

## State of the System Address

### Jim Rogers – Chancellor - Nevada System of Higher Education

I come to you as Chancellor of the Nevada System of Higher Education to share with you the fourth State of the System Address. Let me give you an update on where higher education is in Nevada and where the State is headed as we go forward. I hope my remarks will be a call to action for us all so that we can make Nevada a great home for our children and grandchildren.

#### WHERE ARE WE NOW?

First, the good news. The Nevada Health Sciences System is a reality. Let me repeat that: the Nevada Health Sciences System is a reality. It exists. Thanks to Former Governor Kenny Guinn, the 2007 legislature, and Governor Jim Gibbons, funds have been set aside to construct new and remodel older buildings that will improve the quality of health care in Nevada. You will soon begin to see refurbishing of existing buildings, as well as construction of new ones rising from the ground in both Las Vegas and Reno. We will create quality venues for quality medical care and state of the art research. We must raise substantial funds from private sources to make this a reality, but the building blocks are in place. This also is the first major step in bringing the eight institutions together to use their combined resources. The eight institutions working separately have little hope of rising above mediocrity. Together, as the only higher education system in the United States that is governed by one central authority, the System as a System can become competitive with the best. Two essential ingredients, other than those of the institutions themselves, are a centralized authority with a strong Chancellor as the sole chief executive officer to keep all the institutions working as one system. The second is a board of regents with outstanding leadership, like that of Chair Mike Wixom, that stays focused on setting policy that thoughtfully and carefully develops a longtime strategy whose only purpose is to educate Nevada's students.

All of our 8 higher education institutions through their already existing 150 related health programs, will be expanding to create more nurses, medical doctors and other specialty health care providers and more medical fellowships in badly needed specialty areas. A growing partnership among physicians, hospitals and researchers WILL SIGNIFICANTLY raise the quality of medical care throughout Nevada.

We are woefully short in having enough health care providers in Nevada. We rank 45<sup>th</sup> in doctors and 49<sup>th</sup> for nurses. For a variety of reasons, Nevadans are more likely to become ill and face serious illness. Nevada is currently ranked 39<sup>th</sup> in state health status. It is a travesty to be in this position. It is my hope that during my lifetime we will see Nevadans, who need excellent medical treatment, choose to stay in Nevada for medical care rather than rush off to California or Texas. Our citizens are entitled to the best in high quality health care. The first step was a big step, but we have taken it.

The Nevada legislature stepped forward as our partner to fund not only the Health Sciences System buildings, but also the completion of ten buildings already under construction. The

funding of our operating budget was raised to 85.5%, one percent higher than last session (still not enough) and new computer technology was funded to help students register for classes, apply for financial aid, get advice, and do all the other tasks students must do. In a session in which the Legislature had limited resources, the Legislature did all it could to support us and deserves our gratitude for its continuing dedication to higher education.

We have GOOD institutions but we need to become EXCELLENT INSTITUTIONS. We have two new presidents: Dr. David Ashley at UNLV and Dr. Milton Glick at UNR. We have two presidential searches underway: at the College of Southern Nevada and at Truckee Meadows Community College. The presidents we have and the ones we will soon have are the very best. The Chancellor's office has given them full support, along with a clear message that they are charged with the mission of building excellent institutions. They face challenges in creating the programs we need and will have to prioritize and continue to seek even greater EFFICIENCIES as we face more demands with limited public resources.

The growth of the universities has slowed, at least to some extent, because of the recent rise in admission requirements. For too long, the focus has been on getting everyone admitted, while the focus should have been on the likelihood of students graduating. We want all students to get a college degree. However, too many of your sons and daughters were enrolling in the universities woefully unprepared, therefore failing and dropping out, never to return. We not only want all Nevada students to start college at the college appropriate for them, some at the community college, some at the state college, and some at the universities, but our foremost objective must be that every one of these students finish his or her education.

A troubling thing is happening. In a state with a growing population and a growing number of high school graduates, fewer in numbers and percentages of high school graduates are coming to college. Nevada has offered the Governor Guinn Millennium Scholarship as an incentive. The Higher Education System has opened the State College as an opportunity not only in Southern Nevada, but in Northern Nevada and is making every effort to make financial aid available. New campuses are being planned for the College of Southern Nevada and for the Truckee Meadows Community College. We are working to create higher education opportunities, but Nevadans must support the importance of acquiring a college education as something more than a way to get a job. A university education is designed to create a culture of intellect and public responsibility.

This past year, we have focused on being more student-friendly, along with business-partnering to develop the economic engine for Nevada that you have demanded. The Chancellor's office has heard that message loud and clear as we have traveled around the state to Community Roundtables with business and political leaders.

We must know what we can do better. What do you need us to do that we are not doing? The message most often heard is that higher education needs to pay more attention to each community's needs, and educate more of its young people to satisfy those needs. The

presidents and I are focused on doing our very best on all of these issues. Please give us continuing feedback, accompanied by your support.

A key part of the future economic growth in Nevada depends on two factors: 1) research and technology transfer and 2) workforce development and training. These two together are essential to support small businesses and manufacturers. We ask every legislative session for more support for these. The state has only been able to do a limited amount in growing these programs. Both of these key missions have to be self-supporting and to be self supporting there must be partnerships with the private sector. Our three research institutions (Desert Research Institute, UNLV, and UNR) are growing their research and technology transfer enterprises as quickly as possible. Our community colleges, together with the Management Assistance Program, are working to grow workforce development and training and are making great progress. But we can't do more without more support.

As Chancellor, I have worked consistently on a stronger partnership between K-12 and higher education, and I will continue to do so. In the last year, we began meetings between the 17 Superintendents of Education and the leaders of our 7 teacher education programs to open the lines of communication and improve the quality of both K-12 and our teacher education programs. These meetings continue, and as a result, I am confident you will see changes in the courses our students take to become the teachers that Nevada needs. Part of this discussion is the course teachers will take to continuously improve their skills. All in K-16 must better prepare our youngsters for the rigors of a college education.

