

Cram Calls for School District Solutions in 30 Days

Special to the Sentinel-Voice

Clark County School District (CCSD) Superintendent Brian Cram has called for concrete solutions to problems afflicting the district within 30 days.

Cram issued a three-page list of solutions for the beleaguered district, along with the results of Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills.

"If we ignore these problems, they won't go away," Cram said.

More than 41,000 fourth-, sixth-, eighth- and 11th-graders took the basic skills test and the Test of Cognitive Skills in late October.

Overall, the reading scores ranked in the 49th percentile. Math scores ranked in the 50th percentile, and language scores ranked in the 55th percentile. The national average was the 50th percentile.

The scores, which were at or below the national average, marked the second year in a row the district's comprehensive test scores have gone down.

School district officials point to a transient student population and a move away from teaching basic skills.

"We have tremendous movement across this district

from school to school," Cram said. "Often times, that movement is an expression of income."

Transience accounts for more than 40 percent of the difference in test scores at the high school level, a state accountability report says.

The report said economic factors account for more than 60 percent of test score differences at the elementary school level.

"The figures very clearly point out that there are a number of out-of-school activities that impact learning," Cram said.

Inside the classroom,

teachers have begun using new instructional methods. The methods de-emphasize the traditional "three R's"—reading, writing and arithmetic.

There is also a movement away from the use of textbooks. A recent *Las Vegas Review-Journal* article noted that several Valley schools were spending money allocated for textbooks on computers and other building improvements.

Booker and Kelly elementary schools, both in West Las Vegas, each spent more than \$2,000 less per student than their allocation. Each school received

extra textbook funds.

"It depends upon whether or not those schools bought textbooks last year," Cram said.

He added he wasn't sure whether or not the schools purchased books last year.

Educators are looking at ways to increase school funding.

"We are significantly below the national average (\$5,900) in what we spend on kids," Cram said. "We try to supplement per-pupil funds with funds from the community."

"Frankly, it's hard," he added.

A higher funding level, Cram said, will allow the district to have

a lower staff-to-student ratio.

He said raising taxes may be the best option.

"We have the second-highest ability to pay more if you choose to," Cram said. "The truth is that there is an absolute correlation between kids' condition when they come to school and their performance."

Despite the problems, Cram said, "I don't think we ought to use anything as an excuse to assume that all kids can't learn."

"In every Prime 6 [West Las Vegas] school, you'll find kids with outstanding ability. Those kids are capable of doing better."

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going into the class for 10 minutes, setting up a parent-teacher conference, and/or making a commitment to read to their children daily.

NAAPID was created by Michigan educator Joseph Dulin after he participated in the Million Man March.

"It's needed," Dulin said. "If we're going to save our children, we have to educate our children."

Dulin, an Ann Arbor principal, has worked for 22 years at Roberto Clemente High School, an alternative high school designed for that city's at-risk students where he later practiced before he preached.

When Dulin was first hired, it was called the Alternative School for Disruptive Youth. That was just one of many things Dulin has changed over the years.

Twenty years ago, all of Dulin's students had been suspended from other schools. Today, 90 percent of Clemente's 130-person student body are self-referrals. Parents are actively involved, and more than 90 percent of Dulin's predominantly-black students graduate.

Dulin said the difference was his commitment and parental involvement.

"I know the power of parents. I know they want their kids to have it better than they did," Dulin said.

In his professional career, Dulin has tried to build long-term relationships with parents

Besides setting the rules, Dulin exchanges phone numbers with parents and encourages them to call him as needed.

"Everybody in this school has my number," said Dulin, "but I rarely get called. They already know what I'm going to say."

Dulin greets his students every morning and attempts to make himself as available as possible. He encourages students to be obedient and respectful to their parents and to do their homework.

"If you don't do your homework, you stay after school (to do it)," said Dulin.

Positive parent-educator relationships go beyond just principals and parents. Although parents are required to come to school once a semester for a Saturday breakfast, they meet with teachers every nine weeks in their homes where the teachers personally deliver report cards.

Dulin's hand-on approach to teaching developed from his own professional experiences. He said many black parents harbor resentments over treatment they received at the hands of teachers in the 1960s and 1970s, which they transmit to students either consciously or unconsciously.

"We must get parents back into the schools and teach them that the attitudes are no longer the same," Dulin said.

"I know the power of parents," Dulin said. "I know that every parent wants their child to succeed."

This Week In Black History

February 8 — In 1951 private Edward O. Clearborn, a Black soldier from Memphis, Tennessee, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

February 9 — In 1943 Jack Clayborne became one of the first successful Black pro wrestlers. He laid claim to Mr. Black World Heavyweight title by pinning Rufus Jones.

February 10 — In 1927 the world-renowned Black soprano, Leontyne Price was born in Laurel, Mississippi.

February 11 — In 1933 Aunt Jemima was created when a photograph of a Black cook was printed on a package of a pancake mix.

February 12 — First Lt. Nancy C. Leffenant was the first Black integrated into the Army Nurses Corps in 1948.

February 13 — Absalom Jones, the first Black Protestant minister of the United States was born on this day in 1746.

February 14 — In 1967 Black History Week was proclaimed by 20 State Governors.

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