



Budget Struggles 1975–1984

After almost ten years leading the Clark County School District, in March 1978, Dr. Guinn stepped down to become a vice president of Nevada Savings and Loan. During his tenure, he not only faced the challenge of desegregating the district, he developed a sound budget, reorganized the administrative divisions, and created a standardized teacher salary schedule, which recognized and rewarded advanced educational degrees and training as well as years of service.

With all of the controversy surrounding the sixth grade center integration plan, it was significant that the superintendent who followed Kenny Guinn was an African American. Assistant Superintendent to Guinn, Claude G. Perkins took office in 1978, presiding over a district of more than 86,000 students.

Almost immediately, Dr. Perkins was in the midst of controversy. He stressed stronger academics and higher standards at the secondary level, saying he would limit the variety of less substantive courses, believing that raising the expectations would improve student performance and the overall quality of education. Within a short time, he also reorganized the district's administrative offices, creating a few new top-level positions, and reassigning several others,

garnering criticism and strong reactions from school board members and administrators alike.

Dr. Perkins felt the Clark County School District was not getting fair representation with the latest federal legislation. In November 1979, he traveled to Washington, DC, with the school district's counsel, Robert Petroni, to argue that the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Public Law 94–142 did not address Clark County's needs. He argued that Nevada already had laws of its own protecting handicapped students and that because the federal mandates were unfunded, a heavy burden was placed on school district budgets.

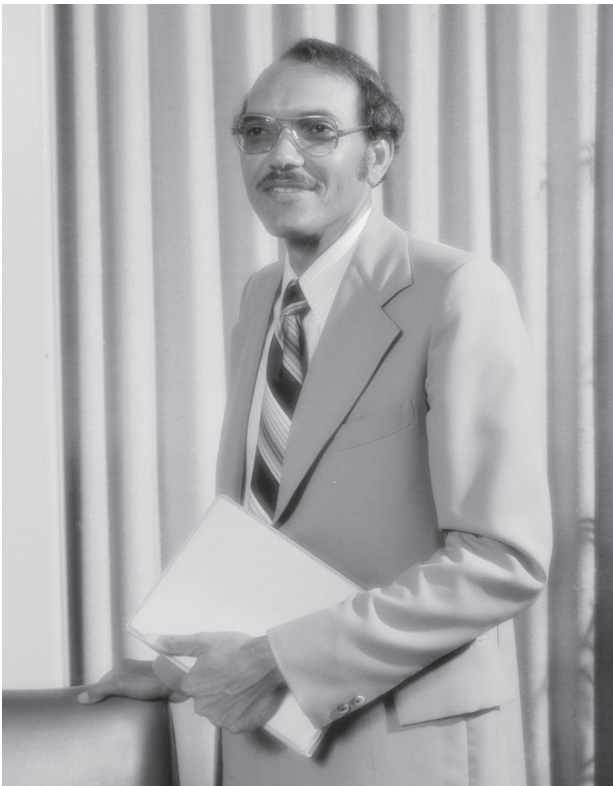
In 1981, Superintendent Perkins continued his battle for funding special education. He told the Nevada Senate Finance Committee that complying



World Events of the 1970s and 80s

- The Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 ousted the Shah, disrupting Iranian oil production, creating worldwide panic and soaring gas prices. Long lines at US gas stations formed, contributing to the problem. It was estimated that idling in lines at gas stations consumed 150,000 barrels of oil a day. In addition, 330,000 Iranians emigrated to the US in 1978–79, with as many as one thousand Iranian families coming to Clark County.
- In 1975, Congress passed Public Law 94–142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act to protect children with disabilities from discriminatory treatment in schools. Later strengthened and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), this act provided federal funds to states that developed and implemented policies assuring a free appropriate public education to all children with disabilities.
- The AIDS virus was discovered.
- The second worst hotel fire in modern United States history happened on November 21, 1980 when a fire started in a restaurant, in the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino (now Bally’s Las Vegas) killing eighty-five people and injuring 650 others.
- The PacMan arcade game became a national craze; MTV (the first twenty-four-hour-a-day music television station) gave teenagers a new reason to stay inside. The Apple computer launched the Apple IIe, and VHS and Betamax vied for consumer attention.
- Of particular importance to Nevada, Atlantic City permitted gambling.

Superintendent
Claude G.
Perkins, 1978.



with federal mandates for special education was draining funds for the educational experience of “regular students” in Clark County classrooms. This financial dilemma remains a struggle to this day.

At the school level, Dr. Perkins reduced class sizes in the junior high schools, keeping the class sizes more in line with elementary and high school numbers, as well as encouraging greater communication between teacher and students. He also earmarked more funds for school libraries and resource teachers, believing their services were important for the improvement and strengthening of education, and raised the bar by increasing graduation requirements for Clark County students.