I also continue to work with the many diverse groups in Nevada who have concerns about whether their children are being given the opportunity to fully participate in higher education. I started the Chancellor's Diversity Luncheons in Las Vegas where leaders of minority groups voice their concerns and ideas and openly and fully talk with representatives of our colleges and universities. The discussions have been productive with growing numbers of people in attendance and subsequent changes occurring. This fall, we will start these same discussions in Reno and will soon move to Elko. The importance of ALL of our citizens getting a college education cannot be overstated. If there are barriers, real or perceived, we want to remove them.

## **WHERE ARE WE GOING?**

That is the good news. Now for a look at the problem areas.

The 2009 session of the legislature will be a pivotal session that could lead directly to success or failure. The state must decide whether to go forward or slide backwards. The status quo means eventual failure. Budget caps are already in place with an uncertain economic future facing us. The Governor is committed to protecting education for our children, but his leadership will be tested by the budget constraints he will face. Even though he and our legislators will have tough decisions to make, that is their job. Our moving forward is solely in their hands. Before the private sector will invest in higher education, it must be assured that the state legislature will do its part forever. Nevada and

Nevadans have the financial capability of building an education system that is as good as any. It is time to do so.

Let me put this in the context of the direction where Nevada is headed if we do not improve. Nevada is still growing rapidly and changing constantly. The number of people living here will grow 66 percent by 2026. This new Nevada will be increasingly Hispanic, Asian, and Black. We are horribly and fatally uneducated. Nevada ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in the chance that a 9<sup>th</sup> grader will graduate from college with a baccalaureate degree. We rank 49<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of our population who are enrolled in college. We rank 49<sup>th</sup> in the number of our citizens who have an associate or bachelors degree. We will not improve this ranking through people moving into the state because most of those moving into our state are equally uneducated.

Nevada is not attracting enough college-educated workers to compensate for our failure to educate its own. We rank 50<sup>th</sup> in the education level of our young workforce. But we do rank 1<sup>st</sup> as the state with the fastest-growing number of jobs requiring some college. We have a devastating train wreck in our future if we do not start to act now. We are at least 10 years behind in recognizing and remedying these problems. In spite of the Higher Education System's efforts and the efforts of K-12, Nevada is falling even further behind.

You and I are at a crossroad in getting more Nevadans to attend, but more importantly, finish college. Over half of our college students attend on a part time basis. Only one state has more students trying to finish college while going only part-time. Unfortunately, students and often their families think they can get the same quality college education by going part time. The odds are against them. We must develop a culture of completion that expects students to attend full time. We accept our responsibility to help students graduate once they come through our doors. We ask your help and understanding that these students must attend FULL TIME if they are to be successful. We understand that the primary reason for attending less than full time is the need to earn money to live and pay for school. We must provide a source of funds so that students can go to college full time.

This crossroad for Nevada involves both the vision for our future and the way we pay for that future. You will be hearing about proposals for tuition and fee increases at our institutions. These increases must be large enough to raise the money that the state cannot or will not contribute. Nevada is still one of the lowest tuition and fee states. It will continue to be so. However, students attending the universities can expect to hear a proposal that they must pay considerably more for that education. We guarantee that more of that money will stay on their campuses to give them a higher quality university experience. At the same time, funds must be made available either through scholarships or loans to allow these students to pay the higher tuition.

One of my themes since becoming Chancellor has been the need for all eight of our institutions to raise more private money and compete for more grants and contracts. I continue to carry that message every single day. As I said last year, "NO STATE LEGISLATURE EVER BUILT A GREAT UNIVERSITY, OR A GREAT STATE COLLEGE OR COMMUNITY COLLEGE." WORLD CLASS INSTITUTIONS,

WHETHER THEY BE PRIVATE OR PUBLIC, HAVE ALL BEEN BUILT WITH MORE THAN 75% OF THEIR RESOURCES COMING FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR. We must have the support of the private sector if we are to be successful. I will continue to work in this arena.

For every business in this state, I have a message. IF YOU WANT YOUR BUSINESS TO BE SUCCESSFUL, YOU MUST BE A PARTNER WITH EDUCATION. Nevadans cannot buy your products, pay for your services, and enjoy your games, if they do not have money in their pockets. To do that, they need highly technical, intellectual and productive jobs to earn sufficient incomes. For too long, we have built our wealth on tourists and newcomers. This thinking will eventually destroy us. Please join us in sending a stronger message on the importance of college degrees and certificates, in creating more internships for students, in giving employees paid time to take college classes, and offering tuition assistance as an employee benefit.

The present Nevada education environment also marks a critical point for each of our colleges and universities. Will they be able to support students to keep them enrolled through graduation? Will they be able to obtain grants, contracts, and private donations to build a competitive institution? Will the faculty be willing to work even harder to meet the needs of the students and the State, even if resources are limited? Will they be able to listen to the needs of the public who support us and respond? The System is committed to do so.

My role in the next year will be directed at three key themes:

**1) Health Sciences System Development and Support**

This System is just beginning, and like all new undertakings, will need resources, a consistent vision, and strong partners. I plan to work with the Regents, the health care community and the private sector to be sure all three are in place.

**2) State and Business Partnerships**

Too often, I see the Nevada System of Higher Education setting agendas based on the expertise and vision of the faculty without fully considering business and the cultural “facts of life” of Nevada. The faculty expertise and community needs must join together to be productive. I plan to continue to work on bridging the gap between “the town and the gown” and ensure we are listening to you as we plan and allocate resources.

**3) P-16 Alliances and the Improvement of Nevada’s Educational System**

As I said last year, we cannot be successful in educating students in higher education unless the quality of K-12 education is also excellent. I am delighted that the new P-16 Advisory Council with its eleven members has been created. This combination of all education holds great promise. I will continue to serve as a member of the Council and look forward to the development of a broad vision of how education in Nevada can be the best in the country for all of our citizens.

I will also be meeting with and listening to Governor Gibbons and our state legislators as we go forward, about the role of the State in supporting higher education and the common problems we face. How can the great researchers and scientists at DRI, UNLV, and UNR help the state? Where can we step forward and direct our energies toward building the workforce that the state needs? How can we avoid the trends current statistics predict, so we can go forward and build a better state?

