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SPECIAL MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 23, 2009

TO: NSHE Board of Regents

FROM: James E. Rogers
Chancellor

RE: THE STATE OF EDUCATION

Attached are the Chancellor's State of the System address and the State of Education addresses by Superintendent Walt Rulffes of the Clark County School District and Superintendent Paul Dugan of the Washoe County School District.

The Chancellor's address and Superintendent Rulffes address will air on Channel 3 in Las Vegas at 7:30 p.m. tonight, January 23, and the address by the Chancellor and Superintendent Paul Dugan will air on Channel 4 in Reno and Channel 10 in Elko tonight, January 23 at 7:30 pm.

If you cannot watch tonight's broadcast, you can watch this weekend at <http://www.kvbc.com>, <http://www.krnv.com>, <http://www.nevada.edu> or on YouTube.

We are sending you the scripts of all three addresses so you will have a preview of the broadcasts. We appreciate you taking the time to read and watch the addresses.

Enclosures:

- State of the System, Chancellor Jim Rogers, Nevada System of Higher Education
- State of the District, Superintendent Walt Rulffes, Clark County School District
- State of the District, Superintendent Paul Dugan, Washoe County School District

State of the System by **Chancellor James E. Rogers**

I have a new slogan for Nevada to persuade out-of-staters to move here. “Move to Nevada – Our education system is in such good shape that we will guarantee your child will graduate from eighth grade. We are sorry, but we are unable to guarantee that your child will be able to read or write or add and subtract.” How about that folks?

I have lived in Nevada 55 years. I graduated from Las Vegas High School in 1956 in a class of 412. My guess is that we had a 90-95 percent graduation rate. Parents’ dreams for their children did not stop with high school graduation. Parents’ dreams were for their children to graduate from college and to do better than their parents had.

What happened to those dreams?

I will have been chancellor a little over five years when I leave in June of this year. Like most of you out there, I came to the job with a sense that education was an overweight, lazy, unproductive, mass of intellect with no direction and little desire to get there fast.

I have looked at the alleged inefficiencies, not only in higher education, but in K-12. The majority of educators work very hard, are much smarter than their critics, and are far more organized and efficient than their critics. If they have a shortcoming, it is that they are, for the most part, not aggressive, mean-spirited people, but are instead caring, concerned individuals who want to teach, not fight. They do not organize well. They do not fight dirty. And the success of your children is more important than their own success.

The average professor with a Ph.D. has spent 20,000 hours, that is 10 years at 40 hours per week, working at his or her expense, to be able to teach at the college level. They receive no reimbursement for those 10 years. And they get no extra pay for being able to do what 99 percent of the public could never do.

I have looked at the administration of the education system. I find them no less productive than the administrators of the television stations I own, or the banks upon which I have served as a board member over the last 28 years.

What then has made the Nevada education system go from good to average to less than average since the 1960s when Nevada’s high schools won multiple awards for being among the best in the nation?

In the 1960s and 70s, every parent wanted his child to receive all the education possible. College today is no longer the goal of this society. Only a very few appreciate the importance of a college education. Whether recognizing the fact or not, in the 1980s Nevadans adopted a new, much lower, set of standards to determine if Nevada’s children’s education was satisfactory. Their vision and ambition then became, “Forget college, that was always too expensive and took too long. Now we will all be happy if our kids graduate from high school.”

But then in the last 15-20 years, Nevadans adopted an even lower standard of dreams, ambition, work ethics, and pride. When high school graduation rates dropped below 60 percent, the new

standards became a new set of dreams, which are, “Guess what Billy and Jean are going to do to fill their life’s dreams – they are actually going to graduate from eighth grade – I hope.”

I have been critical of the Governor for not supporting adequate funding of education. I have been critical of the Legislature for the same reason. But folks, they have not put us into our present education dilemma. The state of K-16 education in Nevada is where the public, that is you out there, has allowed it to sink. Your only relationship with the education system is to ship your unprepared kids to school, not with the expectation of success, but with the demand that an education system, inadequately funded, develop and/or repair children that you as a parent did not prepare for school or support while your children attended school.

If you want a competent and productive education system, tell your governor and legislators to fund it. They do what they think you want them to do. That is why they are called “public servants.” It is the public – that means you – that has created this disaster of a public education system.

