

Clark County School District

Nevada

Superintendent: Walt Rulffes and Agustin Orci, acting superintendents

Primary contact: Susan Wright, Title I director*

280,840 students, preK-12, urban

District Description

The Clark County School District covers a large portion of the state of Nevada, including the city of Las Vegas. The area's population exceeds 1 million and includes more than half the inhabitants of Nevada. Clustered around rapidly growing Las Vegas, the school district is expanding at a rate of 6,000 to 10,000 additional students per year.

Key Findings

- In 2004-05, the first year Nevada issued report cards for schools and the first year for which test scores are comparable for all grade levels, Clark County state test scores went up slightly in math and in reading in all grades except 5th. Though the achievement gap between subgroups and the general student population has been slowly and steadily decreasing, the performance of student subgroups continues to keep the district from meeting adequate yearly progress targets.
- In 2004-05, Clark County had difficulty with supplemental educational service (SES) providers who frequently signed up the same students for services more than once. In addition, some students signed with multiple providers. To combat these problems, the district will provide parents with an official label for the SES contracts. While initially an added expense, this system will cost less than sorting out multiple contracts and invoices, district officials said.
- The state of Nevada added regulations for SES providers, which the district said it hoped would make SES run more smoothly. For 2005-06, the state has asked providers to complete a vendor profile, sign an assurance page, and agree to a set of protocols. Under these protocols, vendors give the district and parents more information about services, administer pre- and post-tests, refrain from raising student fees during the year, and start tutoring within four weeks of signing a contract with a parent.
- Reading First has had a strong impact on the district. All Reading First elementary schools hired an additional literacy specialist. In addition, each region within the district also has the assistance of a Reading First reading coach who provides professional development to all the Reading First elementary schools' literacy specialists. Select state and district professional development funded by Reading First is open to any school or teacher.

*The other contact for this case study is Jennifer Varrato, coordinator of K-12 literacy.

- The district anticipated that it will have difficulty meeting No Child Left Behind’s 2006 deadline requiring all teachers to be “highly qualified.” Currently, 71% of core teachers are highly qualified. Hiring teachers who meet the NCLB qualifications has proved difficult because Clark County is growing so rapidly. The district added 12 schools and hired about 2,250 teachers for the 2005-06 school year, including many from outside Nevada. Even if these teachers are certified and experienced in their home states, they may not complete the paperwork and fees in time to get certified in Nevada and meet the definition of highly qualified.

Overall Impact of NCLB

Officials from the Clark County School District in Nevada said NCLB has pushed them toward achieving more, but that NCLB is not the only reason student achievement has improved. “I think what NCLB does is make us focus on subgroups, and that was a good thing,” said Susan Wright, director of Title I. “But we made gains before NCLB, and we’ll make gains after.”

NCLB and Student Achievement

In Clark County, changes in the percentages of students passing state tests have been relatively small, based on information from the state Web site. In the past year, reading passing rates went up by less than 1 percentage point in 3rd grade and 8th grade. In 5th grade, the only other elementary grade tested, passing rates declined by about 1 percentage point. Passing rates were high enough for this group of students to meet AYP targets anyway. Math passing rates went up in 3rd grade, 5th grade, and 8th grade by about 1 to 6 percentage points. Based on the test scores of the general population, in fact, Clark County met state testing goals for all grades and subjects except for 8th grade reading. Subgroups other than white and Asian, however, consistently failed math and reading goals. For example, in 2004-05 testing in 3rd grade reading, black students’ passing rates were 27 percentage points below their white peers; Latino students were 31 percentage points below. The gap declined very slightly from the previous year. This gap between ethnic groups occurred in the state as a whole as well.

The lowest achieving subgroups in Clark County were typically students with disabilities and English language learners. For example, according to the state Web site, on the 3rd grade reading test in 2004-05, students with disabilities’ passing rates and English language learners’ passing rates were about 40 percentage points lower than those of the white subgroup. These students made gains in every grade tested, except ELL students in 5th grade. Achievement gaps for these groups have also narrowed over time.

Of the achievement of these students, Wright said, “I think we’re seeing a lot of growth and gains. It’s very positive for us.” Despite these successes, the passing rates for these students were not high enough to meet state targets, either in Clark County or in the state as a whole. “There may always be a group of students that doesn’t do well on tests,” Wright noted.

Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL AYP STATUS

Despite some growth in passing rates and some narrowing of the achievement gap, the performance of subgroups placed Clark County in year 2 of improvement as a district. “Our district has made progress; we just haven’t made AYP,” Wright said. The state targets went up by 10 percentage points from 2003-04 to 2004-05 in order to push districts toward meeting NCLB’s required goal of 100% of students performing at proficient levels by 2014. This increase in the goal, Wright said, masked the improvement made by many schools throughout the district. Some schools, she explained, would have made adequate yearly progress based on 2003-04 targets.