We have been successful in building a true system of higher education where all of the institutions work together for the good of Nevada's students and the Nevada economy. We can not tolerate petty differences between and among institutions that harm students in their quest for a degree or frustrate businesses striving to work with us on issues of workforce needs or research opportunities.

If more Nevadans do not go to college and graduate, we will soon have a workforce that can not even begin to compete globally. That must not be our future. My job is to work with the Board of Regents, the legislature, the private sector and the Governor to ensure we have excellent colleges and universities and that we stop being 49<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup> in everything. We are better than that. I am sickened with the constant barrage of statistics that say that Nevada is last, and I intend to change them with your help. Your job is to support these institutions and help all of our citizens get that education. We promise to do our part.

Thank you.

## State of the District Address

### Dr. Walt Rulffes - Clark County Superintendent

I would like to start by thanking the Nevada Development Authority for providing this opportunity to focus on education. It is a critical issue for Southern Nevada and should always be at the forefront of public discussion among community leaders. I would also like to thank Chancellor Rogers for his ongoing partnership as we work toward common goals, particularly better articulation between our K-12 and higher education institutions.

Some of you may know that we just completed our 50th anniversary as the Clark County School District. It is interesting to note that 50 years ago:

- CCSD had 30 schools; today we have 341.
- We served 20,400 students (1956); today we serve nearly 309,000.
- A new high school cost \$300,000; today, excluding land, a new high school costs over \$60 million.

These statistics are typical of the changes that all facets of life in Clark County have experienced in the past five decades. The important thing is our mission of providing quality education has remained the same.

Today, in Clark County:

- We serve 7 out of every 10 students in Nevada.
- One of every five students is an English language learner.
- Last school year, out of every 100 students, 39 were Hispanic; 38 were Caucasian; 14 were African American; 9 were Asian; and American Indians comprised the remainder.
- Over 3,000 of our students are homeless.
- About 11 percent of our students require special education services.
- Staffing is a perennial issue; this year we hired over 2,000 teachers. The matter is complicated by the jump we have seen in the cost of living and the number of teachers approaching retirement age.
- We continue to be funded at one of the lowest rates in the nation. However, our elementary student performance is at or near the national average, and our secondary achievement is improving. Nevada is getting a good value for its education dollar.

Despite the challenges and increased expectations, I am pleased to report that CCSD schools are making great progress. Based on the school classifications established by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), last school year we had:

- 11 exemplary schools.
- 40 high achieving schools.
- 216 schools met all the federal targets for student performance.

Our district also saw achievement growth at all levels in the various populations, including students who are in poverty, second language programs, special education, and in all ethnic categories. We also saw an increase in graduation rates.

These are the two most recent years of data, and we are hoping that the class of 2007 keeps us trending in the right direction.

Graduation challenges are not unique to CCSD; they are a national issue, particularly in urban districts. I believe that getting students through school is critical for all of us:

- It is an economic issue for our society.
- It is a social injustice to permit people to languish in ignorance.
- It is a freedom issue for students to succeed.

We have also seen a decrease in dropout rates. Again, the trend data show that our efforts are paying off. Other data show that more students are passing the Nevada High School Proficiency Exam on their first attempt.

We had a banner year for students earning scholarships, too. The total amount earned by the class of 2007, excluding Millennium scholarship awards, was over \$72 million. Including the Millennium scholarship awards, the class of 2007 earned \$123 million in scholarships. With all those scholarships, it is no surprise that CCSD had 40 National Merit scholars last school year.

Schools do not work in a vacuum. We are a microcosm of the community we serve, and schools reflect both the good and bad that happen in our homes and on our streets. That makes education a community issue; school is simply the place where the formal instruction occurs.

This year, in order to emphasize to staff that we are members of the larger community, I launched an initiative called “Keep Your Eye On The CAP.” On the surface, the message to district employees, at every level in every position, is that we all share in the responsibility of increasing the number and quality of graduates. “Keep Your Eye on the CAP” is also a good reminder for parents and students that education is a journey with milestones along the way, and getting to the mortarboard is a major passage in life. There may be trials, but in the end the reward is worth the effort.

The district is preparing a number of PSAs to promote the “Keep Your Eye On The CAP” theme, and I will be sharing a few with you throughout my remarks, such as this one.

The important piece of the message, though, is to understand that the “CAP” in this case is more than a hat – it is an acronym for three things that I think are essential for us to focus on in education:

- C is for Climate.
- A is for Academics.
- P is for Participation.

I think most of us in business or education recognize that climate refers to the work environment. It is the level of support, the unity of purpose, the understanding of a common mission, and, perhaps most importantly, the respect we show to each other and our clients in the work place.

It is obvious that a lot of what effects school climate is outside of the district's control – low state funding, large schools, large classes, limited parental support, salary and benefits, and so on. But challenging circumstances are part of every job.

And we also know that, with good leadership, a strong team can accomplish the impossible, *leadership* being the operative word here. A recent survey of 8,500 teachers in our district concluded that, when it comes to retaining teachers in our schools, the leadership provided by principals is close to salary in importance.

But if the perception persists that our schools could do better, than we still have work to do. Certainly, most of our schools and offices offer pleasant environments for all who come, but I want *every* school and *every* office to be a welcoming place, not just for employees but for the people we serve. I believe that all of our offices and classrooms can better serve the community if the improvement of school climate is one of our priorities.

The second letter in “CAP” stands for academics, and it is fitting that it is in the middle, since learning must always be at the heart of every decision we make.

I showed you data a few moments ago that illustrated the progress we are making in student achievement, and it takes a concentrated focus over a period of years for us to see such results. My goal is to sustain our focus on student achievement, and I hope that graduates in years to come will continue to reap the benefit of our efforts today.

So what is it that we are doing today to boost achievement? Here are a few examples:

- We created the 21st Century Curriculum – students now need four years of math and three years of science to graduate from high school.
- We also now require three science courses in middle school
- We created a pilot with several “empowerment” schools last year, and with the legislature’s help, we will be increasing that number.
- We are offering full-day kindergarten to more students. It is a strategy supported by extensive research, and it is proven to be especially beneficial for low-income students and English language learners. I appreciate the legislators who supported education in this matter.
- And in partnership with the Nevada System of Higher Education, we have college recruiting kiosks located on a number of our high school campuses, which are designed to get high school students motivated and prepared for college.

