



Statement from CCSD Superintendent Pat Skorkowsky

Thank you for joining us today. And thank you to the Trustees who are standing with me.

I am announcing today that I have decided not to ask the Board of Trustees to renew my contract after it ends in June.

I am not resigning. I am announcing my retirement. I am leaving on my terms.

This decision is mine and mine alone. In fact, I decided while on vacation this summer that I would announce my retirement after the school year started to give the Board sufficient time to do a national search for this position.

Announcing my retirement now will allow me to speak more clearly and address some key problems – and problem-makers - head on, without holding back. So listen up.

As of June, I will have served five years as the superintendent and 30 years as an educator in the Clark County School District. I started as a first-grade teacher and worked my way to the superintendent's office. When I was going to college 34 years ago, the thought never crossed my mind that I would end up being a superintendent. I just wanted to teach kids.

I have come to a point in my life and career that it is time to take some time off and figure out what the next 30 years look like.

I feel good about this decision -- I'm very proud of what we've accomplished in the past 4 years:

- We increased graduation rates from 61.6 percent in 2012 to an estimated 82.5 percent in 2017.
- We opened 12 new magnet programs, adding another 4,800 seats – a 68 percent increase over three years. Magnet schools such as the one we are standing in are the gem and pride of the Clark County School District, and I am so proud of our efforts to expand our magnet programs in the past few years. I was also honored to be named the National Magnet Superintendent of the Year in June.
- Working with Legislators and Governor Sandoval, we established Zoom Schools to support English Language Learners, and Victory Schools to support students who live in low-income neighborhoods.
- We've seen double digit growth in students who take and pass Advanced Placement exams – including a 16 percent increase in participation rate and a 14 percent increase

in pass rates, with more than 20,000 students each year enrolled in AP classes. That includes double digit growth in all minority subgroups of students who took the class and passed the test. We continue to pull the state's average up on AP exams. In fact, Clark County was named the Advanced Placement School District of the Year by the College Board in the large school district category in 2015.

- Again, working collaboratively with many education advocates, we finally established the first weighted funding formula in Nevada. SB 178 is providing more than \$34 million this year to one-, two-, and some three-star schools in Clark County to provide extra support for students who are non-proficient and are ELL or FRL.

The 40,000 educators and employees of the Clark County School District amaze me every day. In Nevada, you have to be creative, resilient, and ready to problem-solve in order to work in education.

The people in our district constantly do more with less. They adapt to major changes imposed on them by state and federal mandates. They have an enduring love for a student population that is increasingly poor and walks through our doors having suffered traumas that distract them from their studies.

Nevertheless, our public educators don't give up. They inspire me each and every day.

So why am I making this announcement now? A few reasons:

I want to give the Board of Trustees time to search for the best replacement for our students. Both the former publisher of the Review-Journal and Governor Sandoval have said that the job of Clark County Superintendent is the most difficult in the state. At the very least, it's one that requires an incredible balancing act.

Frankly, this community will need to rally together to attract the best candidate for superintendent. Clark County pays its superintendent much less than other districts our size and we are dealing with chronic underfunding of education. We are also in the midst of implementing the reorganization of the district, something that no major company with 40,000 employees has ever been forced to implement in 4 to 8 months.

I have done – and will continue to do -- my best to leave the District in good shape for my successor. I also know that the realities of our funding situation and the implementation of the reorganization as required by law means that the honeymoon will be short for whoever fills my seat.

I am making this announcement now because it is my hope our Trustees will conduct a national search for my successor and that they keep an open mind. Given the fiscal and organizational demands of the reorganization, they might consider a career educator or a CEO or other business leader to step in for a few years to hammer out the details of the reorganization.

It is my hope that Trustees will have ample time to establish a process for selecting a new superintendent, run that process, and have a new superintendent in place to overlap with me for a short period of time before I officially retire in June. I pledge to do whatever I can to support this process and my successor.

I want to specifically share why I am making this announcement today.

Unfortunately, some vocal critics of mine have made our current budget situation into a referendum on my leadership. That is not the case! This decision allows me greater freedom to deal with those attacks and address the real issues – and you can be guaranteed that I will.

I want to say – certainly some mistakes have been made in how we grappled with this budget crisis. I know that I am the leader of this district and the buck stops here.

My staff and I should have seen several months earlier that we were headed for a budget crisis unless we received more funding from the 2017 Legislature.

I take ownership for that. I apologize for that.

However, I cannot allow my critics to rest the fault for this shortfall entirely on my shoulders. Not because I am unwilling to take responsibility for what happened – I certainly am and will continue to do so.