You may need to pay more taxes and sacrifice so that your children can go to college. You certainly need to instill in your children a desire to learn, a discipline of hard work, and a willingness to postpone instant gratification for their longer-term good – high school and college degrees that are difficult to gain but gives them a future. Maybe most importantly, you have to take part in your child’s education. Your responsibility does not stop as they walk out the door to catch the bus.

Even if you do not have children in school, each of us has a vested interest in contributing to the success of the current generation of students. This next generation of students will soon be responsible for providing the economic muscle that is necessary for current retirees to enjoy the continued benefits of government programs, such as Social Security.

The evidence is clear that Nevada’s current choices spell disaster. Only one in ten ninth graders will graduate from college here. As a state, Nevada is 49th or next to last in the percentage of its college-age citizens enrolled in a college or university. Nevada is at the bottom in the percentage of its population with any college degree – associate or bachelor’s – and predicted to get even worse.

You have heard your Governor, propose to cut the budget for your colleges and universities by 36%. Let me tell you what this will mean for higher education.

Last fiscal year, operating budget cuts of 4.5% or \$ 28.3 million were made, and this fiscal year cuts of 7.92% or \$41.9 million were made. These were reductions to what was already starvation-level funding. As a consequence, you are seeing a reduction in classes and an increase in the number of students jammed into each class. This means that students will take much longer to graduate, it will cost them more money and they will lose time when they could be working and adding real value to Nevada’s economy. At every campus, programs have been cut – programs that were part of building the quality of life of Nevada’s communities.

If the Governor’s budget proposals become a reality, what will the higher education system do? If the System were to cut 36% of student enrollment to match the 36% budget cut, this would close the College of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas and the Great Basin College in Elko. An alternative would be to close UNR, Truckee Meadows Community College, and Western Nevada College in Northern Nevada. Or the System could shut down UNLV and Nevada State College

in Las Vegas. If the cuts were applied as the Governor proposes, they would cut well over 50% at some of our institutions.

In cutting, the first victims would be the System employees. These layoffs would mean fewer classes, fewer programs, and fewer services. The second victim would be salaries of the remaining employees. Fortunately for the college and university faculty, they live in a world that is nationally competitive and they have the talents to move anywhere. The System's best professors would leave Nevada.

A third unworkable remedy is already being discussed by the Governor, the legislators, and the Board of Regents; increasing tuition and fees. Low tuition and fees have been used to encourage Nevada's high school graduates to stay in Nevada to go to college because Nevada does not offer scholarships. The college door must be kept open for young people who cannot afford even today's level of tuition and fees. However, even the Millennium Scholarship, Nevada's best attempt to build an educated workforce, is in danger of disappearing because of lack of funding sources. But with large increases in tuition and fees and no increases in scholarships, Nevada may be guaranteeing itself a loss of an entire educated generation.

The state pays about 80% of the System's cost. The student pays 20%. If the state were to cut its contribution by 36%, the state would then contribute 51% and the students would contribute 49%, an increase of more than two and a half times our current tuition and fees. An increase in tuition and fees to fill the hole the Governor describes would make tuition and fees so high that it would be cheaper to go out of state to college. At a time when more Nevadans are unemployed and underemployed than ever before, how many could afford to attend Nevada's colleges? And how many would want to attend Nevada's colleges? Remember that it is not just the opportunity lost for an individual; it is a loss for all Nevadans when businesses leave Nevada or do not come to Nevada because Nevada has few educated employees to hire.

Every one of the proposed cuts will ultimately destroy your children's chance to be well-educated. Nevada presently does not have enough college graduates to make Nevada economically competitive against other states or other countries. Nevada cannot afford to have fewer college graduates. College graduates from other states will also have serious doubts about moving to Nevada, where education is the worst in the nation.

Nevada does not have enough high-level research capabilities in its universities or the Desert Research Institute to attract high tech jobs. Under the Governor's proposed budget cuts, Nevada will have less qualified experts because it will not be able to retain, and certainly not attract, the best researchers.

This System does not provide adequate scholarships to retain Nevada's best high school graduates and does not provide financial aid to assist students who need help in attending college.

The System does not graduate enough nurses, physicians, and health care workers to provide even the minimum health care required by Nevadans. With budget cuts, there will be fewer, and possibly no, health care providers available to meet even the basic needs of Nevadans.

And the list goes on and on.

In the last year, I have been working with your elected officials to try to find ways to avert this destruction of Nevada's public K-16 educational system. The Board of Regents has stepped up and will insist on every potential cost savings that can be found while still protecting students and

the System's basic mission. However, it will be impossible to increase efficiencies to make up for the 36% cuts. We cannot cut our way out of this problem.

