

# Test scores still below par despite increased focus

John T. Stephens III  
Sentinel-Voice

In March, the Clark County School District (CCSD) released the results of the TerraNova Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills which measures the achievements of southern Nevada students against a national sampling. The test showed that CCSD students fared in the mid 50's to high 40's percentiles for ability, reading, math, language, and science on a scale of 100.

"We (CCSD) are never comfortable with a grade which is average with the

national level," said Ray Willis, director of public information for CCSD. "The scores are not bad ... they just place our students near the national average."

Fourth, eighth, and tenth grade students were the three tier groups which were tested to track academic success of students as well as teachers.

"Teachers can't do it alone," Willis said. "Education is a shared responsibility." The TerraNova test also compiles school accountability information and predicts the student's ability to achieve

academically in the future.

"The test scores of our children will never change until we get some qualified teachers," said Marzette Lewis, who was just inducted into the Parent Hall of Fame this year. "Teachers who are interested in teaching and not just their paychecks."

"This (CCSD) is the only place on the planet that puts children first," Ruth Johnson said, who is the president of CCSD's school board.

The school district is the eighth largest in the nation with over 203,777 students enrolled in its classes and 52

different foreign languages spoken.

The enormous size of the Clark County School District has some legislators as well as parents complaining that it's too big and needs to be broken up or deconsolidated.

"(Deconsolidation of CCSD) I still feel is the best thing to do," said Lewis.

"District size is not related to the size of the school or the size of the class," Willis said. "To break the school district up would be the same—teachers providing the same education to the same students."

The Director of Public Information was also concerned with the possible inequity of resources for schools in the inner city. Lesser districts would receive poorer education because of their lower tax base compared with communities with higher incomes.

"We are in a different league with other school districts ... We are an urban school district and urban school districts don't fair well on standardized tests," Willis said. "A larger school district can educate children cheaper due to lesser taxes paid to

educate students."

"Split the district into two by dividing it with Las Vegas Blvd," Lewis said. "The west would have Green Valley and upper income communities in Henderson and the east would have the Lakes and Desert Shores to offset the low tax base inequalities."

"(CCSD) faces so many growth issues and we haven't had an opportunity to look at all of them," Johnson said. "We need to be sure we can bring an equal quality of education to all ... it's in our future to examine this."

# Thousands turn out to mourn Columbine shooting victims

LITTLETON, Colo. (AP) — Under a slate gray sky, thousands of mourners clutching flowers, blue and silver balloons and Bibles filed into a chilly movie theater parking lot Sunday for an open-air memorial to the victims of the Littleton school massacre.

Authorities expected as many as 35,000 people to attend the service in near-

freezing temperatures following one of the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history. Vice President Al Gore, state officials, Christian singers Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith, and the Rev. Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, planned to attend.

Mourners of all ages began arriving four hours before the service. For some, it was the

second or third vigil they had attended since Tuesday's rampage. Many were Columbine High School alumni.

The growing crowd was a swarm of dark winter parkas splashed with bright floral bouquets. Florists in Colorado and California donated 25,000 bouquets of white lilies, yellow sunflowers, pink carnations

and roses of all hues.

"I wish I could do more," said Margaret Stark, 19, who graduated from high school in nearby Aurora last year. "You can only give so many flowers."

For some, after absorbing continuous media coverage since Tuesday, it was a wrenching experience just to walk a few blocks from the heavily damaged high school

where 15 people died.

Tim and Donna Weitzel drove 250 miles from Grand Junction to attend. They left their children, ages 11, 5 and 3, at home on Colorado's Western Slope.

Amid Littleton's strip malls and subdivisions, the Weitzels looked a little out of place wearing cowboy hats and ranching coveralls. They said they didn't know any

students at Columbine or their families, but their reaction to the violence was common to parents everywhere.

"It's something that can help us personally by coming and seeing and sharing the hurt and the pain," Weitzel said as his wife hugged him. "It's just something that struck my heart."

The service shifts the (See Mourners, Page 16)

# Detroit sues more than 30 gun manufacturers and merchants

DETROIT (AP) — Gun makers and merchants who knowingly put firearms in the hands of felons and juveniles should pay a price for turning streets violent, city and county leaders said in suing more than 30 companies.

"The industry profits from the assaults, maimings and killings on the streets of our city and county," Mayor Dennis Archer said Monday. "Detroit and Wayne County have had enough."

In their separate lawsuits, the city named 31 companies and the county listed those 31 and four others as defendants. Archer said he expects the two Wayne County Circuit Court cases to be consolidated. The suits, similar to several others filed by local governments across the country, did not specify damages, but lawyers said they could exceed \$800 million.

Jeff Reh, general counsel for Beretta USA in Accokeek, Md., one of the companies named, said he was

disappointed at "a ridiculous trend in this country of blaming an object for human behavior."

"What these lawsuits fail to do is take into account the hundreds of thousands of lives that are saved each year by defensive gun use" by private firearms owners, Reh said. The lawsuits claim that firearms makers and retailers know that the person filling out gun-purchase papers often is not the person who will eventually own the weapon, said Deputy County Executive Mike Duggan.

These are known as "straw purchases," and manufacturers have adopted a policy of "willful blindness" toward them, the county said in a news release.

In a recent sheriff's department sting operation involving 10 gun dealers picked at random, nine dealers allowed "straw purchases" by undercover agents who said they were felons or juveniles. No criminal charges have been

filed against the dealers, but three cases may lead to charges, Sheriff Robert Ficano said.

The lawsuits are similar to those filed by local government leaders in Atlanta, Bridgeport, Conn., Cleveland, Chicago, Miami-Dade County and New Orleans.

In February, a federal court jury in Brooklyn, N.Y.,

found nine gun makers liable for shootings. Three companies were ordered to pay a total of \$500,000 to one of the seven plaintiffs.

A firearms industry lobbying group said the lawsuits do nothing to prevent crime and are aimed at driving gun makers out of business.

"We feel that these are misguided efforts," said Jack Adkins, director of operations

for the American Shooting Sports Council Inc. in Atlanta. "Not one life will be saved by such lawsuits."

Pro-gun groups have responded to such lawsuits by lobbying state legislatures to pass laws prohibiting such legal action. In February, Georgia approved such a law.

Michigan Republican state Rep. Valde Garcia still plans to go forward with

legislation prohibiting state and local governments from suing gun manufacturers.

The timing of Monday's lawsuits had nothing to do with last week's school shooting rampage in Littleton, Colo., officials said. But some pointed to the deaths of 15 people at Columbine High School as a sign of the pervasiveness of illegal guns.


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