

DAZZLING DEBUTANTES

The 2002 Alpha Omicron Debutantes of Les Femmes Douze posed at their ball inside the Savoy Room at the Flamingo Hotel earlier this month. They are as follows: (sitting left to right) Melanie Phelan, Kimberly Carter, Ashley Nichols, Demetrius Dudley, Amia Trigg and Krystal Cotton; (standing left to right) Janet Hendley, Britney Whaley, Ashley Mathis, Ronda Holmes and Krystle Holford.



Education

(Continued from Page 1) sample does," Orci explained.

The criterion test represents an effort to clarify the issue in Nevada because, as Orci notes, "the state has not defined what proficiency is yet." However, he said, "it gives us a baseline to show where our kids are right now."

Over the next two years, legislators and the Board of Education will collaborate to formalize a level of proficiency for Nevada students.

Even as educators and state lawmakers were hard at work trying to raise performance in schools, along came federal education reform.

"Levels of proficiency are required by the new federal

'No Child Left Behind Act,'" State Deputy Superintendent for Instructional, Research and Evaluative Services Keith Rheault explained yesterday.

"The 2002 data," he said, "will be used as baseline data for future testing and reporting." Such data will indicate scholastic progress in Nevada relative to the federal reforms — which mandate that students achieve "proficiency" by the 2013-14 school year — and will influence disbursement of federal funds.

Reforms also require that, as a method of assessment, students be tested annually beginning in third grade, and that schools comply within

the next five years. Thus, the IBST, which students took early this semester, will be administered from third through tenth grades, as Orci explained, because the guidelines require annual testing.

In 1997 the Legislature created its Council to Establish Academic Standards, authorizing the group, comprised of education administrators and teachers as well as lawmakers and other state officials, to set criteria.

The state has long, said many pressures adversely affect education here and discussions begin with growth, which it insists makes Nevada's problems unlike anywhere else in the nation.

For example, Clark County's school system, the nation's sixth-largest, is burdened by a high student transiency rate, local officials say.

Marcia Washington, the only black on the State Board of Education, believes all this points to a major flaw in the Bush Administration reforms, that is, their need of a reality check. It's led her to conclude, she said, that "the federal government needs to put more money into education instead of missiles and bombs."

"Our children are our most precious resource," Washington said, "and we need to invest in them."

Last spring, nearly 58,000 third and fifth graders were tested statewide and results have been correlated with gender, and with income, documenting, for example, whether students qualified for free and reduced meals.

And, they address ethnicity, and related factors such as having a native language that's not English. As CCSD Superintendent Carlos Garcia points out, here in Southern Nevada, "our district now is majority minority."

In third grade, statewide, of just over 14 thousand white students tested in reading, 33 percent demonstrated proficiency and 30 percent exceeded it, while of nearly three thousand black students, only 27 percent were proficient and just 11 percent bettered the standard.

The gap widened in math, as 30 percent of white students reached the proficiency level and 31 percent even went beyond, but only 22

percent of black students managed to achieve the minimum standard, and a mere 13 percent scored higher.

If disparity is a concern, the figures from last year's fifth grade class are more distressing. In reading, just over 15 thousand white fifth grade students were tested and 45 percent were found proficient. 15 percent exceeded the criterion. However, among the three thousand black students, 26 percent achieved proficiency and only a startling six percent performed better.

Of the approximately fifteen thousand white fifth grade math students, 43 percent showed proficiency and nearly a fifth, 19 percent, demonstrated something more. But, among those three thousand black students, only a quarter, 25 percent, achieved the minimum standard, and just six percent were actually better than proficient.

"The four levels of proficiency were just adopted by the State Board of Education in September," Rheault explained, "and that is why this information is just being released." Results of the test, which was administered here in Nevada for the first time last spring, are destined for the U.S. Department of Education.

Most of the 57,841 students tested reside in the CCSD, now bulging with more than a quarter-million students.

"We, of course, are concerned," said Orci, "but the purpose was to get a measurement at a very early age, so we can do the remediation before the high school profi-

ciency test."

Although CCSD has not released its figures, Garcia indicated yesterday that "preliminary data shows Clark County did a little bit better, on this type of test." However, he added, "we have a long way to go." As for these results, he said, "we're probably going to release them next week, maybe Tuesday or Wednesday."

Garcia agrees major aggravating factors include growth and the district's 36 percent transiency rate, but quickly calls attention to "teacher turnover."

Washington, who states frankly she is "very disappointed and concerned" about the findings, said, "we need to invest more into teacher training, so teachers will be able to teach and reach children we consider at-risk."

"We want our teachers to be held accountable for everything but what their job is, and that's teaching," she continued. "It's about time we start compensating our teachers for the hard job they face daily."

The state will now work feverishly to refine its tools for assessing proficiency. Combining aspects of the IBST with its own standards to determine proficiency in third through eighth grades is an idea being considered.

"Unfortunately," Washington says, whatever the strategy employed, success is ultimately "going to take money. And I want to know where is the funding," she asked, "for the states with high minority populations who are failing at an unbelievable rate?"



PRAYERS ANSWERED FOR STUDENTS

Gospel recording artist Mary Mary, seated, signs autographs for the students at Matt Kelly Elementary School last week. The singing duo Tina and Erica Campbell donated 38 coats to the students, which assistant principal Mel Beach helped in distributing.