I have suggested to legislators that they find new revenue sources, including a new and productive tax system. New funding can be found that will not drag down the economy.

Finally, let me comment on one statistic that Governor Gibbons included in his State of the State address. Under his budget, higher education would get 13% of the state general fund, higher than the national average in 2007 of 11.2%. He is correct. However, what he failed to tell you is that the Nevada General Fund budget is so small that Nevada ranked 48th in the nation for the amount the state spends per citizen. Obviously the state has a very small budget, and even a relatively higher percentage produces very limited support. Those figures are for 2007 – prior to the cuts of the last two years and the proposed draconian cuts of the next two years.

Also look at the amount of state money spent for higher education per citizen in the state. Nevada ranked 33rd in 2007 – surely that would be 50th with this budget proposal. If you include local funding for higher education along with state funding, because many states support community colleges with local funding, Nevada drops to 36th, certainly now 50th with this budget proposal. Do not believe that Nevada is doing well in higher education support. The Governor's budget is a travesty.

The legislative conversations are about to begin in earnest, with good people coming together to find solutions. Please express your support of education to your legislators as they undertake this difficult task. Education is too important to you, your children, and your grandchildren. In difficult times, the best investment is in education. Education is the solution to the state's financial and cultural problems.

State of the District Address

**Dr. Walt Rulffes, Superintendent of Schools
Clark County School District**

January 23, 2009

Hello, my name is Walt Rulffes, and I am superintendent of the Clark County School District.

I would like to begin my remarks by thanking Chancellor Rogers not only for providing this opportunity to focus on education but also for his relentless advocacy on behalf of students of all ages.

Both the chancellor and I have been in regular communication with the state's leaders on critical education issues, but, more than anything, we need Nevadans to grasp the seriousness of our current budget problems so that you can help us protect and improve education in our state.

As we approach a critical legislative session, it is important that we all put our cards on the table. I listened to the Governor's address, and I appreciate his forthrightness in establishing his starting point for discussions.

As your superintendent, however, I can tell you that those proposals are unacceptable. Nevada is already at the bottom of the nation in education funding, and further reductions in funding will have a destructive impact on our state and will dim the prospects of every child in school at this time.

At this point, I can only say that I look forward to working with our state leaders during the session to craft solutions to economic problems that do not involve compromising the futures of our students or taking advantage of a loyal workforce.

So, what is at risk in the Clark County School District if education is undermined?

- All data show that we are making progress on closing the achievement gap between high and low performing populations. Students in poverty, students with limited English ability, and students with special education needs all showed improvement last school year.
- Last year, CCSD was the only one of the nation's ten largest districts to make Adequate Yearly Progress under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. And we did it again this year.
- The District continues to open new career and technical centers. Research shows that students in these learning environments outperform peers on virtually every measure.
- We continue to expand dual credit opportunities that allow high school students to earn college credit for some of their high school courses. Nevada has one of the lowest rates of high school students going on to college. Earning college credits in high school builds a bridge that leads many students straight to higher education.

- As of this year, all middle school students are taking three full years of science.
- CCSD developed and implemented the 21st Century curriculum, which the Legislature adopted as law because of its high standards.
- We implemented ParentLink, an Internet- and phone-based communication system that facilitates a superior level of contact between parents and schools.
- We continue to develop and support many partnerships with the Nevada System of Higher Education to ensure the college readiness of our students.
- Last school year, CCSD students earned a total of \$142 million in scholarships to the very best institutions in the state and the nation.
- And, to round things out:
 - CCSD was named a “best-practices” school district by the American Productivity and Quality Center.
 - One of our elementary schools was named the top magnet school in the nation.
 - Six CCSD schools were named in *U.S. News and World Report’s* feature on the best high schools in America.
 - Our District won the Nevada Taxpayer Association’s Good Government Award for energy conservation.

Despite how we are sometimes portrayed, there is a lot happening in your school district that you can be proud of. But these are the very things that are at risk if we begin undermining education.

There are fantastic families and students in our communities, and every time I visit a school, I am reminded that the generations who follow us have unlimited promise. Our job, as today’s business and civic leaders, is to ensure that today’s students have the opportunity to realize their potential.

Reducing support for education while the demand is increasing just does not make sense. Unlike some private sector businesses where work is tapering off, our clients continue to come. We grew by over 3,000 students this year, and our population continues to grow in need, as well.

