

# Paige visits local magnet schools

## Education Secretary's tour as feds debate education

John T. Stephens III  
Sentinel-Voice

A Las Vegas magnet school specializing in math and science had a presidential cabinet member and the state's two U.S. senators pay a visit as class was in session. Secretary of Education Roderick Paige, and Senators Harry Reid (D-NV) and John Ensign (R-NV) visited Hyde Park Middle School, where sixth and seventh graders displayed their knowledge.

A magnet school, often an older school in a mature part of town, is where special emphasis is placed on a specific curriculum. Benefits of magnet schools include reduced student-teacher ratios, input from a curriculum specialist, hands-on-learning and an extended instructional day.

"(They) wanted me to see this first hand," Paige said of Reid and Ensign. "We need to provide this opportunity to all children in the United States. We got to get our math right...fix it."

"We believe that education is the most important policy in America," commented Reid, who said Paige "works 24 hours a day to make sure that education is right."

"We're not competing with students just in California, but in the world," said Ensign. "We have to dominate the world through education...math and science is the key."

"What we have is not a democratic problem or a republican problem but an American problem," said Paige. "I saw young people actually enjoying learning."

"It's exciting to have Secretary Paige here- a fellow superintendent," said Clark County School District Superintendent Carlos Garcia of the former superintendent of Houston's public schools. "It's nice to have someone in Washington that has walked in our shoes."

Paige, born in Monticello, Miss., earned a Masters degree and a doctorate from Indiana University, and was a trustee and superintendent of the Houston Independent School District from 1989 to 1994. He was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as the seventh Secretary of Education on January 20.

The White House and Congress are duking it out in Washington this week over the monies to be spent on the education of school children.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Education Secretary Rod Paige, center, looks on with Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., right, as Clark County School District Superintendent Carlos Garcia addresses parents and students at Hyde Park Middle School last week. Paige also toured the Las Vegas Academy.

Despite Paige's promise of funding for books and for refurbishing decaying urban schools across the country, he admits there is not enough money in President Bush's education bill to cover the building of new schools.

"We need to get him the money in his budget," Ensign said. "If he has the money, he would be glad to do it."

Paige also stressed the need for quality teachers in classrooms, but does not support a national standardized test for teachers. "Each state should make that decision on

their own," he said. "It's a state by state issue." The two Nevada senators agreed, but also cautioned about a shortage of teachers.

"We already do testing of teachers...it's here," Garcia said of the Praxis and PPST exams, used to test instructors' competency in the subjects they teach. "We lose teachers because they can't pass it...I support multiple measures," he said.

According to Garcia, the major funding shortfalls for the district are in money for Title I programs, special education and magnet schools.

He also expressed frustration with government having too many regulations that keep Nevada schools from additional funding or grants for education. Another of his complaints was about nationally mandated testing of students without monies available to cover administrative costs. CCSD is currently the sixth largest school district in the nation, with more than 240,000 students.

"They pass laws without funding...if they want to mandate annual testing they should do more to cover the cost," Garcia said.

# Catholic League accused of bias

CHICAGO (AP) — A predominantly white Roman Catholic athletic league denied membership to a black church's grammar school citing concerns about safety, a decision that has prompted charges of racism.

"I'm saddened that in 2001 we have some of the same headlines and some of the same issues that we had in 1961," the Rev. Michael Pfleger, pastor of St. Sabina's Church, said Thursday. "The sin of racism is a sin we've got to deal with."

Members of the Southside Catholic Conference voted 11-9 last week to deny St. Sabina's School membership in the intramural league.

Opposing parishes cited concerns about the safety of players, coaches and parents from the other schools who would travel to St. Sabina's South Side neighborhood to play, said Hank Lenzen, executive director of the conference.

"I would like to apologize to the children of St. Sabina's," Lenzen said. "I will continue to work with the full board of the conference and the people of St. Sabina's ... toward a resolution not only of the membership of the SCC, but also the deeper issues involved."

League members had suggested alternatives, such as admitting St. Sabina's on the condition that games there would be played during the day or that there be no home games. Pfleger called the suggestions an insult.

"I'm not going to agree to sell ourselves or convince anybody that we're OK. It's insulting and it's degrading to our children," he said.

The league has 21 parishes and sponsors football, basketball, soccer and golf for more than 5,000 children in grades five through eight.

The Archdiocese of Chicago said in a statement that it does not support the league's decision if it was based solely on a concern for safety in St. Sabina's neighborhood.

"While safety for all children is a concern that we all share, it must not be used as a racially motivated reason to deny African-American Catholics the right to participate in Catholic organizations," the statement read.

(See Racism, Page 5)

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