

Clark County School District

Program Name:	Empowerment School Program
Implemented:	2006-2007 School Year
Program Type:	Pilot Program
Legal Authorization:	School Board Policy

School Empowerment Benchmarks		
1.	School budgets based on students not staffing	yes
2.	Charge schools actual versus average salaries	no
3.	School choice and open enrollment policies	no
4.	Principal autonomy over budgets	yes
5.	Principal autonomy over hiring	yes
6.	Principal training and school-level management support	no
7.	Published transparent school-level budgets	no
8.	Published transparent school-level outcomes	yes
9.	Explicit accountability goals	yes
10.	Collective bargaining relief—flat contracts, etc.	yes
Clark County School District met 6 out of 10 school empowerment benchmarks.		



I. Program Overview

The state of Nevada passed legislation to encourage local school districts to have pilot programs for “empowerment schools” in 2007. Through SB238, the legislature would have required that not less than 5 percent of the total schools in a district be empowered by the 2008-09 school year. It was up to the Board of Trustees (BOT) of each school district to determine the selection process, choose the schools to be empowered and submit the list by September 1 of each year. The Nevada legislature was offering \$9 million for a state incentive for the seventeen local school districts to start empowerment schools. Nevada would have provided \$400 per pupil in extra resources to empowerment schools. Unfortunately, the law was never implemented because Governor Gibbons was forced to cut state spending by \$914 million due to the economic downturn. The state-level empowerment school funding was never allocated and local school districts have not moved forward with empowerment schools.

Before Nevada Gov. Jim Gibbons embraced school empowerment as a state-wide concept the Clark County School District (CCSD) was already experimenting with empowerment schools. In 2006-2007, the first four schools in CCSD implemented student-based budgeting and became empowerment schools. The program began in 2006 as part of CCSD’s superintendent’s schools. Empowerment schools have autonomy regarding governance, budget, staffing, instruction and time with the expectation that they will demonstrate annual progress toward increased student learning. The CCSD empowerment school model was designed as a systemic reform

effort to increase student achievement.

In December 2007, a total of 14 schools submitted empowerment school proposals that outlined how their schools would employ the five autonomies (governance, budget, staffing, instruction and time) to address the needs of the school community and increase the achievement of students. To be considered for empowerment, at least 70 percent of the school’s licensed personnel, voting by secret ballot, had to support the proposal. After site visits to the six finalist schools, the district’s “central design team” made the final recommendations based on leadership, collaborative culture and strength of the proposal. According to Superintendent’s Schools Academic Manager Jeremy Hauser, “The CCSD empowerment model is transformational. It places resources and decision-making in the hands of those who are best equipped to meet the changing educational and social needs of their children—the school community.”¹

CCSD will expand the empowerment program in the 2009-2010 school year. With the support of the Nevada Women’s Philanthropy, as well as the continued support of the Lincy Foundation and other private organizations, three more Clark County School District (CCSD) schools will become empowerment schools for 2009-10: Chaparral High School, Wendell Williams Elementary and Ethel Staton Elementary. In 2009-2010, 17 schools will participate in the empowerment school program.

The CCSD empowerment school model provides for:

- More autonomy
- More accountability
- More support
- \$400 per student additional dollars
- Link with a community partner

II. Student-Based Budgeting Formula

Clark County School District provides funding to empowerment schools based on per-pupil resources for each student enrolled at the empowerment school. In addition, each school receives \$400 per student additional money to be used to cover the following:

- Smaller class size with a student-to-teacher ratio of maximum 25:1 in core classes not otherwise governed by CCSD class-size reduction requirements
- 29 minutes extra per teacher per day
- 5 additional days per school year per teacher
- \$150,000 discretionary dollars
- Five percent increase in principal pay
- Up to 2 percent incentive pay for all licensed staff if specific achievement targets are met

In addition, The Public Education Foundation, a nonprofit organization that supports public schools in Nevada, has helped each empowerment school find a private partner that provides \$50,000 in support for three years. For example, Mark L. Fine, one of Southern Nevada's preeminent real estate developers, committed \$150,000 over three years to Kermit R. Booker Elementary School. The donation will boost the school's ability to adopt best practices in research, accountability, curriculum and instruction. The Public Education Foundation has arranged partners for every empowerment school. Examples of partners include the MGM Mirage, Wells Fargo and the Greenspun Family Foundation.