Forty-two percent of our students qualify for free or reduced-price meals and one of every six has limited English proficiency. At a time when there are more students and greater needs for services, solving the budget problem at the expense of education will have consequences that will not only outlast the economic downturn but will perpetuate it in Nevada.

By all national measures, Nevada has been funding education at a minimal level, even in the good times.

This chart, prepared by the Department of Education and based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics and the National Education Association shows that per-pupil support in Nevada has not only lagged behind the rest of the nation for many years, but notice that the disparity has been steadily increasing.

Keep in mind that during the past year, CCSD has already sustained \$133 million in cuts:

- We lost expansion of full-day kindergarten before it was born – a direct hit on the student population that could have benefited most.
- Empowerment schools – the foundation of the Governor’s original education platform – never saw the light of day. However, generous private donors continue to invest in the empowerment program.
- School improvement grants – many of which were used for tutorials and programs to help students pass their proficiency exams – were cut by the state.
- Replacement of aging buses has been deferred.
- Critical positions have been left vacant.
- Dollars designated for textbooks and instructional equipment were reduced by 50 percent.
- Elimination of teacher mentoring programs leaves us unable to help improve skills of teachers who need and want assistance.
- Elimination of school positions means greater work for those who remain, whether it is teachers with even larger classes or counselors and nurses who already have too many students to serve.
- Elimination of programs like block scheduling and AVID means cutting programs that help move students toward graduation and restricting opportunities for students to discover elective interests in high school.
- Reduction in budgets for sports and extracurricular activities diminishes our ability to provide a well-rounded education for students.
- The elimination of over 260 nonschool positions will have a negative impact on how promptly we can respond to everything from parent phone calls to broken computers.
- We are now preparing for the likelihood of employee layoffs at all levels.

The only happy ending for us in a national or global economic crisis is to return to a point where our goods, services, and information are needed and desired by the rest of the world. Nevada most certainly is not investing in education to the point where we can say our children will be competitive in that arena.

I must add that higher education is facing all these same issues: a loss of funding, elimination of courses for students, and a reduction in staff. Across the board, education in Nevada is systematically being reduced to minimum services.

Ironically, education is not the problem in an economic crisis. Education is the solution. Yet, it remains in the balance as if compromising the future of our children is a sensible consideration.

The Governor talked about Nevada investing in renewable energy as one means of providing jobs and returning to prosperity. That would be great. But let's not place ourselves in a position where we have to import the talent and intellect to make that dream a reality. Those jobs should go to Nevadans. And they will if our schools and universities have the resources necessary to educate our children.

From the beginning of the budget crisis, my goal has been to protect the classroom as much as possible. We have thousands of extraordinary teachers who are already going above and beyond, and I intend to protect them as much as I can. I asked all nonschool sites to make 12 to 20 percent cuts so that school cuts could be limited to 3 percent or less.

I have been criticized for that strategy; many folks say that the only way to get people's attention is to eliminate sports, fine arts, and transportation. However, I continue to believe that my job is to offer our students the best experiences that resources allow.

Some people have suggested that all nonteaching positions be eliminated – especially those in administration. While management is always a popular target, the fact is no organization, corporation, military unit, or family can function without leadership.

Basically, nonschool offices in the District have been asked to cut at least four times as much as schools, but you can see from the graphic that when leadership comprises the smallest fraction of the workforce, it is not possible to sustain all cuts in one area.

Eighty-nine percent of the District's general fund employees work in schools, and the majority of them are teachers. Another 6 percent of District employees work in transportation. The remaining 4.8 percent of staff includes central administrators, but it is predominately secretarial, clerical, and other support staff.

Like any business, we have operational functions such as payroll, maintenance, transportation, and others that require oversight. Our ratio of employees to administrators is about 35 to 1. That is already a far leaner ratio than any I can find in other public or private organization.

It is difficult for most of us to grasp the enormity of the cuts we have already made and those that have been proposed. In a three-year period, we will be losing about \$375 million in operating revenue.

To give that some context, \$375 million equates to the salaries and benefits of about 6,000 teachers for those three years. Presently, we have 18,000 teachers and they represent the largest expenditure in our budget. Clearly, it will be impossible to cope with a loss of that amount and leave the classroom untouched.

I should also point out that CCSD is one of the most audited entities in the state. I welcome that scrutiny. We have a huge budget, and it is appropriate that there is plenty of oversight. The audits always make recommendations for improvement, but we have also received many commendations.