The Dirty Dozen

In response to a national trend, UNLV faculty member Bill Marchant and CCSD educator Nadine Nielson created a masters degree elementary counselor program, which began in 1979. Dr. Marchant worked with CCSD elementary school principal



The Dorothy Seigle Diagnostic Center, first located on the site of the Mayfair School and later moved to the John F. Miller campus, was of immeasurable value in moving through the implementation of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142).

Developmentally delayed students listening to storytime in 1982.



William Moore and the Nevada State PTA to identify and secure state funding.

Seeing a need, Dr. Perkins approached CCSD educator Steve Smith who, along with Ron Ross, wrote a proposal for an elementary counseling program. A very proactive CCSD School Board approved the program and hired twelve counselors. They saw themselves as the twelve disciples, until they returned from the State Counselors Conference in Lake Tahoe, calling themselves the “dirty dozen,” a take-off on the movie by the same name.

One counselor was assigned to each of the sixth grade centers. The remaining five counselors were assigned to high-need elementary schools, serving one or two schools each. Counselors dealt with issues of abuse, divorce, death, as well as bullying, anger management, school phobia, and other behavioral disorders. They worked with students individually, in small groups, and in classroom discussions, as well as conducted parent training classes and staff development activities.

With the success of the program, the Clark County School Board developed a “pay as you go” plan, adding a few elementary school counseling positions each year, in the hopes of eventually providing a counselor at every elementary school.

Unfortunately, only a few years later, in the early 1980s, southern Nevada saw a slower economy and many counselor positions were cut. The Dirty Dozen conducted hours of research and data collection on the successes of the counseling program. As a result, the school board made a



Charles A. Silvestri, circa 1987.

By the 1976 opening of school, 83,032 students were enrolled in CCSD, 20,000 more than a decade ago.

commitment to reinstate counselors who had lost their jobs through a reduction in force (RIF), though schools were not guaranteed a full-time counselor. As late as 2004–05, many schools still shared counselors at the elementary level. Only schools

with more than one thousand students or those extremely at risk had one elementary counselor per school.

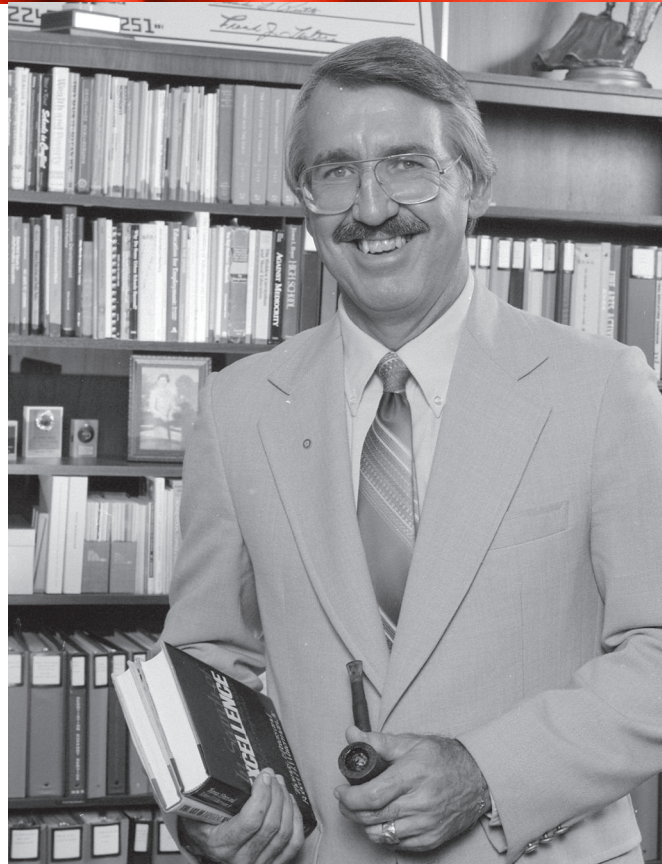
Perkins became increasingly unpopular with the community, teachers, and the school board. He



opposed the unionization of teachers and proposed dissolving their negotiating rights. He battled with his own school board and district administrators, as well as with the Nevada legislature. Though there were rumblings that the pressure put on him was racially motivated, when Perkins resigned in 1981, he was quick to say that race was not the issue. Instead, he admitted to a lack of political savvy.

After Perkins tendered his resignation, the CCSD Board of Trustees turned to Charles A. Silvestri, the current Associate Superintendent of Personnel Services, to step in as interim superintendent, overseeing the twenty-fourth largest district in the nation with more than eighty-seven thousand students. He accepted the assignment, but continued in his position with Personnel Services and also acted as the main negotiator between CCSD and the teachers. Within weeks, Silvestri announced that he would not seek the position permanently, citing the volatility of the position; instead, he chose to focus on maintaining as much stability as possible while the board searched for a replacement.