Based on 2004-05 testing, 206 of Clark County's 315 schools failed to make AYP goals, and 116 were identified by the state as in need of improvement because they had failed to make AYP for two years in a row. An additional 9 schools were placed "on hold" because they met AYP goals based on 2004-05 testing but had failed the two previous years. While reasons for failing to make AYP varied by school, Wright said that the most common reason was the performance of subgroups. Of the 116 schools identified by the state for improvement, only 33 are Title I schools that will have to implement changes based on NCLB.

DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

Each of the five regions in Clark County has an outside facilitator who works with schools identified for improvement. This facilitator assists in writing a school improvement plan and provides professional development for principals. The facilitators come from a state-approved list and are paid \$10,000 from the school's Title I funds.

In addition, the Title I office has hired two data coordinators who meet with schools in need of improvement to help them analyze their testing data. These coordinators work directly with teachers, who then use this information to plan instruction, Wright explained.

Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction

GENERAL CHANGES IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Partly in response to the pressures of NCLB, Clark County has encouraged schools to designate grade-level meeting times. The goal is to have grade-level teams meet weekly. In many schools in need of improvement, Wright said, these meetings are driving changes in curriculum and instruction. "Teachers are asking each other, 'What does our data show? What direction do we need to go?'" Wright explained. While Clark County, like most districts, does have a curriculum aligned with state standards and has district-adopted reading texts, crucial decisions about day-to-day instruction are in the hands of teachers, Wright said. The district is working to make sure teachers have the data they need to make these decisions and the skills they need to analyze the data.

CHANGES IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION FOR SUBGROUPS

Wright attributes the success of students with disabilities in large part to the district's inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classes as much as possible. This move started before NCLB, Wright said, but has continued and matured during NCLB. While students with disabilities do not yet meet AYP targets, their achievement has consistently gone up in all grades tested.

English Language Learners

Clark County receives Title III funding for English language learners, the majority of whom speak Spanish. The district continues to work to reach these students, who typically have difficulty meeting AYP targets. Despite progress made by ELL students in Clark County, the arrival of new immigrants each year adds to the pressure to focus on this subgroup. While the district tries as much as possible to hire bilingual teachers, more and more teachers have become involved in helping English language learners, district officials said. "What I'm seeing is that more teachers are being TESOL endorsed," Wright said, explaining that this endorsement for teaching English as a second or other language gives teachers training on how to adapt instruction to ELL students.

In addition, the district offers teachers and administrators a variety of classes in ELL instruction. In "Reality Spanish," for example, teachers, principals, and administrators learn Spanish vocabulary needed for essential day-to-day communication within the school and for communication with parents about their children.

NCLB School Choice

In 2004-05, Clark County offered choice in 30 schools under NCLB. In these schools about 21,000 students were eligible to change schools. Students were given the choice of their home school plus two additional schools, Wright said. The district tried to offer schools nearby to cut down on travel time, but as Wright explained, “They have to go to schools that are not failing, and 99% of the time that school’s not in the neighborhood.” Commute times were typically 20 to 45 minutes, Wright estimated.

Only 780 students or 4% requested transfers under NCLB in 2004-05. “I think most parents would like their children to go to neighborhood schools,” Wright said, noting that parents may be more comfortable having their children in schools where they already know the teachers and the other students.

For 2005-06, the number of schools offering choice increased to 33. In these schools, about 27,000 students were eligible for choice. Wright anticipated that the percentage of students requesting transfers would be similar to the 4% in 2004-05.

Supplemental Educational Services

In 2004-05, because the Clark County district was identified for improvement, it was no longer allowed to provide supplemental educational services. Other providers, including a foundation created by the district’s teachers’ union, have stepped in to fill the void, offering tutoring to eligible students in 18 Clark County schools. Other large private providers included Club Z, Sylvan, Education Station, and Newton Learning.

During the 2004-05 school year, the district had numerous problems with providers, record keeping, and invoicing, due to some vendor’s overzealous attempts to sign up as many students as possible. The district held three fairs to introduce the providers to the parents; however, some providers were not satisfied with the turnout. These providers started going door-to-door signing up students for tutoring whether or not the students were actually eligible and whether or not the students had already signed up for services, Wright said. At one point, the district had to ask police to escort uninvited providers from a school where they were soliciting parents, Wright reported. In many cases, providers signed the same students two or three times and, in some cases, parents signed with two or three providers. This created additional work for district staff members, who had to match letters of intent to contracts. Only about 10% of eligible students actually participated in tutoring, and many services didn’t start until after January, Wright said.

