move to mollify the group, Cram told parents that monies remaining from the 1988 school bond initiative would amount to around $12 million and that these funds could be used to help refurbish older school buildings, but admitted that the funds would be insufficient to complete the needed upgrades. Cram also stated that no plans to change the CCSD desegregation plan would be developed.

472 Jane Ann Morrison, “Miller’s Legacy.”
475 Ibid.
until a lawsuit brought against the district by black educators was concluded.\textsuperscript{478} Six months earlier a U.S. District Judge had dismissed a similar lawsuit brought by the Las Vegas Alliance of Black School Educators against CCSD in 1989.\textsuperscript{479} While this meeting suggested to some that district officials had no plans to change the manner in which the CCSD desegregation plan was being implemented, the situation soon changed dramatically.

On April 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1992, soon after the verdicts were issued in the Rodney King case, violence broke out in Los Angeles, California.\textsuperscript{480} On the next evening, April 30th, rioting began in the Las Vegas Westside. Two people were killed and several million dollars worth of property damage was inflicted upon businesses and other buildings.\textsuperscript{481} As a safety measure aimed at student protection, CCSD officials closed sixteen schools in the Westside and in North Las Vegas. Student bus service into and out of the area was suspended.\textsuperscript{482} Soon thereafter, School Board Trustee John Rhodes, asked Cram to look into the possibility of modifying the 20-year old CCSD desegregation plan.\textsuperscript{483}

Local papers reported that “School busing in Las Vegas was born out of a class-action lawsuit black parents filed in 1968 alleging [that] the district segregated black students and teachers in poorly maintained West Las Vegas elementary schools. In 1970, a federal judge ordered the district to desegregate under the direction of Dr. Kenny Guinn

\textsuperscript{478} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{479} Al Tobin, “Judge Rejects Black Educators’ Lawsuit,” \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 1 Nov 1991, p. 1B. The 1989 lawsuit alleged that the school district had a dual school system – one for blacks students and another for white students. The lawsuit also claimed that CCSD “intentionally discriminated against black employees and black students.”
\textsuperscript{480} The Rodney King riots of Los Angeles followed the acquittal of 4 police officers in the videotaped beating of a black motorist, Rodney King. Parts of LA were awash in violence, arson, looting and murder. In all, 52 people died as a result of the riots.
The desegregation plan stated that children living in the Westside area (Carey Ave on the North, Bonanza Rd on the South, Interstate 15 on the East and Rancho Drive on the West) were to be bussed for 11 years (1st through 5th and 7th through 12th grades) to other area schools. While in the 6th grade, Las Vegas area children who were not attending segregated schools were to be bussed to converted Westside elementary schools, now designated sixth-grade centers. The 1972 plan was opposed by many local residents, this opposition taking the form of a one day boycott of area schools by 17,000 white students. Ultimately, U.S. District Judge Bruce Thompson deemed the plan an “honest effort” and gave it his blessing. This desegregation plan remained in place for the next 20 years.

On March 31st, 1992, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its ruling in the *Freeman v. Pitts* case, concluding that in certain instances resegregation was tolerable. Justice Kennedy wrote, "Where resegregation is a product not of state action but of private choices, it does not have constitutional implications ..." The court was, at this time, reflecting the changing view of blacks with regard to busing, thus opening the door for CCSD to modify its desegregation policies. School Board Trustee Mark Schofield admitted, referring to the Rodney King outcome, that “[the riots] expedited bringing to fruition something we had debated on for years and [about which] no action had been...

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485 Not all 6th grade children in the Las Vegas Valley were bussed. Those children attending schools with at least 9% minority populations were exempted from the requirement.
488 US Supreme Court Case, *Freeman v. Pitts*, 503 U.S. 467
The riots, along with changing court rulings, offered a way to begin the process of recasting desegregation policy in the school district.