During Silvestri's short time in office, he did see some success, integrating the last all-black West-side school by turning it into a sixth grade center. Unfortunately, a failed bond issue disrupted Silvestri's goals of maintaining the status quo and the tax base for Nevada schools brought in less revenue than



Dr. Robert Wentz, circa 1984.

expected. Cutbacks were looming. Lack of funds and continued growth: the same old story.

Superintendent Wentz

Dr. Robert Wentz was already superintendent in St. Louis, Missouri, but expressed interest in presiding over the Clark County School District. While stable at the moment, it was preparing for explosive growth again. When he took over the superintendent duties

In 1982 the CCSD computer center was created for staff training, district wide software licensing, and technology curriculum development.

for Clark County School District in July of 1982, he faced major fiscal shortfalls in the millions of dollars. He was given the difficult task of cutting seven million dollars from the budget through layoffs and program eliminations.

Wentz then took a different tack toward funding new school construction. He worked with the school board to create the Pay-As-You-Go Plan. The plan called for schools to be built only when property taxes collected were sufficient to pay for new construction.

While there was initial public support for the plan, it failed. The defeat meant the school district would face serious overcrowding in the years to come.

In addition to struggling with the community over funds for school construction, Dr. Wentz was also at odds with the Clark County Teachers Association, at least in the beginning. Teachers were fighting for better pay, smaller class sizes, and improvements in hiring practices. Yet with the budget in crisis, Wentz could not support these initiatives. By 1985, though, Dr. Wentz was able to secure raises for teachers from the legislature, bringing peace to the two sides.

Innovative Curriculum

During the 1970s, Sue Morrow, the first elementary music consultant, recommended the Discipline-Based Art Education program and the Orff process she had seen at a national music conference. The Orff Music Program was introduced to CCSD elementary schools in 1975 with sev-

enteen music specialists teaching 11,600 fourth, fifth, and sixth graders at fifty-three elementary schools. CCSD music instruction was enhanced and the first step in providing planning time for teachers was in place.

Eventually, the employment of specialists became a part of the negotiated agreement between the district and the teachers' union to provide instructional planning time for teachers during the school day.







Carl Orff, a German composer, had been dissatisfied with the quality of musicians in his orchestra, which he decided could be traced to music education in elementary school. So he traveled the world, looking for instruments that could be adapted to encourage children to become independent musicians. He created instruments with removable bars that encouraged improvisation: the glockenspiel in Germany, the xylophone in Africa, and the metallophone in the Gamelan Orchestra.

Above: Music education in practice. Right: Students perform during Orff Music Festival, 1993.





Each year, elementary school teachers donate three Saturdays a year to write, produce, and develop a music program to showcase during the annual Orff Music Festival. Some of their music has been published throughout the world. The Elementary Orff Curriculum has been presented ten times at American Orff-Schulwerk Association Conferences and Music Educators National Conferences. This curriculum has also been shared with school districts in almost every state in the US, as well as in many foreign countries. To this day, CCSD remains a model throughout the U.S. for music education.

Additionally, the School-Community Partnership Office created and organized the Class Act Program. Since 1980, this program has presented professional music performances at schools throughout the district. These programs expand the educational and cultural experience of students while reinforcing the music curriculum.



Scenes from the 1994 Orff Music Festival.



High school performing arts program.







Today there are more than 226 music specialists serving elementary schools throughout the district.

During the 1978–1979 school year, CCSD established a three-year comprehensive fine arts program that was partially funded by the federal Elementary and Secondary Educational Act (ESEA). This act contributed to professional development, instructional materials and other resources, and the promotion of parental involvement in primary and secondary education. Movement and dance were included in both the elementary music and elementary physical education curriculum in a parallel fashion. The Elementary Dance Festivals, the Regional Music Festivals, and the Elementary Music Orff Festival showcased the emphasis on music and dance.

The CCSD music program continued to grow at both the elementary and secondary levels. By 1977 there were seventy-five thousand students enrolled in music education. Band enrollment jumped twenty percent the following year and participation in the strings program doubled. Also, many private businesses pitched in to help, donating instruments and equipment.

In 1980, CCSD took over full funding responsibilities for its comprehensive fine arts program.

Also instituted during the 70s was the Academically Talented Program, later known as the Gifted and Talented Program (or GATE). The program was designed to provide support and enriched curriculum for high achieving elementary students whose needs were not being met in the regular classroom. Funding came from both the state and county coffers.

Recognition for the district's efforts in writing instruction quickly followed. The Southern Nevada



Students from Ruby Thomas Elementary School meet face to face with sheep.





Fire Safety

After the tragedy of the MGM fire, there was a general call for better fire protection in public buildings, especially in Clark County schools. Money was diverted from the new school building program to complete a fire retrofit of older schools. This process became even more costly when construction stirred up deadly asbestos dust, which had recently been linked to lung cancer and respiratory disease. The asbestos, commonly used as a fire-retardant coating in buildings throughout the 1960s, had to be removed.