Overall, our audits have been favorable – including those imposed by the legislature – and they consistently show us to be responsible stewards of tax dollars. CCSD compares well with peer districts, and a greater percent of every operating dollar goes directly to the classroom than in most districts across the country.

While the state must cope with the current loss of revenue, we also need to take steps to protect education from cuts every time the economy falters. The Clark County School District is introducing a bill during this legislative session to accomplish just that.

Every year, taxes are raised in the name of education. What most people do not know, however, is that when revenues are strong, the excess taxes raised in the name of education do not go to schools; they are placed into the state's general fund for use in other state programs. In fact, a recent study by the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce noted that reversion of education dollars "... constitutes a significant supplement to the state budget as a whole."

In short, hundreds of millions of dollars have been diverted away from education over the years and placed in other budgets. The Board of School Trustees and I believe that if people are taxed under the impressions that the funds are for education, then the funds, in fact, should be reserved for education. We propose that when revenues are strong, the additional dollars should go into a stabilization account for education so that services can be preserved during difficult times like these.

Whether you are a parent or not, there is no way that the crippling effect of a substandard education for a generation of students can be considered a good solution for our current problems.

Aristotle said, "All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth."

Think about that: the fate of empires depends on the education of youth. What is the fate of Nevada and its empires?

At the very moment that critical and creative thinking are imperative, we are beginning to dismantle higher education, while at the K-12 level, we are making additional cuts in a state that already funds at the bottom of the nation.

If the fate of this empire is dependent upon the education of our youth, my message to you is: Nevada is in trouble.

Degrading our education system ultimately will cost more than it saves. I urge policy makers and citizens to take the long view and protect the asset most critical to ensuring and sustaining Nevada's prosperity, a sound system of public education.

Thank you.

State of the Washoe County School District by **Superintendent Paul Dugan**

Good Evening. I am Paul Dugan, Superintendent for Washoe County School District. Since this is the third year for giving this State of Education address, I want to thank Chancellor Rogers for creating this tradition of addressing the community on the State of Education and inviting me to take part. In my four and a half years as Superintendent, Washoe County School District has enjoyed a growing, positive and meaningful relationship with both Truckee Meadows Community College and the University of Nevada, Reno. This is due to Chancellor Rogers' leadership as well as the leadership of both TMCC President Maria Sheehan and UNR President Milt Glick. I thank the three of them for this collaboration.

Let me begin this address with the troubling subject of the budget. The news could not be any more bleak. In November, Washoe County voters rejected a measure that would have provided much-needed resources to update, modernize and revitalize the teaching and learning environment in our older schools. Its failure was a blow to all in this community who value education but more importantly, a blow to our students. Not only would we have been able to improve the condition of our older schools, the average age of which is 40 years, but it would have been a sizeable economic stimulus package for the area's battered construction industry.

We are now faced with the daunting task of allocating about \$300 million in available dollars from the 2002 bond rollover issue to meet an estimated need of \$1.3 billion. Our Board of Trustees will have to decide which needs are met and which are not. Shall we spend all of these dollars to protect the taxpayers' investment in existing schools and put a moratorium on new schools? That is one option facing us in the months ahead.

Our general fund, the budget that runs this district on a day-to-day basis, is faring no better. We cut our 2007-08 budget by \$3.6 million and we cut this year's budget by another \$10.4 million. Sadly, there is no hope on the horizon either. Over the next biennium it appears that cuts in the range of 14-30% will be ordered. That is truly staggering. Here is what that could mean.

If you take 25% of our \$456 million general fund budget it is twice what we spend on maintenance and operations. Are we to stop repairing broken plumbing and cleaning schools? Twenty-five percent is more than we have to transfer to the special education budget to meet federal mandates. Are we to ignore federal law and stop serving these most challenged students? Twenty-five percent is more than we spend to operate the entire transportation department. Shall we just park all the 300 buses we operate, fire the entire department and let students get to school the best way they can?

I also need to remind everyone that it is not like we're starting from a position of financial strength. Were this district funded anywhere near the national average, such a scenario would not be as challenging. But we're not. Nevada's per-pupil spending of \$6,963 ranks us 47th in the nation; almost \$2,600 per pupil less than the national average. The Boston Public Schools, a district about the same size as the Washoe County School District, spends \$16,000 per pupil.