III. Autonomy

Empowered schools are granted autonomy to decide issues relating to the operation of the school, including schedule, governance, employee incentives, staffing, budgeting and instruction. In return they are accountable for student achievement.

Most student-based budgeting programs give schools discretion over hiring teachers at the front end of the process but they do not give principals an alternative to transfer teachers who don't fit well with the school model. CCSD's union contract has a provision that details how empowerment schools can deal with teachers that are incompatible with the school.² The contract states that the "school empowerment team," in conjunction with the school principal, may implement a peer review model and may remove and replace a teacher deemed to be incompatible with the model established at the school. The principal ultimately has the authority to make staffing decisions. Any teacher so removed shall fall within the involuntary transfer provisions of the contract and should be identified in time to participate in a spring or fall surplus meeting. Any teacher identified for removal either too late to secure a voluntary transfer or too late to participate in a surplus meeting shall be administratively reassigned by the Human Resources Division.

Any teacher at any empowerment school may choose to transfer out of the school at any time. Any teacher opting to transfer out shall be administratively reassigned by the Human Resources Division. The union contract also explicitly spells out the conditions for flexibility of work rules for the empowerment schools.

IV. School-Level Management Support

There is a special superintendent just for the empowerment schools and other innovative schools in the district (“superintendent’s schools”) and that office serves as a liaison between the empowerment schools and other central offices and provides the schools with training, guidance and support. As well, empowerment schools receive professional support from their school partners through The Public Education Foundation and extra support from the district through the administrative division that supports the “superintendent’s schools.”

V. School Site Councils

Schools are required to establish a “school design team,” consisting of teachers, support staff, parents and community members to assist the principal in the development of an empowerment plan for the school. The plan covers the proposed budget and overseeing and assisting in management decisions for the school. The school design team must develop a three-year strategic plan to be approved by the Board of Trustees of the Clarke County School District.

VI. School Choice Component

Students attend empowerment schools based on their residential address. There is not a unified school choice program because Clark County’s empowerment schools are located throughout a large geographic area

and each school’s enrollment is based on the school’s original residential boundaries.

VII. Accountability

In exchange for autonomy each empowerment school agrees to reach specific achievement targets that are outlined in the school’s individual empowerment plan and contract with the Board of Trustees. The district offers teachers incentive pay of up to 2 percent of salaries if student achievement and school outcome targets are met. The schools are held accountable by annual reviews of their test scores, surveys of parent satisfaction and school performance under the federal standards of the No Child Left Behind Act.

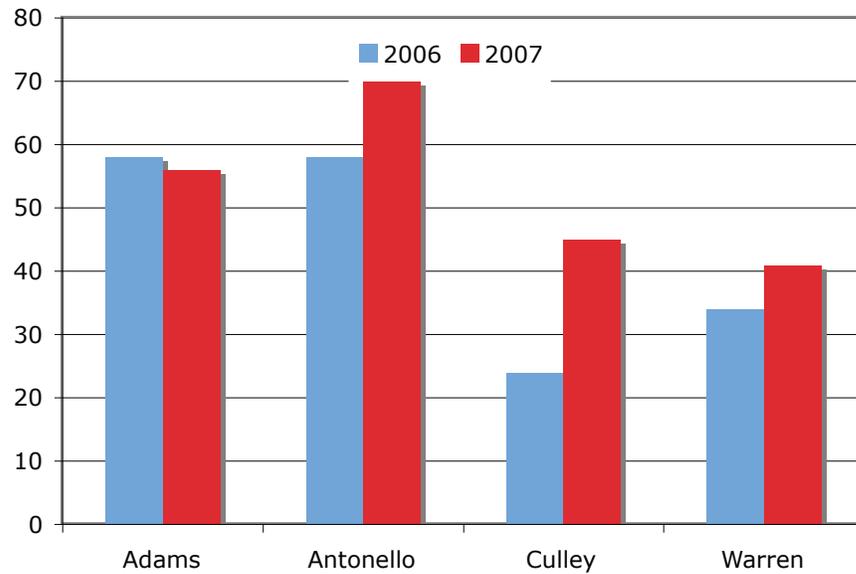
VIII. Performance Outcomes

CCSD’s experiment with empowerment schools shows positive achievement gains on the first cohort of empowerment schools that were started in 2005-2006. The district evaluation of empowerment schools in 2007 shows that two of the schools, Culley and Antonello, made large gains in reading and math, while Warren made gains in math and stayed flat in reading and Adams stayed flat in reading and math.