Speaking of higher education, we have a multitude of partnerships in progress there, too:

- We are developing an Early Assessment Program for math and English in partnership with higher education.

- We have expanded dual credit course offerings on CCSD campuses. Courses are in both remedial and general studies and allow high school students to graduate with college credits.
- There is the Center for Accelerating Student Achievement. This is a partnership between the Nevada Department of Education, UNLV College of Education, and the Clark County School District for the purpose of addressing the achievement gap.
- We have an elementary school on the UNLV campus to help train future teachers.

We have many more partnerships with Nevada State College (NSC), the College of Southern Nevada (CSN), and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), and we truly appreciate the collaborative relationship we enjoy that allows us to offer so much more to our K-12 students. We also have a close relationship with the state-funded Regional Professional Development Program, which provides high quality staff development for administrators and teachers.

Another academic initiative the district is working on is the creation of a school for our most gifted and talented students. I do not want us to be so preoccupied with No Child Left Behind that we forget to push the gifted ones ahead. Gifted students are an underserved population, and I think it is time we put more resources into their education.

CCSD is also home to a virtual high school, which allows students to meet all of the mandated graduation requirements in a completely nontraditional manner. The virtual high school eventually will move to the district's new technology campus when it is completed in 2009.

Academically, we have a lot to be proud of in CCSD. However, I feel the need to remind the community that achievement requirements are constantly increasing. The No Child Left Behind Act has established the expectation that all students will be performing at grade level in math, language arts, and science at all schools by the year 2014, regardless of language barriers, ability, or poverty. In order to reach the 100 percent target by 2014, the state increases achievement benchmarks every couple of years.

This means that schools face the challenge of meeting even higher targets this year. I am concerned that a number of schools, particularly those serving the neediest populations, may not reach the higher federal targets in a single year, even though they will continue to make progress.

Congress is currently grappling with the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act. While NCLB has done some great things for students, the act's rigid measurement system does not take into account factors such as high numbers of transient and non-English speaking students, both of which are challenges in our communities.

We have an extremely dedicated workforce in the school district doing everything possible to achieve all standards, and we will continue to work with every school to keep pushing performance up.

The third component of the “CAP” is participation. As I mentioned, education must be a community priority, and we in the profession need to focus on outreach and the constant engagement of public, parents, legislators, students, businesses, and anyone else you can think of.

I am pleased to announce I will be joining the "Ed in '08" campaign. It is a national effort to get the presidential candidates on both sides of the aisle talking about kindergarten through 12th grade and how they plan to improve education. The “Ed in '08” campaign will emphasize more rigor, longer school days and years, and performance pay, all of which are embodied in recent reforms in CCSD. I fully support these concepts, as well as this sort of engagement at the national level.

For us, participation starts at the school level. You may have read recently that Nevada was ranked 51st in the nation (behind Puerto Rico) in volunteerism. We are working to change that. I am proud to say that last school year, CCSD secondary students volunteered almost 250,000 hours of community service and raised over \$276,000 in charitable contributions for our community.

Another accomplishment in reforming schools has been the expansion of our high school career and technical academies, or CTAs, as we call them. We opened a state-of-the-art facility in the northwest this year, and more are coming on line in the next several years. In anticipation of opening the CTAs, we have met with and surveyed business and community groups to see what disciplines and career choices are most needed here in Southern Nevada.

We also have the School-Community Partnership Program that has over 600 partners. These are not fund-raising partnerships; all of the programs support our curriculum and our students. They range from small businesses allowing an employee to mentor a child for a few hours a week, to casinos adopting an entire school. For 2006-2007, we estimated that the hours donated to schools through our partnership program were valued at almost \$8 million.

The Public Education Foundation is another terrific partner in supporting education. Since its inception in 1991, the Foundation has raised more than \$45 million for our schools.

If you are a parent, I can not stress enough how important it is for you to reinforce the work your children’s teachers are doing at school. We all have the same goals in mind – the success of your child – so it only makes sense that you support our work and we support yours.

If you have a business, please let your employees who are parents attend necessary conferences. Give them time, if you can, to periodically volunteer. Encourage them to be engaged in their children’s education.

One way that all parents will be able to engage, even at work, is by accessing a Web-based parent communication tool that we now have in most secondary schools. Parents

can log on to their school's Web site and check attendance, assignments, and grades and communicate with teachers. We hope to have the same system in our elementary schools before too long. Another way that parents can be involved is through new homework help centers being established in local county libraries where technology and materials are linked directly to our standards and curriculum. The first one just opened at the West Las Vegas Library and it is worth a visit. Again, this is participation – agencies working together toward a common goal.

We are as eager to hear from you as you are to hear from us. I encourage you to be an active participant in public education.

That is the essence of “Keep Your Eye On The CAP” – climate, academics, and participation. Our district is focused on this initiative, and we hope you will join us by supporting education and reminding students to keep their eyes on the cap. While this initiative improves the learning environment, enhances the academic experiences of our students, and involves the community, I know there is still much to be done.

United Way's Southern Nevada Community Assessment survey shows that education is a critical concern of our constituents – that is you and your employees.

- About 75 percent of the survey respondents said that the quality of education is a problem.
- 57 percent supported salary increases for teachers based on merit.
- 54 percent supported smaller high schools even if it meant increased costs.
- 67 percent supported publically funded full-day kindergarten.

I agree with these findings. The quality of schools must be improved, and, as our legislative record shows, we are proponents of merit pay, smaller schools, smaller classes, full-day kindergarten, longer school days or years, and a host of other proven reforms.

We also support greater assistance for our 62,000 students who are learning English. They require extraordinary services, yet there is no extraordinary funding from the state, and the federal government just reduced our allocation for this population by more than \$2 million, despite its dramatic and steady growth.

Ours is the most dynamic district in the country. This is neither the time nor the community that should be satisfied with status quo thinking or minimal investments that continuously leave Nevada at the bottom of the nation. We need to wake up to the plight of P-16 education in this state and take action. That is a message that must be heard by legislative candidates next November and by every business, parent, and community member.