For 2005-06, both the state and the district made changes to try to avoid the snafus of last year. Clark County printed an official label for each student eligible for supplemental educational services. All contracts for tutoring must have an official label and a parent signature in order to be valid. Parents received packets describing each vendor and the sign-up process, and had their first opportunity to pick up their official label and sign up with a vendor at one of eight vendor fairs held in the district early in the fall. Labels that were not picked up at one of the fairs were sent to the student’s school and made available to parents. “Hopefully, we won’t get duplications of contracts,” Wright said. “This should also stop door-to-door solicitation.” While Wright said creating the label system was an additional cost to the district, it has proved to be less expensive than the cost of sorting out the contracts and fees last year.

The state has also placed more restrictions on vendors. In 2004-05, vendors had to provide more information so that parents could make better decisions about who they want to provide tutoring. Vendors had to state the pupil-teacher ratio in their program, the number of hours of instruction, and their tutors’ qualifications. The state also stipulated that vendors cannot increase the amount of money they charge for tutoring during the year. This was a problem statewide last year that made it difficult for districts to distribute Title I funds accurately. Vendors also have to provide the district with pre- and post-test information so that the state and districts can monitor

the effectiveness of tutoring. Finally, in an effort to ensure that tutoring starts in a timely fashion, the state required vendors to begin tutoring no later than four weeks after enrolling participants.

The district appreciated these state efforts, Wright said, but added that the language “may not have sounded as strong as I would have liked it.” In one attempt to firm up the regulations, Clark County requires vendors to start tutoring by mid-October and stop signing students up after that point.

Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

As a rapidly growing district, Clark County needed 2,250 new teachers for the 2005-06 school year. Filling these positions with teachers who meet NCLB’s definition of “highly qualified” is very difficult, Wright said. Shortages are especially acute in middle and high school math and science and in special education and bilingual education.

As a result, Clark County often recruits teachers from out of state. For example, after Hurricane Katrina, the district set up teacher interviews in Dallas, TX, Shreveport, LA, and Jackson, MS, in hopes of recruiting displaced teachers for the district’s high-need areas, including special education and secondary math and science. While out-of-state recruitment efforts like this often provide good teachers, Wright said they sometimes do not result in “highly qualified” teachers. Even if these teachers are certified and experienced in their home state, they may have difficulty meeting the definition of highly qualified in Nevada, Wright reported.

Transferring the certification requires paperwork and fees. “It’s a catch-22,” said Wright. She explained that sometimes young teachers do not want to pay the fees until they know they have a job, but if they wait to pay the fees they may not get certified before the official count of highly qualified teachers.

Wright anticipates that Clark County will have difficulty meeting NCLB’s 2006 deadline for having 100% highly qualified teachers, despite continued efforts. When the deadline comes, she said, “I don’t think we’re going to close down schools. Life must go on.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In addition to professional development for ELL teachers, Clark County has focused on providing professional development on data analysis. Each of the five regions has a person who works with schools on analyzing data. The Title I office has two additional positions focusing on professional development involving data-based decision making, such as using data to group students of like ability for instruction and to determine the sequence of lessons to be taught to the groups. This helps teachers get specific information about their school and students, Wright explained.

The district also has literacy specialists at each elementary school who model lessons, help with assessment, and provide professional development at all elementary schools. The work of these literacy specialists is enhanced by professional development through Reading First. Middle and high schools have the opportunity to hire “learning strategists.” These strategists are similar to the district’s literacy specialists but they focus on helping teachers implement best teaching practices across the curriculum, said Jennifer Varatto, coordinator of K-12 literacy.

In general, Wright said that Clark County has always provided professional development for teachers. As a result of NCLB, which requires schools in improvement to set aside 10% of Title I funds for professional development, she said, “At Title I schools you’re seeing even more.”

Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support

For the 2005-06 school year, 98% of Clark County’s paraprofessionals met the definition of highly qualified. This was up from 87% at the end of 2004-05. While some paraprofessionals took classes to become highly qualified, the rest who did not meet the state’s definition were moved into non-

Title I positions. Other highly qualified paraprofessionals from non-Title I positions typically took over the Title I positions. Because Clark County is such a large district with a mix of Title I and non-Title I schools, Wright said switching positions was usually possible and not too disruptive. She added, however, that timing was important. “We didn’t want a big movement of people during the school year,” she said, explaining why most positions shifted before the NCLB deadline.

Funding and Capacity Issues

Clark County struggles to keep pace with its growing enrollment. In 2005-06, this struggle included opening 12 new schools and filling these schools with new teachers. Funding and capacity seem to be keeping pace with the growth. “We do what we can with what we have,” Wright said.