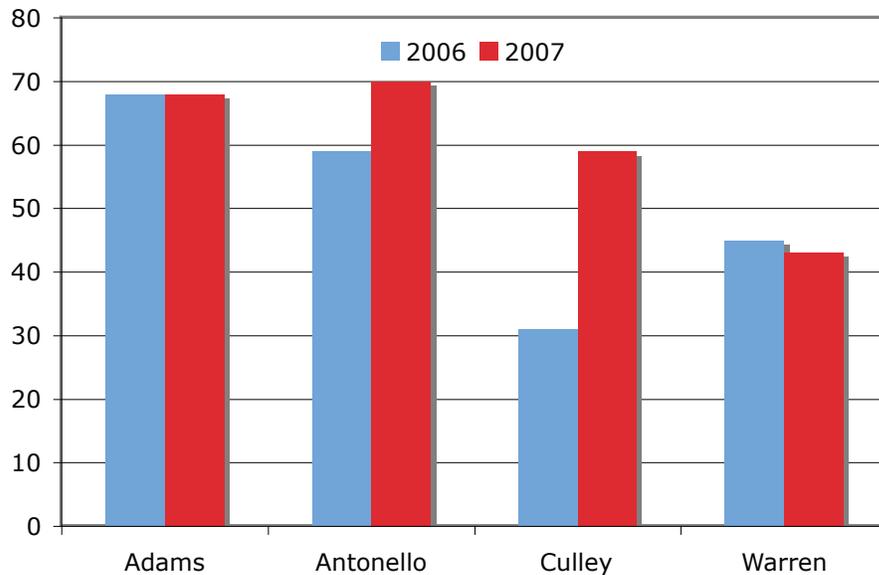
In addition, the 2007-2008 school accountability summary reports for each of the first four empowerment schools show that Antonello, Culley and Adams are exceeding the state’s average proficiency rates for reading and math, while Warren elementary is still below state averages for reading and math proficiency.

Paul Culley Elementary School was

Superintendent's Empowerment Schools CRT Reading Results (2006-2007)



Superintendent's Empowerment Schools CRT Math Results (2006-2007)



designated as a “high achieving school” by the state of Nevada for 2008 for the school’s scores in English language arts (ELA) and math on this year’s Nevada Criterion Referenced Tests. The school’s proficiency

rates exceeded the national requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in both areas. Elementary schools should have 51.7 percent of their students proficient in ELA and 54.6 percent proficient in math.

Culley students demonstrate 52.61 percent proficiency in ELA and 70.45 percent proficiency in math. In addition, Paul Culley Elementary School was also named one of Nevada's two "distinguished Title I schools" for 2007-2008. Title 1 schools serve a large population of students that qualify for the free or reduced lunch program.

IX. Lessons Learned

1. The CCSD empowerment schools provide an example of schools receiving extra resources from the district in exchange for signing an agreement with explicit performance outcomes for students. In exchange for autonomy these schools are expected to raise student achievement targets for each group of students.
2. The CCSD empowerment school provides an example of a superintendent taking responsibility for a specific set of schools by allowing those schools to experiment. In Nevada's case, an administrative office, under supervision of the superintendent, helps these schools use innovative practices to raise student achievement.
3. The CCSD empowerment schools provide an example of an agreement with the teachers union that allows principals to determine whether personnel are compatible with individual empowerment schools. It allows a "peer review" process and a mechanism for transferring incompatible teachers out of the school. This gives principals more discretion over the management of staff at the school level.

Resources

Clark County School District
Empowerment Schools, http://www.nvasb.org/07_conf_documents/lee.pdf

Contact Information

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Endnotes

1. "Three schools to gain 'empowerment' status in 2009-2010," Clark County School District, Press Release, February 9, 2009, <http://ccsd.net/news/pdf/20090209-941663748.pdf>.
2. For full contract provisions see http://ccsd.net/jobs/imagesDownloads/CCEA_NA_2007-2009.pdf.
3. For more information about the superintendent's schools see: <http://ccsd.net/regions/superintendents-schools/>.