Seventy-two schools had asbestos, seven of them requiring extensive and costly retrofitting. Those needing the least costly repairs were fixed first; however, complete retrofitting took twelve months for junior high schools and fifteen months for high schools. Much of the work was done after school, but some schools required a complete shutdown, sending students to attend classes on other campuses on double sessions.



Writing Project (SNWP) began in 1984 as a staff development partnership between the Clark County School District and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). This important collaboration involves UNLV faculty with K-12 grade teachers in an intensive summer writing workshop. Teachers learn a nationally-approved writing process while practicing, in a “hands-on” fashion, the same writing skills they will later teach their students. Teachers selected for the institute become part of an ever-growing leadership team, bringing their writing knowledge and experience back to their own classrooms, as well as providing professional development training for their colleagues. In 2004, additional Writing Institutes were added in the fall and spring to accommodate the schedule of year-round teachers.

The Southern Nevada Writing Project is affiliated with the National Writing Project which has 200 sites around the nation. It is the only federally-funded program that focuses on the teaching of writing. Teachers learn how to bring students through the writing process that includes: 1) prewriting and brainstorming, 2) writing a first draft, 3) revision and rewriting, 4) editing, and 5) publishing. The process emphasizes student choice as well as peer collaboration and sharing. Collaboration between teachers within each school and throughout the district is also promoted by the SNWP so that teachers better understand writing development across grades and subject areas. Some of the district programs for children that have evolved as a result of the SNWP include: 1) a Young Writers’ Institute held in the summer, 2) a day-long Writing Fair for elementary, middle, and high school students,



and 3) the Family Writing Project — bringing family members together to write.

A second vocational high school, the Area Technical Trade Center, opened in 1982 in North Las Vegas. Unlike traditional vocational-technical programs, students from across the county spent half the day at their home high schools for academic coursework and the other half of the day at ATTC studying such trades as electronics and culinary arts, or preparing for careers in medicine, mechanics, and construction. Some of these classes lasted five hours in length.

In the outlying rural parts of the county, such as Moapa Valley, courses were offered in farming and husbandry, as well as programs that involved students in growing actual crops and marketing them.

The Clark County School District also developed cooperative programs with local businesses to train young people in educational and work settings. Students can obtain course credit toward graduation as they work in paying jobs. Over one thousand students work each year in retail shops, fast food restaurants, legal offices, dental clinics, and doctor offices, to name a few.

Partnership office

The Partnership office at the Clark County School District asks businesses and people in the community to work with schools. The goal is to identify community resources that can be used to enrich the educational experiences of students.

The program started in 1983 when seven businesses were partnered with seven schools. The program now has a staff of five administrators and



six support staff members. Out of this office, six hundred partnerships are arranged each year, impacting as many as forty thousand students.

The businesses and individuals inspire students to stay in school and mentor them in different profession choices. The United Way once gave the school district a five-year grant that matched adults with



failing students. The adults acted as mentors, meeting with the individual students at least once a week to make sure they didn't fall through the cracks.

Other partnerships applied the specific resources of their business to an assigned school, such as:

Sierra Health held health screenings at Twin Lakes Elementary School. They also provided crutches, wheelchairs, computers, and other equipment to the school.

Various chambers of commerce held career days and offered college scholarships for graduating high school students.

Station Casinos funding enhanced programs and facilities, such as new landscaping at C.P. Squires.

The Las Vegas Philharmonic has provided orchestral programs for thousands of elementary students in a professional concert setting.

Perhaps the most interesting and exciting partnership program is the JASON Project. Developed by Dr. Robert Ballard, the oceanographer who discovered the Titanic, the program delivers Internet and satellite broadcasts of scientific programs to students throughout the world.

Dr. Ballard started the JASON project to help middle and high school students apply math and science to real-world applications. Each year, JASON project staff develop a curriculum based on an expedition they will be taking someplace in the world. Past programs went to the Galapagos, Puerto Rico, Peru, Iceland, and Alaska. Students and teachers also have the opportunity to apply to be a part of the research team each year. Clark County students have gone to the Everglades, Belize, and were even part of an expedition that mapped the bottom of the ocean.

Schools built 1975–1984

Elementary schools:

Grant Bowler
C.H. Decker
Harvey Dondero
Elbert Edwards
Doris French
Fay Galloway
Oran Gragson
R. Guild Gray
Walter V. Long
Nate Mack

R. E. Tobler
Sandy Valley
Virgin Valley

Middle Schools:

B. Mahlon Brown
Helen C. Cannon
Elton M. Garrett
Kenny C. Guinn

High Schools:

Area Technical Trade Center