In May 1992, Cram told the school board and WAAK-UP members that it would not be possible to initiate major changes in policy by the fall of 1992. However, when black parents lobbied for a new elementary school on the Westside, the request was approved even though no plans had been made to build a school in that area. Funds that had been programmed for school construction in Laughlin were reallocated to the future Fitzgerald Elementary School. Fitzgerald Elementary would be the first new elementary school built in the area during the past 20 years. Black community activists gained another victory when the school district formed the Educational Opportunities Committee, which would advise district officials on how best to terminate the Westside busing process. A little over a month later the Educational Opportunities Committee recommended that the School Board end the busing of black children as a way to achieve desegregation. These recommendations from the Committee failed to appease the members of WAAK-UP who, with the assistance of Westside churches, staged a two-week boycott of District schools at the beginning of the 1992-93 school year.

It was during this time that an addendum to the Clark County teachers’ contracts for the 1991 through 1993 school years became an issue. As part of Governor Miller’s budget reductions in 1991, a 4% raise for state employees, teachers and university staff members was deferred pending the identification of additional funds. University regents overrode the governor’s deferral request and granted raises. Other state employees then filed suit to secure this raise. The situation for CCSD teachers was different as the result of an addendum to the 1991-93 union contract. The addendum stated that, “The 4 percent increase… will occur only if the state of Nevada does not act to reduce or defer its payments of basic per-pupil financial support to the district. If the state does act to reduce or defer such support during the term of the agreement, the 4 percent salary schedule increase shall be accordingly reduced.” As reported by the *Las Vegas Review Journal*, “Miller has asked them [school districts] to hold it [budget cuts] in reserve.” The plan was to introduce a bill when the Legislature convened in January to return the funds to the state. With budget cuts looming, the promised 4% raises would become an issue during Clark County Teacher contract negotiations.

In July 1992, Governor Miller asked the District to trim $9 million from its budget; at the same time $10 million allocation earmarked for 3rd grade class size reductions was withdrawn. Dr. Cram responded that such reductions would not be easy, but that CCSD could probably make deductions of that magnitude “…without

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498 Jon Ralston, “Local Teachers Contract Complicates Miller’s Budget Decisions,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 3 July 1992, p. 13B. This “escape clause” made it difficult to force budget cuts by school districts. However, the clause put teachers in Clark County in the position of having to bear the brunt of the cuts, while teachers in other Counties in Nevada would be unaffected.
layoffs and without major disruptions in the classrooms….we are gong to prepare
ourselves for the fact that this [reduction] is going to occur, but we’re going to hope
…that revenues pick up.”501 A few weeks later, the CCSD employee union asked the
school board to reopen negotiations on the current contract.502 Union negotiators
apparently felt that, if the State would not provide the funds needed for salary increases,
perhaps the School Board could be convinced to do so. These financial shortfalls,
together with union agitation for contract renegotiations, added complexity to local
efforts to improve the situation of Westside students.

At the beginning of the 1992-93 school year, Dr. Cram was concerned about the
1989 discrimination lawsuit filed against the district by black administrators. The original
court case had been dismissed in the Nevada courts, but had since been refilled and
would soon be heard by the 9th U.S. Circuit of Appeals503 One of the new demands of the
lawsuit would be to allow no more than 29% of any school’s student population be
composed of minority students.504 If the lawsuit were to be won by the black
administrators, even more busing would result. 505

WAAK-UP leaders, having concluded that the District was not responding to their
demands for change, threatened to conduct a second school boycott on the CCSD’s

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501 Ibid. During this time Board President Lois Tarkanian suggested publicly that someone from “outside
the district can be brought in to evaluate programs and recommend cuts….Sometimes we in education lose
sight of business practices.”
503 John Gallant and Marian Green, “Busing: On the Road to Change Slow, Cautious Process Likely,” Las
504 Current law dictated that a school could have up to 60% minority students and still be in compliance.
505 John Gallant and Marian Green, “Busing: On the Road to Change Slow, Cautious Process Likely,” Las
‘count day’.\textsuperscript{506} The boycott was canceled when the school board assured the group that, at a future school board meeting they would consider recommendations by the Educational Opportunities Committee on suspending the busing of West Las Vegas students in grades 1-5.\textsuperscript{507} Cram was asked by the Trustees at the September board meeting in September to prepare a plan to end busing.\textsuperscript{508} In late October 1992, the first ‘resegregation’ plan was presented to the school board, detailing major changes in the then-current desegregation policy. The plan, named Prime 6, would return grades 1\textsuperscript{st} – 3\textsuperscript{rd} to six 6\textsuperscript{th} grade center schools, while a seventh school would become a “full-service” elementary school featuring a Pre-K program. At the time the Prime 6 proposal was presented, it appeared that black parents were pleased with the plan, one that would affect 2800 black students. As part of the plan, parents were to retain the option to bus their children to schools located outside of West Las Vegas.\textsuperscript{509}