And speaking of November '08, the district will be asking you to support a school bond issue. Our last bond issue, in 1998, produced more schools than projected, ahead of schedule and under budget.

Those of you who have been here awhile know that we have been opening and filling an average of 12 schools a year for many years. We are focused on energy efficiency and incorporate cost-saving features in every project, including the modernization projects in existing schools. With growth continuing, it is critical that you support your schools in making sure that capacity keeps pace with demand.

Education, in my view, is the most important profession in the world. It is the force that propels science, communications, nations, and economies and determines the course of the future. As educators and citizens, we model for children the behaviors and values that promote good citizenship and ethical use of knowledge. I am not sure what could be more important than that.

And I am happy to say that CCSD has a first-rate Board of Trustees and some of the finest administrators, teachers, support employees, and business partners in the country, so you can be sure that there are some great people on the job.

All of us have a vested interest in providing a good education for the children of Clark County. You can help us help students by reminding them to “Keep Your Eye On The CAP.”

Thank you.

## State of the District Address

### Antoinette Cavanaugh – Elko County Superintendent

Having had the honor to serve the children, teachers and community as Superintendent of Elko County School District, it is my pleasure to share with you the accomplishments we have made during the previous year in this State of the District Address. Our education professionals understand the importance and value of a solid education, with that, we also know that every child succeeds differently, thus our focus is to provide a solid education foundation based upon increasing levels of mastery so our children are competitive in our global society.

During the 2006-2007 academic year, Elko County School District took a major step forward in building community, business, and interagency partnerships to address student performance rates in the content area of reading by launching the Elko County Reads Campaign on February 26, 2007.

The vision of building a cooperative, collaborative county-wide endeavor to emphasize reading was realized as multiple cities, county and state agencies rallied to support this initiative through participating in planned activities centered upon reading. Elko County School District enjoyed the partnership of over 30 businesses from throughout the county in support of the scheduled campaign activities designed to promote reading among students. Our parent partners were certainly an integral part in the success of our initiative through participating in the scheduled activities hosted at their neighborhood schools and communities. Mastery of reading standards district-wide has increased by as much as 25% among certain grade levels. I anticipate that this improvement will continue as long as we collectively encourage students to read in every environment. The gift of reading may very well be the greatest gift we impart to our children.

Recently, Elko County School District embarked upon a plan to provide opportunities for high school students to explore health occupations—a venture borne out of the concern that Nevada has a severe shortage of local health providers. Retention of professionals recruited to live and work in rural Nevada is costly and, in many cases, short lived. With the availability of Carl Perkins Grant funding, Elko County School District conducted a study to determine the level of interest among students to study health careers. After analyzing the student response data, curriculum information, and availability of local resources, it was determined that courses focused on health careers was a viable elective for high school students.

During the 2006-2007 academic year, 24 students enrolled in and completed Health Occupations coursework at two of our seven high schools. All students who completed the class graduated from high school and have aspirations to major in a health field in their post-high school studies. This year's program boasts a 64% increase in enrollment. This is a significant beginning to build awareness among our young adults that *what they learn* is relevant and necessary to their success in future academic studies.

Through offering this coursework, we are exposing them to career possibilities related to their area of interest. This academically rigorous, experientially based program is central to increasing student interest in a field that is a significant void in Nevada.

Herein, I would like to emphasize once again, that partnerships are essential to allow us to provide quality, relevant, and highly technical education programming to our students in Elko County. Without the partnership of Great Basin College, the University of Nevada, Reno's Medical School, and local health providers, including Northeastern Nevada Regional Hospital, our Health Occupations Program would not have been successfully launched and the vitality of the programming would be questionable. We will continue to explore and develop career and technical courses that fit the changing demands of our communities and society as a whole.

Every year our demographics have changed—2007 is no exception. While demographic data by ethnicity is available for Elko County School District, my greatest concern is the fact that 30% of our students qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch—an indication of the poverty levels currently experienced among our children. It occurs to me then, that while we address the educational needs of our students, we must also partner and work closely with agencies equipped to address the basic needs of children if we are to expect them to perform at increasingly higher academic levels. In June 2007 the Board of Trustees committed to a partnership with Nevada's Communities in Schools Organization—a first for Northeastern Nevada.

Communities in Schools is the nation's leading community based organization helping kids succeed in over 3,000 schools across America. We are honored to partner with this organization in providing additional support systems for our children who need them as they progress through our education system. At the present time we have one elementary school that has developed programs to address local student needs. We anticipate expanding that relationship to design site specific programs to fit the needs of the children in every community in our district. This partnership is largely dependent upon volunteerism at the individual, business and organizational levels.

Now, let me turn your focus to a different kind of partnership, that of quality instructional design, an essential component of the prekindergarten-12 education system of Elko County School District. Improving student performance through systemically improving instructional quality has been a focus in Elko County for at least four years. Currently, 100% of teachers and administrators have been trained to collect data and speak to the quality of instructional practice in any given classroom. Twice annually, school visitation teams, comprised of staff and administrators from schools throughout the district, visit classrooms to collect data on observed instructional practice. Instructional data is compiled and analyzed then presented to each site level administrator for review.

During the course of the year, the expectation is that the administration at each school site will provide professional development activities to address areas where the data indicates a need for improvement. In addition, administrators are expected to conduct classroom walkthroughs to ensure that quality instruction is taking place daily. Teacher instructional data and student performance data is used in another arena, that of Professional Learning Communities. It can be said that teachers historically have worked as, what some would call, independent contractors. Once the students entered the classroom, the teacher closed the door and delivered the adopted curriculum. The expectation was that the teacher delivered the curriculum and the student was expected to “get it.”

Today, the expectation for the teachers in Elko County is to work collaboratively with colleagues in helping students to master the established standards. Teachers are expected to analyze student performance assessments designed to measure individual progress during the year. Collectively then, teachers are expected to be problem solvers in meeting the individual needs of students and employ strategies to increase individual performance among all students. The role of the administrator is to facilitate this process and provide support for teachers as they work through methods for refining processes in the art and science of teaching.

