

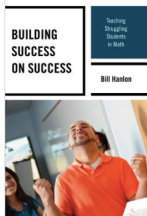
Nevada Public Education



Academics Not a Priority In Clark County

Bill Hanlon

As reported in the RJ, only 26% of our students are proficient in math. That statistic should not shock anyone. The facts are the last three superintendents (Jones, and Skorkowski and Jara) have done virtually nothing to improve math instruction.



Walt Rulffes was the last superintendent to emphasize academics. He required content professional development, testing, and required his superintendents and school administrators to attend so the message was prioritized and uniform. The result, CCSD was recognized back then as the fastest improving district in the nation.

Rather than focus on core academic subjects like math; the district's concerns seem to be focused on scheduling community meetings, equity, diversity, social emotional learning, discipline policies (restorative discipline), grading, testing changing report cards, and the pandemic. These issues, while important, are secondary and tertiary in terms of priority. Board President Cavazos needs to change the narrative to address public education's primary mission.

One might ask, where's the beef? Who is actually looking at public education's primary mission? You know, reading, writing, arithmetic, etc.

The trustees should schedule a meeting to discuss student performance on first quarter grades in classes like algebra. Wouldn't the board want principals to collect grade distributions on the first tests of the quarter to determine who needs help – or do we wait for failure?

Teachers, rather than enrolling in professional development based on what they teach, how they teach it, resources that support that instruction and how to fairly assess student achievement of that knowledge are now required to enroll Jara's big issues that apparently take precedence over students' academic learning.

Do math teachers in CCSD need content professional development in math? Again, the headlines tell us we have experienced a math teacher shortage since 1985. Too many of our students are being taught by less than qualified math teachers; we have daily substitutes, long term substitutes, alternative route teachers, and teachers with education degrees with a math emphasis teaching our students – there are few actual math majors.

I'm not sure many of them would know enough math to show students how well math is linked; that the Pythagorean Theorem, Distance Formula, Equation of a Circle, or Trig identify $\cos^2x + \sin^2x = 1$ are all the same formula, just written differently because they are being used in different contexts. Or, as students ask, when will I ever use this? Would these less than qualified teachers be able to create interest or enthusiasm in teaching math by explaining how math is used. For instance, the properties of a parabola are used for amphitheatres, satellite dishes, flash & headlights, etc.

The Governor, the Legislature, NV Dept of Education have all emphasized the need for concentration on STEM subjects, without success in math, students certainly won't be successful in science, engineering or technology.

When Jara was quoted in the RJ's article saying the district will do everything in its power to provide students the support they need to get back on track and succeed academically, I know that is not true. Math help has been offered to the district at no cost, the district reply, they didn't need help at this time. Academics is clearly not a CCSD priority.

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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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