During the month of November, WAAK-UP launched a public attack on the Prime 6 proposal. Two public meetings were held during a single week, at the first of which Westside parents and WAAK-UP leaders told school board members that 4\textsuperscript{th} and 5\textsuperscript{th} grades should be added the Prime 6 plan.\textsuperscript{510} At the second meeting black students told school trustees that they were being discriminated against on the school busses by being forced to sit in back while white students could sit wherever they wanted.\textsuperscript{511} A week

\textsuperscript{506} John Gallant, “Black Group Threatening New Boycott,” \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 17 September 1992, p. 1A. Count day is important to the district in that it is by the accurate determination of attendance on that particular day that a decision is made about the size of state per pupil funding allocations.


later, Dr. Cram released a revised Prime 6 plan which directed that the 4th and 5th graders be slowly integrated into the current sixth-grade centers. Cram was quoted as saying, “It sounds kind of corny, but this was kind of democracy in action. From the beginning we wanted to do what we felt was in the best interests of the students. I don’t think there is any argument over what our goal was. The question was how far it would go and how soon.”512

In a historic vote held on December 1st, 1992 the school board enacted the Prime 6 plan, one which would end the bussing practices of the past 20 years. One critic of this plan was, interestingly enough, the teachers’ union. The union, which was at that time conducting negotiations with the school district, expressed concerns about the cost of the Prime 6 plan. Cram told the board during the Dec. 1st meeting that the cost of Prime 6 would be around $1.2 million over two years. The teachers’ union representative then threatened a lawsuit against the district if the Prime 6 plan were to be implemented as outlined, citing the ‘hidden’ costs as their reason.513 Later in the week District officials released a substantially different expenditure projection on the Prime 6 plan, assigning a cost of $4.6 million.514 At the beginning of the new 1993-94 school year, the Prime 6 plan was officially implemented. Fifty percent of all Westside parents elected to enroll their children in neighborhood schools

The next major challenge Cram confronted related to dollars to support student enrollment growth. Events occurring in early 1993 caused Cram to be labeled the “school

bond poster boy” of the Clark County School District.\textsuperscript{515} In spring of 1993, Don Schlesinger, a member of the Clark County Commission, negotiated a compromise with local home builders and gaming executives concerning impact fee legislation that was to be considered by the state legislature later in the year.\textsuperscript{516} During that negotiation, schools were removed from the fee list which included money for police and fire stations, parks, roads, and libraries.\textsuperscript{517} Cram jokingly dramatized the plight of the local schools by telling County Commissioners that “in the past hour the district had [sic] spotted crossing the state line six elementary schoolchildren in a brown Dodge Van, three high school students in a Toyota Celica and one kindergartner on the back of a motorcycle, all of whom would need seats in Clark County classrooms.”\textsuperscript{518} Even though joking, Cram was seriously seeking to negotiate a portion of the revenues generated by the building boom so that area children would have proper schools to attend. With the $675 million from the 1988 school bond fund almost exhausted, Cram needed to find ways to generate money for new school construction.

In early fall, the teacher’s union began to air TV ad’s aimed at embarrassing the School District and Board into quickly ending the then-ongoing contract dispute and giving teachers a raise. The teachers sought a 5\% salary increase, while the school board was offering .5\%, \textsuperscript{519} an offer later later increased to 1.25\%.\textsuperscript{520} In November, with

