**Nevada Public Education News**

***Clark County School District’s Accountability Program is called into question.*** Bill Hanlon

The Clark County School District’s School Performance Framework, SPF, is in conflict with the state of Nevada’s framework. The CCSD School Performance Framework, designed by Ken Turner, a special assistant to the Superintendent and an outside consultant, will cause a great deal of confusion in the community when the state releases the results of their framework.

Both frameworks rank schools by assigning “stars”. Clark County’s model relies heavily on what they describe as growth. The state’s program, while incorporating growth, has a greater emphasis on proficiency. This results in schools with low proficiency rates in Clark County earning 4 stars on the district accountability system and only 2 stars on the state’s system. The state was expected to release their results last month but have decided to wait until after the Legislative Session.

The whole idea behind the accountability system is so parents and the community know how a school is performing. Having these conflicting results will not inform the community at all. This lack of transparency, leads to problems with credibility and higher levels of distrust in public education. As sure as the sun will rise in the morning, the public will be told by state and local representatives there are technical difficulties with the reports and that is why they are being held up a few months - till after the Legislative Session.

While the district continually touts transparency, more and more people believe the transparency occurs only when it benefits the resumes of school district officials. Both newspapers have requested information regarding graduation rates. They have not received the information suggesting state law does not require they release it.

A joke about the district’s framework is beginning to circulate around the state at Clark County’s expense; To see stars in Clark County, you only need look up at night because that doesn’t demand a lot of proficiency.

Earlier this year, it was reported that schools in Clark County, whose scores and/or growth declined, were held “harmless”. That means that they were awarded more stars than they earned.

These inconsistencies do not bode well for new teacher evaluation systems required by the state. If the district and state are so far off on rating schools, the teachers should be concerned about this inconsistency, the unfairness, in their personal evaluations which already have an abundance of unanswered questions.

One huge problem with both accountability systems is the use of a single descriptor, in this case the number of stars, to determine school performance. If the accountability system is supposed to inform the community, then proficiency and growth should be reported separately. People, especially parents, have a right to know how their school is performing based on proficiency. They also have a right to know if the school is moving in the right direction – growth. Combining them into a single statistic and assigning stars does not inform anyone, it merely leads to more questions.

One of the problems facing CCSD is the elected trustees don’t ask questions. Anyone that has taken a class in statistics knows the first rule of statistics is to ask the next question.

A few superintendents ago, all students were required to take algebra in 8th grade. That resulted in very high failure rates. The argument the superintendent used back then to support his initiative was he’d rather have the students take and fail a more rigorous course like algebra than take pre-algebra because it would serve the students better in the long run.

Members of the community thought that was a bold move, a reform worth supporting, an idea that would move southern Nevada ahead educationally. They supported it. Math educators thought it was nuts. Well, the most recent research suggests that students who were forced to enroll in algebra without the necessary knowledge and skills underperformed their peers who were not forced into taking algebra unprepared.

That’s a lesson lost here. In Clark County’s School Performance Framework, schools are awarded stars based on the number of students enrolled in honors type classes. You’d like to think the stars would be rewarded based on --- student performance!

This plan has resulted in students being deliberately misplaced in schools so the schools could be awarded more stars. You’d also like to think the school district would adopt a “do no harm” policy in this star chase. Instead the district is ignoring history and any research that is inconvenient.

And to what avail did the schools earn these stars by deliberately misplacing students? Not much. Because when the state’s school performance framework gets released – even if it is after the Legislative session – everyone will know they were being deliberately misled.

And who pays for it? The students. The students who did not receive the assistance they needed to be successful by not being properly placed. Those same students are more likely to become credit deficient which places their graduation in jeopardy.

The students who earned a right to be in those classes by past performance also pay a toll. Their teachers were distracted, taking care of attendance and discipline issues, addressing student deficiencies, and other issues taking time away from instruction. Last year, schools were told to take 15 minutes out of their 50-minutes of instruction everyday, classes like algebra, for “interventions”. Interventions mean the teachers were helping the students who were behind who probably did not have the prerequisite knowledge and skills to be there in the first place. So students who had the necessary knowledge and skills, came to school everyday, paid attention, etc. had their instruction in math cut by 30%. Then the higher-ups want to know why students are performing poorly.

Who else pays for it? The teachers. Their class sizes are some of the largest in the country. The average first year algebra class has 37 to 42 students in it. So those teachers are dealing with approximately 200 students per day in overcrowded conditions, not enough books and supplies, dealing with students with IEPs, students referred from the judicial system, students not taking their meds, students being misplaced and asked to teach a more rigorous course of study with the adoption of the common core standards. The question they have is how can they continually take time out of academic classes to provide interventions for students who should not have been placed there in the first place and successfully implement the more rigorous common core standards.

This star chasing also impacts taxpayers because we will be expected to pay more for the remediation of these students who were misplaced. History suggests it is always better and cheaper to do it right the first time.

The Clark County School District would better serve their students by getting out of the PR mode and into the education that occurs in the classroom. Creating a 12 member Public Relations team while crying poor mouth and asking teachers to do more with less sounds a little disingenuous.