Consider this and perhaps, it will put all of this in perspective. I said a minute ago that our general fund budget is....or used to be....\$456 million. Divided by our enrollment of 63,000 students and then divided further by the 180-day school year means we are spending about \$40 per day per student to do all we are asked and required to do. That's it. \$40 per day, per child. That is comparable to what parents pay for day care. With that \$40 we provide teachers, aides and assistants, clerks, secretaries, bookkeepers, counselors, psychologists, principals, music teachers, attendance officers, speech therapists, nurses, bus drivers, custodians, accountants, groundskeepers, coaches and a superintendent. We pay the utility bills, provide property and casualty insurance, buy textbooks, computers, paper, copiers and other supplies, wax for the floors and musical instruments for the band. We provide specialized staff to teach recent arrivals the English language, auditors to provide accountability, efficiency, and transparency in all those transactions, statisticians to analyze thousands of pages of testing data under No Child Left Behind, testing specialists to comply with that law, grant specialists to seek out funding opportunities, staff to improve parental involvement, and communications specialists to ensure that we communicate regularly and that our many stakeholder groups are involved in decision-making.

What is it that we are NOT supposed to do? Where is the lessening of expectations? We cannot, nor should we, turn children away. We cannot close, nor should we, 1/4 of our schools or decide to cap certain services. We cannot legally drop, nor should we, our ESL program or stop providing special education services and, if this community is to maintain its quest to be a "World Class School District," we surely cannot recommend cuts to music, fine arts, JROTC, debate, the International Baccalaureate program, the Gifted & Talented Program, or countless other programs that so often spark and ignite a student's passion to come to school.

Finally, I want to comment just briefly on some of the steps we have already taken to be as efficient as possible with our limited resources. A district-wide rezoning of our elementary schools last year moved about 1,800 students from crowded schools to others with space. Doing so delayed the need for building two schools at a savings of \$48 million. Energy conservation measures have resulted in savings of \$179,000 in annual utility bills. The realignment of bus routes two years ago has shown savings of \$481,000 and initial cuts at the central office has netted a savings of \$300,000.

When I sit back and think about all of this, I am reminded of a poignant scene after hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans. Do you recall 9 year-old Charles Evans outside the convention center who said to the camera, "This is pitiful, just pitiful. We just need some help out here." As surely as that hurricane leveled the Gulf Coast, the economic winds are wreaking havoc with education in Nevada. And just like Charles, we need some help out here.

Now despite the seriousness of this situation, our core mission remains unchanged---to have every child graduate from high school, college and career ready. It is not the fault of our students we are in this economic mess and no matter what our budget ends up being, our goal of all students graduating is as important now as ever.

Why must every child graduate? There is overwhelming evidence that a high school diploma is the gateway to economic opportunity. The average annual earnings of a high school dropout is \$19,900 per year. For a female, it is \$14,300. A high school graduate earns \$29,400, while those with an associate's degree earn \$38,000 and a bachelor's

degree \$54,600. The “more you learn, the more you earn.” Failure to successfully complete high school is a decision to throw away up to \$5 million in earning power over a life time. (U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey-2005; Alliance For Education Issue Brief, June 2008).

A high school diploma is the key to economic opportunity. Absent a decent standard of living, what does life promise a child? Although there are many barriers to education success, the most destructive statistically is poverty. At an early age the impacts of poverty can be devastating. Poor children have vision problems at twice the rate of middle class children. They have untreated cavities at three times the rate and blood lead levels at five times the rate. The overall health of a child affects attendance, the ability to learn and ultimately academic performance (Rothstein, Class and Schools). As professional educators we accept these facts as challenges, not excuses. Acknowledging these challenges and how other risk factors like incarceration rates and drug use are directly correlated with personal education levels, it is crystal clear why every child must graduate from high school. Those that do graduate live longer and are more likely to vote and be community volunteers (Alliance for Excellent Education, Issue Brief, June 2008).

How many of our children graduate from high school in four years? Nationally and internationally the United States is not keeping pace. Young people today are less likely than their parents to complete high school. Low expectations for student performance is a major cause of this problem. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, most states have set the bar low for expected high school graduation rates. According to the Education Trust, Nevada’s rate for its high schools is 50%, the lowest in the nation (Education Trust, Counting on Graduation, 2008).