One might ask, “What about the new teacher?” “Can the district expect new teachers to be high performing professionals at the outset of their careers?” The answer now is a resounding, “Yes.” As of the 2006-2007 academic year, Elko County School District began the second phase of our Teacher RISE Program which consists of a teacher induction and mentoring program specially designed to support all new teachers in being effective professionals during their critical first year. RISE is an acronym which stands for Retaining, Inducting, Supporting and Encouraging new teachers. This program was specifically designed to provide new teachers with master teacher coaches in designing, refining, and analyzing lessons so that students benefit from quality instruction.

I firmly believe our students deserve highly trained teachers and that we cannot afford to waste precious resources on replacing good teachers who fall prey to the stressors of the teaching profession, who then resign their position, according to national statistics, within the first three years of their career. Nevada has experienced a significant shortage of highly qualified teachers and the dilemma is magnified in the rural counties of our state. As a result, it is imperative that we support and encourage the professional development of our newest staff so students benefit from quality instruction.

An important component in instructional delivery is the use of technology in facilitating instruction. It is well understood by educators that we have a significant challenge in maintaining the interest of our students as they learn new information and skills. One way to engage students is to use a medium they understand and enthusiastically embrace—that of technology. We have over 500 classrooms throughout Elko County School District.

To date we have outfitted more than 50% of our classrooms with a SMARTBOARD. During school site visits across our district, I have observed the use of this technology to facilitate learning at all levels of instruction—from simply demonstrating the proper writing of letters in kindergarten to helping students better understand abstract molecular constructs of DNA through video streaming. This instructional tool helps teacher make instruction interactive and multi-dimensional. More importantly, it is an instructional device that our 21<sup>st</sup> Century students understand and readily embrace.

Earlier I stressed that all students should have the opportunity to succeed. Our system of education should ensure individual academic opportunities for all. Our vast geographic area should not be a barrier in providing all of our students with challenging courses—a definite academic foundation for post-high school studies in both academic and technical fields of study. During the 2006-2007 school year, students in our rural schools were able to enroll in Advanced Placement and Honors courses through the use of our district-wide video-conference system. This was made possible through a federal rural development grant and a partnership with Great Basin College. Instruction has been successfully implemented so that teachers from the Elko and Spring Creek campuses are able to teach students in Carlin, Jackpot, West Wendover, Wells and Owyhee. This strategy has served our rural students well. When coupled with lessons provided on the SMARTBOARD, electronic instructional notes can be saved and sent electronically to students in rural areas.

Each of these instructional facets contributes to the increased student performance indicators realized in the content areas of reading, writing and math in Elko County's preK-12 education system. This achievement does not happen by chance. Much work has been deliberately planned to refine instruction so that teachers are well-prepared to produce and deliver high quality instruction. Meaningful professional development specific to instructional best practice is supported and provided to teachers and administrators. Technology is being used to support and facilitate instruction. Finally, barriers have been identified and strategies have been developed to overcome the present challenges that get in the way of providing essential curriculum to our students. With these and other concerns sufficiently addressed, there is a call to do better—and we must.

The challenges educators continue to face in working toward providing a high quality education to Nevada's children must be overcome. A shortage of highly qualified teachers—especially in the “hard-to-fill” positions such as special education, math, science, and speech and language pathology continues to be of significant concern. Nevada's Legislature, during the 2007 legislative session, set aside funding to support innovative programs and remediation programs to promote student success. In the upcoming session, I believe that the public call will be to support instructional programming that goes beyond what has traditionally been supported. I believe the appropriation of funds to provide quality all-day kindergarten to entry-level children will be necessary to facilitate the adequate preparation of our youngest learners to enter primary level classes.

Our vision for the future is to build safety nets for our students in our prekindergarten-12 system so that academic goals are accomplished. To focus on the goal for every Elko County School District student to graduate, our district will roll out the “2008 Project Graduate” initiative which, in a nutshell, will emphasize the expectation for our students to succeed—failure will not be an option. We will be asking all community stakeholders to make a commitment to our students through promoting high academic expectations and work ethic with the focus for each student to graduate.

We want to develop a culture of high expectations for our students in our communities and schools. To that end, we will also develop partnerships with parents who will help craft a four-year academic plan for progress with the expectation that parents will actively support their child’s plan for success. We will challenge our community agencies to actively engage in supporting programs for youth that provide mentorships with the intent to communicate the expectations that all students will graduate from high school and proceed onto post-high school institutions. Collectively, we must nurture success among our young adults by helping them realize their potential.

The cornerstone to building effective partnerships to promote excellence among our children is to articulate clear vision and communication about strategic methods to accomplish well-defined goals. The Board of Trustees adopted a new district improvement plan indicating their support for promoting success in all schools. It is necessary for the administrative leadership to articulate best-practice methods for achieving district benchmarks and communicating those benchmarks to our stakeholders—each and every citizen of Elko County. We will continue to communicate our benchmarks and instructional accomplishments through regular publications and media releases so that each of you will be our partner in sustaining student improvement.

I believe the Elko County School District has significant momentum as we begin this academic year. Our most valuable resource, our employees, are committed to providing all children with a quality education. Their participation in ongoing professional development activities and their unending dedication to our children is paramount to facilitating academic success. The days of teaching in isolation are over. Collegiality is now the norm. Combined with administrative support, active parental involvement, and business collaboration, we are sure to continue improvements in preparing our students for the global world that awaits them. In *Elko County School District* we realize that *Every Child Succeeds Differently* and our intent is to tap into their individual talents and genius to facilitate achievement.

Thank you for your continued support of the Elko County School District. More importantly, thank you for your support of the nearly 10,000 children we serve.

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## **State of the District Address**

### **Paul Dugan – Washoe County Superintendent**

Before I begin my formal remarks, I want to thank Chancellor Rogers for once again including Washoe County School District in today's address. Your sincere commitment to a collaborative K-16 system is greatly appreciated.

School Board Members, Regents, President Glick, Chancellor, EDawn members and friends of education – as I begin my 26<sup>th</sup> year in Washoe County School District and my 4<sup>th</sup> year as Superintendent, I reflect on how far we have come and look forward to how far we need to go. As Superintendent I have had the opportunity to speak in front of many civic and community organizations. In speaking to these groups, I have often made reference to the initials of WCSD conveniently fitting into the phrase “World Class School District.” While it makes for a good sound bite and good press, it doesn't really communicate much. For what exactly is a world-class school district and how do you know if you are one?