But resting the fault of this budget shortfall entirely on me misses the real culprits: A chronic underfunding of the base funding formula, the outdated Nevada Plan for funding education in Nevada, unfunded mandates from the government, and a broken collective bargaining system.

Moving forward, I will be entirely candid with the community, our employees and our elected officials about how we got to this budget shortfall. It's the same reasons why the Washoe County School District fought for their increase earlier this year.

Legislators and the Governor have put more money into earmarked programs such as Zoom and Victory. I appreciate that more than you know, and think their hard work will pay off by improving education and opportunities for thousands of our most at-risk students.

However, our base funding formula has not kept up with rising costs of employees, utilities, insurance and other expenses, which we can't pay for with earmarked funds.

So, I'm announcing this decision today because I don't want this budget shortfall to be about me. If we don't address these problems now – as a community – the next superintendent will face the same situation.

Over the next 10 months, I'm going to look at our internal practices and I'm going to clean up whatever contributed to this problem. I'm willing to make tough decisions.

I'm also going to be candid with our community and our elected officials about the external causes of this budget crisis, why this funding system is broken, and how we need to change the way we negotiate with our employee associations. We need to fix this on behalf of our kids.

Don't get me wrong – I know how hard each and every one of our educators work. I value you more than you know. However, we have to be aware of the impacts of major contract increases on our budget.

The bargaining units want the district to evolve but are unwilling to change how they do business. They need a cultural shift too. They can't just stand with their hand out all of the time without coming to the table with real solutions - or resort to nasty personal attacks designed to distract the community from the real issues at hand.

Our budget is extremely tight now. There is no major back-up reserve. This is our new reality, whether I am superintendent or not.

I am appealing to our community not to circle the wagons and shoot inward when CCSD faces budget problems. I'm tired of some members of the community who only criticize us but do not offer to help – let alone help us celebrate our many successes.

These are OUR schools. We get as much out of them as we put into them.

I also want you to know that I will not be a lame duck in my final 10 months. That's just not in my nature. Part of my reason for making this announcement now is that I'm going to make some difficult – but necessary – decisions.

First, we are going to tackle this financial issue that CCSD is experiencing, and I need to have flexibility and freedom to make necessary changes in order for the district to get on solid financial ground and fully implement the reorganization.

I'm also calling for a forensic audit of the Teachers Health Trust. There are millions of dollars that are unaccounted for from the THT – money that leaders of the Clark County Education Association transferred out of the retiree health trust without permission from our Board of Trustees. Meanwhile, our Board provided the THT with a \$10 million bailout and the THT still says they are broke.

I'm also ready to tell the real story about how Nevada funds education. For decades, the state has underfunded CCSD. The Distributive School Account and the Nevada Plan is broken and needs to be fixed. It was created for Nevada children in the 1960s – not Nevada children today.

I also want to reassure the community that my retirement in June will not slow down the implementation of the reorganization required by state law. The reorganization is tantamount to the success of the district and improved student achievement.

There are pieces of the reorganization that are incredibly positive. We also need our legislators, leaders, and community to listen to some of the concerns we have. There is a part of Assembly Bill 469 that allows schools to keep all of the savings from vacancies. That sounds like a good idea but will cut into funds that currently provide critical services.

Our community has created a destructive narrative bashing the school district. I understand some of why this has happened. However, we need to decide as a community – do we want quality neighborhood public schools? Are we OK with the dismantling of public education in Nevada?

Standing here today, I think about my early years at the Clark County School District. At least four of my former students are now teachers in the school District – Colin Darfour, Jessica Claborn, Miguel Cano, and Daniel Cano. I am so proud of them!

I'm not done yet; I'm just letting you know of my retirement in June. If anything, I'm letting you know that I plan to do more than ever in the coming months to address the issues in our county that do not support student achievement. These adult issues hurt children. I will not be quiet; I will not be on the sidelines. I will be dealing directly with the internal and external barriers that prevent even greater successes. I will be dealing with the people who are in it for personal gain and not for our students.

We have had a great deal of success in CCSD in the past four years. Our employees have worked tirelessly to ensure the success of every student in every classroom:

- We have increased graduation rates substantially
- We have award winning Magnet and Select schools. Choice schools that deliver real graduation rate increases, not empty promises to the community.
- We have implemented ZOOM and Victory.
- We have increased Advanced Placement.
- We have established the first step in weighted funding to get rid of an outdated education funding plan from the sixties.

I want to say thank you to everyone in our community who has supported me for the past 29 years, and thank you especially to the Trustees who are standing behind me today who have been constant mentors, friends, advisors and supporters.

We will work harder for the next ten months to ensure the amazing successes of the Clark County School District will continue. We will get through the crises and challenges that face us now. We will ensure the success of “every student in every classroom, without exceptions, without excuses.”