The Washoe County School District’s expectations are more robust. Our Board of Trustees, parents, the community, employees and I expect all of our students to graduate college and career ready. Our strategic plan, the Blueprint For Student Success, explicitly states this. Reliable data is a necessity for improving the district’s graduation rates. An accurate, uniform way of calculating high school graduation rates has not existed in Nevada or nationally. Eighteen months ago the Data Profile Committee, a University of Nevada, Reno/Truckee Meadows Community College/Washoe County School District partnership took a look at this issue. They developed an absolutely accurate model for calculating graduation rates patterned after the National Governor’s Association’s.

When this model was applied to the district’s Class of 2006, this is what we found. The overall graduation rate for the class was 56%. Under the old method, which is used by the state of Nevada for No Child Left Behind accountability purposes, the rate was 75%. Using the new method for calculating rates for individual student categories were:

American Indian and Alaskan Native students	36%
Hispanic students	37%
African American students	44%
Caucasian students	63%
Asian and Pacific Islander students	66%

(Washoe K-16 Data Profile, December 2007)

Although painful to accept, these data give us a bedrock benchmark for understanding the seriousness and scope of the challenge to graduate every child in Washoe County. What

have we done, what are we doing, and what will we do to meet this challenge? We have implemented numerous research-proven programs and initiatives. Hug High school was restructured into small learning communities following the successful model pioneered by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Student achievement has steadily improved. All 9th graders are now enrolled in Algebra and Biology (Hug High School Accountability Report, 2007-2008). We implemented a literacy program in every middle and high school that accelerates the acquisition of skills for children not reading at grade level. In all of our elementary schools we have research- based reading and math programs. In the fall of 2007 we initiated a nationally-known and proven initiative that employs the expertise of professional educators and the knowledge and insights of parents to collaboratively identify individual student learning issues and recommend interventions to address these issues.

Finally the Board of Trustees and I have been working with senior staff to create system-wide planning tools that are being applied to the Blueprint For Student Success, the district's strategic plan. These tools will focus the district's resources on the most pressing challenges such as improving the graduation rate. One of these tools, the District Continuous Improvement Cycle, will ensure that comprehensive data analyses and evaluations will be annually applied to all educational and operational functions. The resulting outcomes will drive the allocation of resources. This entire process will eventually be subject to the process improvement and evaluation efforts of the district's ISO 9001 initiative. As an ISO certified organization, the district is continuously expanding this system internally.

In the final analysis, these efforts alone are insufficient. Forty-nine percent of the days in the year are school days. For the most part, children only spend 25% of each school day in school. Success in school is a measure of the capability to engage students in learning and the students' ability to retain and apply that learning to academic tests and actual problems. This success is rarely achieved without the continuous involvement of parents and the community. Towards this end, we are working tirelessly to more actively involve the community and parents. The Parent Involvement Resource Center grant, operated as part of the Education Collaborative, has been instrumental in developing programs and initiatives to actively engage parents. A Strategic Communications Plan was recently approved by the Board of Trustees. It features efforts that promote two-way communication with the community. The Board of Trustees' Listen to Learn Program, which provides a forum for the community to meet and speak with Board members, will continue to be a component of this effort.

The district will maintain its partnership with the City of Reno, City of Sparks, Washoe County and numerous other organizations and individuals in the Ready For Life initiative. This initiative will improve the coordination of services and programs for youth who are school dropouts, pregnant and parenting teens, foster children and those engaged with the juvenile justice system; and it will help create a community that fully embraces these youth.

Lastly, two wonderful organizations supporting education, the Education Collaborative and the Education Foundation, recently merged into the Education Alliance. While continuing all current programs, the Alliance will be actively seeking means to strengthen community support for education.

These are very challenging times. The current fiscal situation is serious and we will leverage this situation to seek new efficiencies. Yet ultimately, we must have a strong and dependable resource base to achieve the critical goals we have set for our children. We must have warm, safe, dry, and technologically current older schools so that all of our children learn in equivalent physical and educational environments. We must be able to recruit and retain talented teachers and administrators. We must have your support in maintaining the physical and human capital infrastructure necessary to effectively and successfully operate a large, complex urban school district that is systematically improving. And finally, we must continue to have active community and parent advocacy for children and youth. As our collective journey toward becoming a World Class School District continues, this advocacy and support is essential if we are to address the challenges posed by our most needy students; as well as to provide the programs and people that serve all of our students. Our children have dreams, ambitions and aspirations that benefit us all. As a community, we must give them the education they need and deserve to pursue these dreams, ambitions and aspirations.

Thank you very much.