

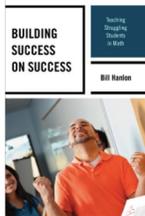
Nevada Public Education



When Boards Don't Do Due Diligence

Bill Hanlon

Nevada's citizens have witnessed first-hand what happens when boards don't do due diligence. The local papers' front pages have had a field day with Wynn's Resorts well paid board of directors. The State Public Charter School Authority board found that they were being kept in the dark from their executive, the NV State Board of Education's blind eye is all telling with their testing fiascos, bias against southern Nevada, relicensing rules etc. Those are all appointed boards. The Clark County School District's (CCSD) board members are elected, and they have allowed our schools that were nationally recognized as the "***fastest improving in the nation***" to the mess we are in now because they didn't ask questions.



CFOs and school superintendents want docile boards so they can do "their" jobs. I get it. I would want that too. Superintendents often keep their board members "busy" by appointing them to committees – out of their hair. But, when board members don't ask questions, don't dig, then the train goes off the track. In education, when that occurs, students pay the price.

As an example, you'd think our schools' remediation rate and test scores would cause more concern than just talk, but we only get lip service about the issue. Someone might ask if "we", the adults, are the actual cause of the problem by misplacing students in the first place. Asking questions and demanding responses should not be seen as developing poor relationships with a superintendent. Trustees in smaller districts seem more willing and able to ask questions, trustees of larger districts could follow their lead.

A report by the Council of Great City Schools reveals just how poorly the CCSD's Board of Trustees performed in overseeing the school district. Our representatives on the board have had a tendency to fall in love with their superintendent and just follow the leader – no questions asked. Hopefully this report will bring them back

to reality. There has to be a healthy tension between what the superintendent is proposing and doing, the board's only employee, and the board. The "love affair" that has been so detrimental to our students with the last two local superintendents, that complacency should not happen again.

Under former superintendent Jones, the district adopted the philosophy of "moneyball" used by a California baseball team. These school leaders decided that paying for the best teachers was NOT worth the dividend. They would seek to hire new or average teachers so they could pay less in salaries. How's that working out for your kids? Where were board members when this was happening? CCSD went from the fastest improving in the nation to the mess we are in today. The proof – just glance out national rankings – look at our ACT scores.

Under Jones and Skorkowski, students' experiences learning in the classroom took a backseat to their plans. Professional development in the content areas teachers teach was diminished greatly. District semester exams stopped being reported and finally dropped. Where was the board when these decisions were being made? Why was the focus taken off the students' experiences learning in the classroom?

The issues facing our students, our rank educationally, and the mess identified in the Great City School Report can only happen when the board is asleep at the wheel. The trustees have to start paying closer attention, listen to school based employees as well as central office and superintendent, examine the "pros and cons" of their decisions, make those public, and start doing what's in the best interest of students.

Bill Hanlon, is a noted speaker, an author, educator, consultant and coach for schools, former Director of the Southern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program, and is a national presenter for organizations such as AASA, ASCD, ALAS, NMSA, NASSP, NSBA, and NCTM. He was the coordinator of Clark County School District's Math/Science Institute and was also responsible for K-12 math audits. He served on the Nevada State Board of Education, Regional Director of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) and as a member of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) States Partnership Board. He also hosted a television series, "Algebra, *you can do it!*" on PBS Las Vegas.

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