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{516} Jon Ralston “School Chief and Teachers Union Will Oppose Impact Fee Plan,” \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 18 March 1993, p. 11B.
\item \textsuperscript{517} Impact fees are “a municipal assessment against new residential, industrial or commercial development projects to compensate for the added costs of public services generated by new construction.” As stated in the web site: \url{www.rubloff.com/inside/glossary.html}
\item \textsuperscript{518} Mary Hynes, “Schools Seek Share of Impact Fees,” \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 7 April 1993, p. 1B.
\item \textsuperscript{519} Natalie Patton, “Teachers Cite Fund Variations,” \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 15 Sept 1993, p. 1B.
\item \textsuperscript{520} Marian Green, “School Board to Consider Teacher Raises,” \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 13 October 1993, p. 1B.
\end{itemize}
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contract negotiations still underway, Gov. Bob Miller asked Dr. Cram in a telephone conversation if Cram would like to have someone from his office meet with the two parties. Cram declined the offer, indicating his confidence that a negotiated settlement could be reached without engaging in arbitration.521

In December, negotiations were concluded, with the district giving teachers 3% raises for the 1993-94 school year and the first half of the 1994-95 school year, and with an additional 2% raise during the second half of the 1994-95 school year. Estimates put the cost of these raises and other benefits at $37 million.522

In January 1994, Cram presented the school board a Prime 6 expansion plan. Due to the success of the program to date, Cram felt that the speed of reorganization could be accelerated, with all 6th graders in the district being assigned either to middle or junior high schools. While this reassignment of 6th graders throughout the district threatened to add to overcrowding at several Valley middle and junior high schools, the board of trustees approved the plan.523

As the 1994-95 school year began, three new Westside schools were opened. All elementary school age children living on the Westside now had the opportunity to attend a neighborhood school, while seven middle and junior high schools were either on double or year-round sessions. These overcrowded conditions were in direct contrast to the

521 Natalie Patton and Ed Vogel, “Miller Rejects Special Session on School Funding,” Las Vegas Review-Journal, 17 November 1993, p. 2C. It may have been that Miller was worried that Cram would give teachers the 4% he himself had promised but had not delivered to Nevada school teachers.
Prime 6 schools, which had several hundred of empty seats.\footnote{Natalie Patton, “Big Changes in Place for Start of School Year,” \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 21 August 1994, p. 1B.} Clearly the implementation of Prime 6 had generated some enrollment disparities.

Another immediate challenge was the passage of the 1994 bond issue. This was to be the first of three such bond campaigns that Dr. Cram would implement. His success in 1994 was a harbinger of successes to follow in securing additional dollars for school construction.

In 1994 the bond initiative was divided into two portions: part A, involving a tax-neutral or “tax-freeze” component from the 1988 bond program which was designed to generate $605 million and part B; involving an increase in property taxes to secure an additional $300 million.\footnote{Albert Johns, “Cram’s Talks Enlighten Seniors on Importance of School Bond Issues,” \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 16 October 1994, p. 7J.} Among the opponents of the bond initiative was WAAK-UP. This vocal Westside group cited overcrowding in middle schools as their reason for not supporting the bond initiative\footnote{Natalie Patton, “County School Bond Election Debated,” \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 14 August 1994, p. 1A.} – somewhat surprising since it was the group’s support of Prime 6 that had caused much of the overcrowding. Other opponents of the bond issue cited the fact that only 57 of 77 schools which were to have been built with funds from the 1988 bond initiative had been constructed. Dr. Cram pointed out repeatedly that 85 percent of the promised student spaces had been constructed as well as 94% of the planned school square footage.\footnote{Natalie Patton, “Stakes High Over School Bond Votes,” \textit{Las Vegas Review-Journal}, 17 October 1994, p. 1B.} Instead of building small schools, a number of larger schools had been constructed. Opponents of the bond initiative virtually silenced by the School Growth Committee, which raised $350,000 in support of the 1994 bond issue. A large percentage of that money came from local developers and builders who had escaped...
paying for schools through the impact fee increase in 1993. In the November voting, Part A passed and CCSD received $605 million to build schools.