In the next 20 minutes or so, I will attempt to outline for you six qualities that I believe have to exist to be considered “world-class” and more importantly give you my assessment of where we as a District here in Washoe County find ourselves today when using these qualities as benchmarks.

So, how best to describe a world class school district?

Let's begin with the issue of attracting and retaining the highest quality employees at all levels of the District from principals and teachers to support staff. The heart of any great organization is its people. A world-class organization would select the best candidates possible, support them with quality staff development, evaluate and reward them appropriately and honor their accomplishments.

Second, the environment – in all schools – would be safe, welcoming and energizing. Children would be free from threats, harassment, intimidation and bullying. The atmosphere would be one of acceptance, mutual respect and tolerance for all.

Third, this world class school district would be one that recognizes not only the importance, but the absolute responsibility it has of addressing students with special needs – whether they be students identified as gifted, learning disabled or autistic. It would meet the full range of educational needs of our students.

Fourth, everyone has the “common sense feeling” that schools do better when a strong and meaningful partnership exists between schools, parents and community and the research absolutely confirms this. When parents and the community feel connected to the school system, achievement increases. So, for any school district to refer to itself as world-class, there must be identifiable systems in place to ensure this collaborative connection exists.

Fifth, student achievement must be at the forefront of all a world-class school district does. It must be evidenced by a graduation rate approaching 90% and continuing to rise, where no significant distinction exists among ethnic groups. It must be evidenced by a rising college-going rate and a declining dropout rate. It must be evidenced by all students being challenged by a rigorous and relevant curriculum where successful completion of four years of math and three years of science is the norm, not the exception. It is a district where student academic achievement consistently

outperforms national norms measured by something besides the arbitrary and misleading standards of No Child Left Behind.

Sixth, to be world class, your buildings must reflect a commitment to equity for all of its students no matter where they reside. Roofs would not leak, heating and cooling systems would be reliable and powered by renewable (or at least low cost) energy sources, adequate technology opportunities would exist for all students and be fully integrated into the daily routine. Differences between one school and another – in terms of what they could offer their students – would be negligible. These facilities would have sufficient space to house the students they serve and would not just include modern classrooms, but science labs, performing arts centers, art studios, athletic facilities, career and technical centers and libraries fully equipped to meet the learning needs and interests of all students.

Now certainly one could argue that there are more than six qualities of a world-class school district, and that would be worthy conversation, but for today let us use these six benchmarks, as certainly none of these would be excluded from anybody's list. So where are we, the Washoe County School District, today? How do we compare with these benchmarks and more importantly what plans or systems are in place – or still needed – to successfully address the gaps?

Before I do that, however, let's understand the current landscape, the context that is the Washoe County School District. This is a large and complex organization consisting of over 63,000 students. By enrollment, we are the 63<sup>rd</sup> largest district in the nation (out of about 14,000 school districts). Those students attend classes in 94 schools, are served by more than 7,000 employees and are supported by a general fund budget of \$426 million. Nearly 11% of those students require special education services and more than 8,000 of them are served by our English as a Second Language program. Forty-four percent count themselves among our growing minority enrollment.

So let's start our analysis with the first quality—attracting and retaining the best employees. On this indicator, I feel confident in telling you we ARE world class. I could not be more proud of my colleagues in this district. They are dedicated, hard-working, innovative people and I am proud to be their Superintendent. A greater percentage of our teachers are nationally board certified than any district in Nevada. Our Principals' Academy has a strong national reputation. Our teacher evaluation system is a model for the rest of the country and has been so recognized in professional journals. We have just instituted a comprehensive staff development program for our support staff and our principals and teachers consistently win state and national honors. It is the people who serve our students that make this district what it is.

Now let's turn our attention to the learning environment. While our students do not have to contend with the levels of violence that plague many urban school districts, far too many of them report patterns of harassment by their fellow students. Racial and ethnic tensions persist in the community, and they spill over into our schools. While not all incidents of fighting are racially motivated, I suspect that many of the 1,690 suspensions last school year for fighting carried those overtones. That is why, two years ago, I created an Office of Diversity and charged it with moving us towards a goal of Cultural Competency. Sadly, progress in this area has been far too slow. In a district where 44% of our students count themselves among a minority we must make faster progress to ensure that we meet the needs of ALL students. If current trends continue, this will be a “minority majority” district within three or four years. We must find ways to teach our students—and our staff—the values of mutual respect, tolerance and acceptance. We must incorporate new teaching tools and adjust our curriculum to honor these new cultures and reach out in new ways to the parents of these students to bring them into the schools so that they can support student learning.

In this regard, I was pleased that our Education Collaborative was awarded a \$3.1 million dollar federal grant to improve parental involvement, especially among our Spanish-speaking parents. Their work with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) is making great strides in that direction.

The third indicator I mentioned was the school district's responsibility in meeting the requirements of those students with special needs. In the past three years Washoe County School District has made significant strides in improving its services to our Gifted and Talented students. A GT strategic plan, developed by parents and staff, was presented and approved by the School Board in May of 2007. Since its approval several positive improvements have been made:

- An additional School-Within-A-School site for the Sparks area has been funded.
- Full-time psychologist has been funded for the entire Gifted and Talented Educational Program.
- Recommendations/Nominations for testing have quadrupled (to over 1000 in the 06-07 school year).
- Numbers of under-identified gifted students have increased because of improvements in the identification process and psychologist assessment options.
- Elementary pull-out participation is nearly 80% (up from 50% in past years).
- Curriculum and Instruction/Professional Development and support have been provided.

Yet more attention must be given to the GT students at the middle school level. Today the GT implementation at this level ranges from full implementation at some schools to non-existent at others. This must and will change. All GT students no matter what middle school they attend must be given the services they deserve.

Additionally, with more students being identified at the elementary level, fewer spaces to serve these students exist. Both additional programs and classrooms are needed.

