

“Ensuring Every Dollar Counts”

A public-private partnership with the Clark County School District and community partners Frequently Asked Questions January 14, 2015

1. Why is this work noteworthy?

This public-private partnership is unprecedented in Nevada. Leaders came together from all corners of our community, including the business world, UNLV, philanthropic organizations, and the school district.

Our goal is to show that every dollar makes a difference in the lives of students. The aim is improved effectiveness, efficiency, and customer satisfaction. The ultimate goal is to enhance the welfare of “every student in every classroom” and advocate for an increased focus on education in Nevada.

The partnership speaks with one voice in a way no other entity can.

2. What did the study accomplish?

This work linked school expenditures with school performance. Taking into account the make-up of the school population, the study will shine a light on schools that provide better-than-expected value given the resources at their disposal.

We also looked at the performance of school district academic programs and departments.

3. What is new about this?

The School Comparison Study is a first-of-its-kind effort. It compared two existing pieces of data: a school's expenditures and its academic performance. This allows us for the first time to think more carefully about whether resources are being expended in a way that provides the best possible return. This is commonly called “return on investment” or ROI.

4. What makes this work groundbreaking?

To our knowledge, this work has been done in the educational realm at different levels but this is a first-of-its-kind partnership between a school district and community leaders to implement financial best practices in a school district.

For several years, the Return on Investment of public post-secondary education institutions has been compared state-to-state:

- U. S. Chamber of Commerce and American Enterprise Institute co-produce a state report card (*Leader's and Laggards*)
- American Institute for Research has a publicly-searchable online database to evaluate states (*Delta Cost Project*)

Work on Return on Investment also has been undertaken in public K-12 education, but chiefly at the district-to-district level – not at the school level.

- In 2011, the Center for American Progress began evaluating the educational Return on Investment of school districts.
- In 2014, the Center created a publicly-searchable online database gauging school district productivity.

Some (including Marguerite Roza) have worked with applying these ideas to the school-level, but to our knowledge, no one has yet successfully accomplished this for schools within a large urban district.

5. *What makes us think that this work will make a difference?*

There are five reasons. The partnership believes this work can have a positive impact on achievement if CCSD will:

- Align to what matters most by transparently linking expenditures and output.
- Make sensible comparisons to identify excellence where it exists in departments, programs, and schools.
- Scale up what works and scale back what doesn't.
- Drive this deep into district culture by implementing a program-based budget that can change the conversation.
- Advocate to legislators and the community that CCSD is smartly spending its funds, and that it's time to focus on education funding in Nevada.

6. *What comes next?*

The School Comparison Study is in peer review. National experts have been invited to offer opinions on whether and how the study can be strengthened. As well, school-level data are being validated. Consequently, school-level results are not yet available.

Feedback is also being collected from local stakeholders through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. This feedback is intended to identify how implementation can proceed in a healthy way and how the study design can be strengthened in ways that amplify impact.

A staff team is identifying steps to ensure that results of this work have a beneficial impact. This team is addressing one question. "Once we couple data on school funding and school performance, what assistance needs to be in place so implementation supports teaching in ways that expand opportunities and outcomes for all students?"

Beginning this coming April, the feedback from local stakeholders and national experts will be used to modify the model that has been created. These changes to the model will be applied and the data will be re-analyzed.

CCSD is also collecting feedback on the frameworks developed to evaluate district departments and programs.

7. *How are the results useful?*

The school district is looking for ways to provide greater value to students and families. Simply asking for more money is a tough sell. By tying school funding to student results, the school district hopes to demonstrate to taxpayers and lawmakers that school-level funds connect meaningfully to the achievement of young people.

By reassuring the public that their tax dollars are used in ways that directly impact students and classrooms, the district hopes to rekindle public faith in schools. The aim is to demonstrate that school funds make a difference in terms of student achievement, and to ask for a renewed focus on education in the 2015 legislative session.

8. *If I am a CCSD staff member, why do I care?*

By clustering schools that are similar in character (elementary to elementary or middle to middle or comprehensive high school to comprehensive high school, etc.), we can look at how many and which schools perform better than expected. These schools can provide useful clues to practices that can be useful to other schools. If acted upon and used widely, these practices have the potential to improve overall district performance.

9. *If I am a taxpayer, a legislator, a parent or a governor, why do I care?*

In a fragile economy, every dollar counts. This work has the potential to shape the opinions of our community. This can happen when local thought-leaders speak with one voice and offer testimonials attesting to the school district's fiscal responsibility.

10. *Is the business community supporting additional funding for schools in the 2015 Legislature?*

We know that Nevada's education system needs to improve in order for our economy to grow. The leadership is in place in the school district to ensure that additional funds are targeted to programs that have a proven track record of increasing student achievement.