In January 1995, Gov. Miller, as part of his state budget request, asked the state legislature to fund the 3% teacher salary increases that CCSD had authorized during the 1994 contract negotiations, but not to fund the additional 2% raise included in that package. School board members and Superintendent Cram told reporters that an ad issued in September 1993 by Gov. Miller, wherein he urged “fair financial treatment for unselfish, dedicated educators,” was one of the reasons the teachers had been given the 3 and 2 percent raises. Governor Miller was then quoted in the press as saying, “Covering the 2 percent increase would shortchange taxpayers and send a message that the state will bail out school districts that make promises they cannot keep.” This snub from Miller would cause a $10 million budget shortfall for the school district. As reported in the Las Vegas Review-Journal in March 1995, “Miller and 29 state lawmakers signed the ad despite their refusal during the 1993 Legislature to give school districts money to negotiate pay raises.” It’s possible that Cram remembered a statement by Miller, made to school districts in Jan, 1992, in which he stated that if the districts helped him (Miller) out of the budget crisis he (Miller) would remember the favor in 1993. Miller may have forgotten. Cram apparently took the statement “to heart”.

528 Ibid.
530 Ibid.
Public sparring continued between Cram and Miller as Miller attempted to negotiate 3rd grade class size reduction funds in the legislature. In April 1995, Miller and Cram ended their dispute when Gov. Miller pledged $33 million in additional funds. With Cram now siding with Miller the two were able to convince the state legislature to provide $7 million for 3rd grade class-size reductions, $26 million for the schools budget and $34 million for one-time funds.

While the Legislature was deciding upon funding for the District, WAAK-UP led by Marzette Lewis, met with Cram and a federal mediator to discuss the district’s history of treating blacks unfairly. One of the issues the group was most unhappy about, as mentioned earlier, was that no middle or High Schools had been built on the Westside. Even though the group had campaigned against the 1994 bond issue and had led the fight to end busing, which led to the Prime 6 program, Lewis demanded the construction of a middle school on Martin Luther King Blvd in settlement of the civil rights complaint. In September 1995, school board trustees voted to build West Middle School, the first middle school constructed on the Westside.

In mid-1996 a controversy arose involving the administration of CCSD’s special education programs. The controversy was largely fueled by the preparation and release of an audit report prepared two outside consultants on “…how resources and finances were

allocated in the Special Student Services Division.”539 Several members of the board of school trustees became heavily involved in the matter. Unhappy with the manner in which Superintendent Cram was handling disclosures of alleged misconduct and inefficiency included in the report, board members Lois Tarkanian and Jeffrey Burr became vocal in their complaints. Tarkanian said that she was “…disappointed in his [Cram’s] feeling that there is nothing wrong because there definitely are some very specific procedures and regulations that were broken.” Burr said “I’m a little concerned that something this serious is being treated so lightly by the administration.”540 This prompted rejoinders from Dr. Cram and other administrators, along with charges by the Clark County Association of School Administrators (CCASA) that members of the board of trustees were seeking to interfere with the day to day administrative operations of CCSD and were guilty of overstepping the bounds of proper conduct.541

The debate became sufficiently heated that CCASA brought a civil suit against the board and its legal counsel. Pro forma, Dr. Cram was also named a respondent, although his name and those of all other board members except Dr. Tarkanian were subsequently dropped from the suit. The case was heard in February 1999, following more than two years of legal wrangling. In it Dr. Tarkanian was “…accused of overstepping the boundaries of a School Board member by interfering with the hiring and placement of district employees, delaying budget items to further personal agendas, and cronyism.”542

539 David Rostetter and Edward Sontag were the external consultants for the audit process.
Martin Kravitz, the attorney for the School Administrators’ union and former school board member, was quoted as saying “The point is, board members cannot discipline staff. The superintendent can investigate conduct and discipline staff. Dr. Cram investigated the allegations and found no wrongdoing. But that wasn’t good enough for them [the board], so they directed Johnnie Rawlinson [the board attorney] to investigate. The trustees and their designated agent are not to act as administrators.”

Allin Chandler, Executive Director of CCASA, said that “Dr. Tarkanian has overstepped the boundaries of policy making and has attempted to administer. If board members…want to become school administrators, then perhaps they should apply for the jobs.”

In February, 1999 the School District Administrators’ Union’s lawsuit against Tarkanian commenced. As stated earlier, the lawsuit had originally listed as defendants all seven board members, along with Cram and Rawlinson, but by 1999 only Tarkanian remained. During the hearings Cram gave damaging testimony against Tarkanian. In March 1999 the lawsuit concluded with each side claiming victory. The upshot of this suit was that, while neither side admitted any wrongdoing, the bounds of appropriate action on the part of school trustees were set, as follows: “[Trustees] are empowered to set policy and provide oversight on district programs but they are not empowered to issue directives on personnel matters.” This outcome helped to set a more appropriate and positive tone for future Superintendent-School Board relations in Clark County.

