



Breaking Up Is Hard To Do: Issues to Address in the Reorganization of the Clark County School District

Executive Summary

Nevada has embarked on a process to reorganize the Clark County School District (CCSD) by the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. In 2015, the Nevada Legislature adopted AB 394, which creates an Advisory Committee and Technical Advisory Committee to develop a plan to reorganize CCSD into local precincts. The plan must be completed on or before January 1, 2017. Proponents aim to achieve three main goals by reorganizing CCSD: (1) improving responsiveness to local needs; (2) improving student achievement; and (3) improving efficiency.

This policy report focuses on five critical issues that the Advisory Committee will need to address to ensure the goals of the legislation are met: (1) community based communication; (2) demographic and educational equity; (3) funding equity; (4) education facilities; and (5) governance structure. To assist the Advisory Committee in its analysis, this report is accompanied by a series on interactive maps that illustrate demographic differences based on factors such as race, socioeconomic status, academic outcomes, school choice, age of facilities, and teacher vacancies.

This summary includes preliminary findings and recommendations related to a possible reorganization. However, it is important to emphasize that **the Guinn Center is not endorsing or opposing the reorganization of CCSD.** If reorganization of CCSD does occur, this report is intended to identify important policy considerations that should be addressed during development and implementation of the reorganization plan.

Key Findings and Recommendations

1. Community Based Communication and Information Process

Findings

- The Advisory Committee has not publicly outlined its strategy for gathering information from the public about local needs to determine the differences in needs by precinct.
- The Advisory Committee has not publicly outlined a strategy for communicating to the public, especially minority communities, the purpose and goals for the possible reorganization.
- Given disparities in student achievement by race, ethnicity and socioeconomic background and given the historical poignancy of real and perceived discriminatory treatment of such groups in education, the failure to include a public process could create lasting feelings of resentment that could undermine the legitimacy of any decision.

Recommendations

- Establish and disseminate a comprehensive community engagement plan that aligns with the work and schedule of the Advisory Committee.
- Schedule regular and formal community information sessions.
- Conduct focus groups and surveys across the district.
- Meet with community stakeholders to allow for the communication of community concerns.

2. Demographic and Educational Equity

Findings

- CCSD students currently face significant levels of segregation.¹ This isolation exists by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and language.
- Low levels of student achievement are highly correlated to large concentrations of minority, low income, and English Language Learner students.
- High performing schools are concentrated in suburban areas while low performing schools are concentrated in central Clark County.
- Magnet schools and other specialized programs are concentrated in central Clark County.
- Schools for special populations such as alternative education and special education students are not evenly distributed throughout CCSD.
- There are high numbers of novice teachers and teacher vacancies in schools with high concentrations of low income students.

Recommendations

- Conduct a preliminary needs assessment of the district that can be used to inform the design of precincts.
- Develop measures to compare student learning within and across precincts to monitor progress of each subgroup and to incentivize educational equity.
- Consider strategies to configure precincts in a way that promotes demographic equity, increases choice, and improves educational outcomes.
- Establish a robust system of high-quality public school choices within each precinct, including magnet schools and charter schools.
- Develop strategies for serving populations in alternative and special education schools on a regional basis.
- Explore using monetary and non-monetary incentives to improve the distribution of high-quality, experienced teachers across and within precincts.

3. Funding Equity

Findings

- Schools have differential costs based on teacher experience, transportation and repair needs, etc.
- Local revenue is not generated equally throughout Clark County.
- State and Federal categorical funds are distributed based on target populations and are not distributed evenly throughout the district.

Recommendations

- Analyze current costs to develop a formula for calculating the Basic Support Guarantee for precincts and central services to be provided by CCSD.
- Develop a mechanism to equalize local revenue received outside of the Basic Support Guarantee.
- Develop criteria for determining which functions could be conducted most efficiently by precincts or the central district.

¹ While this term has been used in various contexts to connote intentional or invidious discriminatory classification and categorization, it is used in this paper generally to mean an aggregation or grouping without ascribing intent to this aggregation or grouping except in those sections of the paper which discuss historical segregation.

- Create methods to distribute State and Federal categorical funds in a manner that ensures targeted populations in each precinct have equal access to resources.

4. Education Facilities

Findings

- Capital facilities needs are currently underfunded in CCSD.
- Older facilities are located in central Las Vegas and newer facilities are predominantly located in suburban areas.
- Existing debt is for newer facilities, which are concentrated in suburban areas.
- Property tax revenue to pay debt service is not generated evenly throughout the district.

Recommendations

- If facilities functions remain centralized, create a governing body with representatives from each precinct to prioritize projects and determine how to charge precincts for facilities functions.
- If ownership and responsibility for facilities is transferred to precincts, determine how to distribute revenue between precincts and how to repay past debt.

5. Governance

Findings

- Governance structure does not have a significant impact on student achievement.
- CCSD has not taken full advantage of current laws allowing parents to have a greater role in school site decisions.
- Accountability and oversight will be important to ensure goals of deconsolidation are met.

Recommendations

- Review governance models of districts and charter schools to choose a structure for precincts.
- Create a mechanism to foster a pipeline of quality board members.
- Create avenues for community and parent input in schools.
- Create mechanisms to keep precincts accountable for student achievement and fiscal efficiency.

Conclusion

Looking beyond the plan required by AB 394, it is important for the Advisory Committee to recognize that simply reconfiguring CCSD will not improve student achievement. The three main goals of the legislation should consistently remain at the forefront. As each decision is made, the Advisory Committee should evaluate whether the action will increase responsiveness to parents and the community, improve student achievement, and improve efficiency. Through its work, the Advisory Committee can recommend structures and accountability measures that will help achieve these goals.

Additionally, and most importantly, the Advisory Committee should take care to outline a process that is transparent and maximizes parent and community input throughout each stage of discussion. Community buy-in to the reorganization plan will be critical to the long-term success of deconsolidation of CCSD.