

Committee on Resources

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Testimony
Before the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands'
Oversight Hearing on the Dispensation of Funds
From the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act
December 4, 2003

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony related to the distribution of proceeds from the sale of public land in Nevada by the Bureau of Land Management. The Clark County School District urges that consideration be given to increasing the proceeds from the sale of land to benefit educational opportunities for students in southern Nevada.

Background

The Clark County School District is the sixth largest school district in the nation and is home to approximately 70% of the K-12 students in Nevada. The District serves approximately 270,000 students in 289 schools throughout the District, which covers 7,910 square miles. The Clark County School District may be the fastest-growing school district in the entire nation, increasing by four to six percent per year. This fall the District welcomed 12,566 new students. To accommodate that growth, 12 new schools were opened. This fast-paced growth has been with us for over a decade. Since 1990, 144 new schools have been built, and the student population has nearly tripled. The community is supporting about \$1.25 million per day on school construction, but operation funding per student is among the lowest in the nation.

The fastest-growing segment of the District's population is English Language Learner (ELL) students. The Clark County School District is now a minority-majority district, with approximately 46% of the population Caucasian, 32% Hispanic, and 14% African American. The District, along with the rest of the country, embraces the requirements of No Child Left Behind and faces many challenges as we prepare our 46,000 ELL students to meet the rigorous testing standards that will help ensure their success in life.

The District's fast-paced construction is financed by a voter-approved, ten-year capital program, the fifth voter-approved building program since 1986. However, expenditures are limited to school construction and equipment. Funding for essential student, staff and patron support functions, such as safety and security, food service, maintenance, technology, central services, etc., must be taken from operational revenues, thus diverting instructional dollars from classroom activities.

The current per-pupil funding for Clark County School District is approximately \$5,600. This compares to a national per-pupil funding average in excess of \$7,000. The total funding gap on a districtwide basis is approximately \$400 million per year. This gap in funding results in fewer educational opportunities for students in Clark County.

Against this background, Clark County School District is desperately seeking needed funding sources for non-recurring expenditures to address essential educational and school support services and non-school capital projects. Examples are not limited to, but include:

1. New textbook adoptions and related instructional equipment.
2. Capital improvements in technology areas such as computers in remediation centers, expanded library systems, and updated enterprise systems.

3. Accountability reporting to the community, parents and government agencies.
4. Reduce student dropouts with after-school and Saturday opportunities for students to catch up and graduate.
5. Campus security improvements for student and staff safety.
6. Staff training academies.
7. Funding for facilities that will house all-day kindergarten programs. (Currently, the District's half-day kindergartners attend school for two hours, 40 minutes per day.)
8. Updated safe and efficient housing for central educational service personnel.

Under the current formula for distribution of land sale proceeds, a portion is allocated to a legislatively established state fund from which annual interest earnings (approximately \$4.0 million annually) are allocated to the State's Distributive School Account (DSA). While this allocation is helpful to the Clark County School District, the District could greatly benefit from an increase in the formula, which would direct earnings from local land sales directly to southern Nevada's students.

The District supports continuation of the existing allocation, but requests that any increased allocation go to the direct benefit of the local school district(s).

We are deeply appreciative of your support in this matter, as well as your ongoing interest in improving educational opportunities for the students of southern Nevada. We are mindful of the community's concern that students from Nevada have full educational opportunities to not only meet academic standards to graduate, but also to be competitive in future job opportunities, objectives we know you share. We are readily available to respond to questions or to provide further information.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input on an important topic.

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