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Despite the controversy surrounding the relationship between the school board and Cram, the school trustees voted him a contract extension that would last until Summer 2000.547 During the ongoing public sparring between Tarkanian and Cram an important vote took place. The “tax freeze” as it was called by opponents involved the continued implementation of the bond measure passed in 1996. The then-current property tax rate of 55 cents per $100 of assessed value would continue in force until 2008, generating $2.5 billion in construction funds for CCSD, along with another $1 billion derived from a real estate transfer tax and the hotel room tax.548 The “tax freeze” bond initiative passed in November of 1998.549

In January 1999, Dr. Cram announced his retirement in 2000 upon the expiration of his contract. This allowed the school board almost a year and a half to find a suitable replacement. The press and the school board focused their attention on the search for the next superintendent while Cram quietly lobbied newly elected Nevada Governor Kenny Guinn for budget increases.550 In addition to the difficulties associated with garnering sufficient budget funding through negotiations with the legislature, Dr. Cram was faced with a teacher shortage of daunting proportions.551

In the year 2000 the College of Education, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, produced slightly more than 600 teaching graduates annually while, at the same time,
CCSD needed to fill approximately 1500 slots. These large numbers were predicated upon resignations, retirements and positions created by new building construction. Dr. Cram informed legislators of “rough seas ahead” if larger numbers of teachers could not be attracted to the district. His predictions did of difficulties did, in fact, come to pass.

Although the close of Superintendent Cram’s term of office was low key and, perhaps, overshadowed by the public attention directed toward the search for his replacement, the press and knowledgeable persons did pay heartfelt tribute to CCSD’s longest-serving leader. Some interesting facts concerning Cram’s tenure were reported by the Las Vegas Review-Journal in July 2000. “Clark County School District went from being the 17th largest public school system in 1989, with 111,000 students, to taking the number six spot this year. In the 1999-2000 school year, Clark County’s enrollment of 217,000 students surpassed the number of public school children in the entire state of Hawaii. The district now [2000] has 235 schools, up from 133 in 1989, when Cram took charge. The district’s general fund budget - $405 million 11 years ago- has doubled to $1.1 billion.”

Shortly after Dr. Cram announced his retirement in 1998, he was asked by Brian Greenspun to accept a position that was specifically created for Cram. Greenspun, the editor of the Las Vegas Sun, asked Cram to become the director of educational and community initiatives with the Greenspun Family Foundation. Cram announced his future plans with the Greenspun Foundation at a Clark County Commission meeting.

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The Greenspun Family Foundation was founded in 1989 with the intention of pursuing the Greenspun’s family's philanthropic endeavors. It now supports both the Greenspun College of Urban Affairs and the Hank Greenspun School of Communications at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, as well as many other community initiatives.
where he was honored for his years of service to the Clark County community. During the meeting, Commissioner Bruce Woodbury said, “The son of a [school] custodian has risen to great heights. We are all deeply grateful for his outstanding leadership ability in one of the most challenging jobs known to man.”

Cram was also recognized in the U.S. House of Representatives by Congresswoman Shelly Berkley. She said, “Dr. Cram should be very proud of his accomplishments, as he has been successful in achieving his great challenge to meet the growth needs of the 8th largest school district in the county. His commitment and dedication is [sic] unmatched, and will be truly missed. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Cram on behalf of the Clark County community, and wish him every success in future endeavors.”

In August of 2000, Brian Cram was further honored by having a Middle school named for himself and his late wife Teri. By coincidence, the first Principal at Cram Middle School, June Gunderson, had been a cheerleader at Clark High School when Dr. Cram was Principal. At the school dedication Gunderson told the audience, “He [Cram] said [to me] ‘you were my cheerleader, now I’m yours.’” Cram Middle School serves as a permanent reminder of the Cram administration and legacy, one that is both fitting and proper given the contributions and impact of this pioneering educator.

555 Ibid.
558 Ibid.
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