District Title I funding grew from \$48 million in 2004-05 to \$51 million in 2005-06. The number of Title I schools increased from 48 in 2004-05 to 58 in 2005-06. This increase is due to students moving into the district. The state as a whole is also growing, and this growth means more funding for Clark County. So far, funding and student needs seem to be growing at comparable rates, Wright said.

Reading First

Clark County received its Reading First grant in 2004. The grant provides about \$4.4 million per year. Reading First fit well with the district’s existing reading materials. The district had already adopted Harcourt Trophies and Scott Foresman as texts, which fit the goals of Reading First, Varrato said. Schools were allowed to adopt either the district-approved text or one of the reading texts from the state recommended list. All but one elementary school is currently using a district-adopted text, Varrato said, explaining that the school not using the district text has adopted Voyager, which is a more prescriptive reading text found on the state remediation list.

Implementing the 90-minute reading block required by the state of Nevada for Reading First schools was more of a change, Varatto said. Prior to Reading First, the district required 140 minutes of English/language arts spread across the entire day. Of teachers’ adjustments to the new schedule, Varatto said, “I think they’re fine. Teachers are provided with ongoing professional development, which includes modeling and coaching on how to focus their instruction and pacing to adapt to the 90-minute block.” Some reading instruction has had to be embedded in science and social studies lessons, Varatto explained. Scheduling 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading time has been challenging, Varatto said, but added that “CCSD has very experienced and talented site administrators that are able to address this issue.”

Professional development in the district has also been influenced by Reading First, and this influence reaches beyond just Reading First schools. The district’s Reading First grant allowed Reading First schools to hire an additional Reading First literacy specialist, who works in conjunction with the school’s district literacy specialist. The district also hired Reading First coaches for each of the district’s five regions. These regional coaches provide professional development for the Reading First literacy specialist and the district’s literacy specialists.

This arrangement has worked well with one exception, Varatto said. In Clark County’s initial grant, the district planned to hire substitutes to relieve teachers in Reading First schools so that they could observe a literacy coach modeling instruction in other classrooms. Last year, however, there was a substitute shortage in the district, so there simply weren’t enough substitutes to implement the program. In response, the district began to have regular literacy coaches and Reading First literacy specialists work in teams, Varatto explained. One specialist would relieve a classroom teacher, while that classroom teacher went to another classroom to observe the other specialist model a lesson. This ensured that teachers could observe theory turned into practice in a variety of classrooms.

Given the full school day and lack of substitutes, Varatto said much of the other professional development occurs outside the school day, and teachers are paid for their time. Reading First reading coaches offer professional development on a variety of reading topics twice a week after school. The district will also host two “mini-conferences” with keynote speakers and breakout sessions for grade-level teams.

The state supports professional development in several ways. Each month, principals of Reading First schools meet to discuss the program. All teachers in Reading First schools must attend a weekend-long “Reading Academy” hosted by the state within the first two years of the district’s grant. In addition, a local university offers Reading First-funded training for interested teachers and schools.

Data File—Clark County School District

Location: Nevada

Type: Urban

Number of Schools:

Total: 315

Elementary: 187

Middle/junior high: 69

High schools: 59

Number of Title I schools: 58

Student Enrollment and Demographics

Total number of students: 280,840

White: 41.2%

Latino: 35.4%

African American: 14.4%

Asian: 8.2%

American Indian: 0.8%

Low-income students: 44.4%

English language learners: 21.0%

Students with disabilities: 10.8%

Teachers

Total number of teachers: 18,953

Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 71%†

Paraprofessionals

Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals: 404

Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 98%

Total Number That Did Not Make AYP Based on 2004-05 Testing

Title I and non-Title I schools that did not make AYP,
including those in improvement, restructuring, or corrective action: 206

†This is the percentage of core teachers who are highly qualified.

Number of Title I Schools in Improvement, Restructuring, or Corrective Action

	Based on 2003-04 testing	Based on 2004-05 testing
Schools in year 1 of improvement (Did not make AYP for two consecutive years):	12	20
Schools in year 2 of improvement (Did not make AYP for three consecutive years):	18	13
Schools in corrective action (Did not make AYP for four consecutive years):	0	0
Schools in restructuring (Did not make AYP for five or more consecutive years):	0	0

Number of Schools Offering Choice and/or SES

	Based on 2003-04 testing	Based on 2004-05 testing
Schools offering choice <i>only</i> :	12	20
Schools in year 1 of school improvement offering SES <i>instead</i> of choice:	0	0
Schools offering SES <i>and</i> choice:	18	13