For those with other special needs we continue to struggle to meet the demand. In the case of autism the numbers are staggering. The identification of autistic students has grown over 30% in the past three years. Nationally, it is reported that one out of every 150 students will be identified with some form of autism. Many parents have become frustrated at the seeming inability of the School District to meet their child's needs. At the same time staff is equally frustrated at the lack of resources available to them to meet these pressing needs. The School District and the relatively newly formed Autistic Coalition of Nevada must join together if we want to have any chance in addressing this ever increasing challenge. As Superintendent I pledge to work collaboratively with this group and other legitimate special needs groups in order to help solve both the educational and financial hurdles that lie in front of us.

Let's turn now to the most important issue; that of student achievement. I want to look first at our graduation rate. Remember, I believe a world class district will have a graduation rate approaching 90%. While we can take some degree of pride that WCSD's 2006 graduation rate exceeds the state average (75% compared to 67%), we are a long way from hitting the goal of 90%. And, furthermore, who among us can be satisfied when the rate for our Hispanic students is 55%, or 64% for African-Americans or 66% for Native Americans? The same disparity rears its head when SAT scores are disaggregated. For the class of 2006 the difference between average writing scores for whites and Hispanics was 58 points. This is unacceptable in any society which claims to value each individual. The personal and societal loss implied by these statistics is staggering. But, there is hope on the horizon.

I spoke to you last year of the great confidence we place in the new Gateway Curriculum. Starting with this year's sophomores, and in addition to their other courses, all students are automatically enrolled in three years of science, four years of math and they will be required to carry a full class load their senior year. In the past, as we looked at course-taking patterns, there was a disturbing divide between majority and minority students. Our minority students were not challenging themselves with junior and senior level math and science classes and we were letting them get away with it. This program puts an end to that not so subtle "discrimination of low expectations." As the name of the program implies, high school should be the gateway to success, not a gatekeeper where students are sifted and sorted by income, race or ethnicity. If it's not too trite, let's remind ourselves that a rising tide lifts all boats.

I applaud the cooperative efforts of our high school leaders who have worked closely with the math, science and engineering faculty from the University of Nevada and TMCC to help us develop the classes and course content that will prepare our graduates for college and for the workforce. I am also encouraged by the results of programs like Read 180, which addresses the literacy needs of students at the middle school and high school levels. And, we now have about 5,000 students enrolled in one of our "Options" programs such as the Regional Technical Institute, Washoe High School or WOLF, our new on-line high school.

In addition I received just last week the recommendations from the Career Technical Committee on how to meet the ever important demands of a meaningful career education program. These recommendations will soon go to the School Board for their input and approval.

We also have recently remodeled the Regional Technical Institute to better support the student's core academic subjects allowing them to enroll full time. An additional \$11 million dollars has been approved by the Board to continue expansion of this program. Today, is our career education program where it needs to be? No, but we are moving in the right direction and I pledge to continue that movement.

My high school principals would also want me to mention that for the first time ever, all 11 comprehensive high schools were listed by Newsweek magazine as among the top 1,000 public high schools in the nation. Now, the criteria is admittedly narrow; the ratio of Advance Placement and International Baccalaureate exams given to the size of the graduating class. But this honor signals an important trend—more and more of our students are challenging themselves with these most demanding of high school courses.

I would be remiss in omitting from this overview of student achievement, the data from our elementary schools. While scores on Criterion Referenced Tests are not where I'd like them to be, recent improvements are dramatic and they are across the board in all ethnic groups. In 2002, only 46% of students were proficient or above on the reading CRT tests. In 2007, that number had grown to 61%. In grade 3 math, there are similar impressive gains. The percent of proficient students grew from 46% in 2002 to 57% in 2007. By grade six, the results are even better; 70% are proficient in reading and 73% are proficient in math. Certainly well-earned and deserved praise goes to our teachers, but I also want to recognize the efforts of the Education Foundation whose generous funding of after-school reading programs has also played a significant role in the rise of these scores. I also see great promise in our program called New Horizons which takes students in grade 2 who are in danger of being retained, and puts them in a special 15-month continuous program where the student-teacher ratio is 12-1. With an intense effort in math and language arts, 39 of the first 40 students in New Horizons are now performing at grade level with their 4<sup>th</sup> grade peers. The challenge, of course, is to find the extra classrooms and teachers to grow this very promising program. There is a final comment I want to make in this area dealing with the performance of some of our minority students.

Students who have exited our English as a Second Language program are, on average, now performing at or near the District averages on CRT tests.

Finally, let me turn my attention to the final benchmark; that of the physical environment. It is in this arena where we face one of our greatest challenges. Last year, as we entered the legislative season, I commented that I was looking forward to a resolution of the disparity that exists in funding sources available to this school district compared to the other districts in Nevada. For reasons too complex to address here, the legislature delegated the resolution of this problem to a 15-member committee which has just concluded its first meeting. Here is the issue they face. When we compare our known revenue between now and 2012 to our clearly demonstrated needs, we're staring at a \$500 million deficit.

Those dollars are needed to not only build new schools, but more importantly, to close the growing gap between older schools and newer ones. Where your child goes to school should not determine whether she has a computer lab, or a high speed internet connection, or a modern library, or a kiln in the art room, or a dedicated music room, or at the most basic level, a roof that does not leak. Sadly, in this school district today, all of those inequities and more are all too common. I continue to be the eternal optimist on this issue and am confident that this committee of good, common sense, civic-minded leaders can and will find a solution and that the voters of Washoe County will find it acceptable on the November, 2008 ballot. We cannot fail in this mission.

To conclude – as I mentioned at the beginning of this address, I have been an employee of Washoe County School District for 26 years. My wife retired from the Washoe County School District and my son graduated from the Washoe County School District. I am proud to be the Superintendent and believe this is a high quality district, but it is not World Class – at least not yet. However, with these six benchmarks as our guide, we have the goals in sight and the determination to achieve them. As proud as I am to be Superintendent here, I am equally proud to be a member of this growing and vital community. Working together – school district, parents, business community and all Washoe County citizens interested in the rewards of a high quality of life through a world class school district, we can pledge to keep student success at the forefront of all we do and in the end lay claim to the title of Washoe County School District, a World Class School District.

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