



**An Educator's Perspective:
AB394 Presentation on Empowerment
Schools to the Technical Advisory
Committee | April 13, 2016**

Vikki Courtney, President CCEA

Good Morning Madame Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am Vikki Courtney, President of the Clark County Education Association. We represent 18,000 educators and licensed personnel for the fifth largest school district in the country, CCSD.

Today you will hear from educators who have first-hand experience with the site-based decision making empowerment model and also about the powerful student outcomes achieved. These educators are at schools that represent a good cross-sample of student populations from English Language Learners, Free & Reduced Lunch qualified, GATE, to Special Education. You'll also see a good cross-sample of schools from different socio-economic areas ranging from affluent communities to areas where poverty is prominent. One presenter is at a school who was a recipient of the categorical funding passed this last Legislative Session.

With over 54 combined years of experience, you will also hear about broader issues that are addressed when shared decision making is implemented; issues like teacher retention, diminishing turn-over rates, feelings of ownership, accomplishment, and the sense of working as a team.

We thought we would also do things a little bit different. We invited Grant Hanevold, Assistant Chief Student Achievement Officer, Performance Zone 9, a well-respected leader among teachers in the empowerment model experience, to present. We are going to get started with him first. Thank you for this opportunity for educators to have a real voice in this process.

Grant Hanevold, Assistant Chief Student Achievement Officer

A little bit about myself:

- 26th year in CCSD
- Harney MS principal from 2003-2006, Moapa Valley Empowerment HS principal from 2006-2013, Sunrise Mt. Turnaround HS principal from 2013-2015, currently Assistant Chief Student Achievement Officer PZ9
- I've been blessed with great mentors and have had exemplary instructional leaders – they have taught me great lessons at being an effective administrator. In addition, I have worked with amazing students, teachers, parents, and community members. Interestingly, I've always felt like I learned more from them than they did from me.

My leadership style evolved, then transformed under empowerment.

- Participatory (shared) decision making vs. empowerment
- Shared decision making:
 - The shared decision making team (SIT or SPT) is generally the principal and the department chairs or grade-level chairs – maybe a parent or two. The principal typically selects the group members.
 - Information is requested and/or shared with a select group of staff as determined by the principal.
 - The primary purpose of the meetings are to discuss curriculum & instruction.
 - Meetings are infrequent and/or inconsistently held.
 - The meetings are not always transparent – staff and community feel detached from decision making.
- Empowerment: An empowerment school is more than a program. It is a culture born out of a belief and ideas that teachers, students, parents, and communities can and should work together without the constraints, which would hinder plans developed by the team of professionals in the school. The school is governed by an empowerment team to make site based decisions in the areas of governance, staffing, instruction, budget, and time.
 - Let's talk a little bit about the School Empowerment Team (SET) and the five Autonomies (it's important to note that schools are empowered, not just principals):
 - Autonomy #1: Governance – Those who directly impact student success make critical decisions affecting teaching and learning at the school level. When all stakeholders have a voice that is heard, the resulting decisions are more likely to be successful.
 - Autonomy #2: Staffing - Under autonomy, Empowerment Schools have the flexibility to set staffing patterns and job descriptions to create the best learning

environment for students. In Empowerment Schools, attention is given to the role of teachers as change agents.

- Autonomy #3: Instruction – Empowerment Schools select the instructional programs and materials, the assessment practices, and the schedule best suited to their students’ needs, within the parameters provided by the State of Nevada and CCSD.
 - Autonomy #4: Budget - Rather than being the recipient of funds with predetermined uses, Empowerment Schools have more control over the capital they receive. Empowerment Schools ensure that maximum dollars reach students in the classroom. Strategic Budget.
 - Autonomy #5: Time - The SET has the flexibility to determine the daily schedule and the yearly calendar to maximize learning time for students and collaboration time for staff. This flexibility, however, must be provided within the provisions of Nevada state law regarding student contact and faculty time usage.
 - The SET drives all decision making at the school.
 - My team consisted of the principal, one teacher representative per department, two support staff personnel, two parents, and one community member.
 - Members were selected by the group they served and were voted into the position.
 - They served two year terms and, by design, were not always the department chairs.
 - The SET had an elected chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretary.
 - The School Empowerment Team (SET) met twice monthly – the agenda was always set by the five autonomies and was posted in advance for staff and community.
 - Administration, faculty, staff, parents, and community all had the opportunity to include items on the bi-weekly agenda.
 - The SET secretary took minutes. Motions to suggest, change or approve policies & procedures could be proposed by any member of the SET.
 - Motions were passed by unanimous vote only.
 - ALL decisions were directly tied to student achievement, and we always looked at the return on our investment. We didn’t talk about people - we talked about positions. Data drove decision-making.
 - Minutes of every meeting were reviewed by the SET then posted for the school and community to view – full transparency.
- I’ve seen empowerment work at two very different high schools in CCSD.
 - Moapa Valley HS – small, rural, affluent, overwhelming community input. Goal: graduation rate, college dual-credit options, school farm, ACT/SAT scores, college acceptance, etc.

- Sunrise Mountain HS – large, urban, at-risk, minimal community input. Goal: graduation rate, proficiency pass rate, second language acquisition, 9th grade credit sufficiency, reduce dropout rate, transiency, poor attendance, behavior issues, etc.
- These two schools could not have been more different; however, the empowerment model led to success at both sites.
- Staff and community members at ALL schools want to be part of something special – and it’s even more special when you are part of the decision making process.
- Administratively, the paradigm shift for me happened when I finally realized that the more decisions I allowed others to make the more revered I became as a leader.

I think Steve Jobs said it best, “It doesn’t make sense to hire smart people and then tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do.” This really captures the essence of empowerment for me.

- Bottom Line:
 - As long as schools can demonstrate sustained academic success and/or improvement – they should be allowed to function with little oversight from central office; however, it’s critically important that those who supervise empowerment schools understand the empowerment process. It is different.
 - Central office should provide services – not just direction. Empowered schools should select the services that meet the needs of their communities.
 - No one knows the kids better than those who work with them every day. School communities want the freedom to determine what will best accomplish the school’s goals and they want to deploy the resources that have been allocated to implement those choices.
 - Critically important is finding the right principal for the right school and community. Not all principals want Empowerment?
 - I think it would be tragic to impose Empowerment on building principals without a planned paradigm shift. That shift starts at the top with those of us who supervise schools.

I will finish with a quote by Iyanla (E-Yan-La) Vanzandt:

“Most of us do not know what we cannot do until someone tells us. We are willing to try almost anything, go anywhere, and stretch ourselves to the limits in pursuit of our dreams. And then we talk to other people. We are reminded of how dangerous it may be, how ridiculous it sounds, what a chance we are taking. People have no problem informing us of all the downfalls and pitfalls; they cannot see how we will ever reach the goal. They put us in touch with our faults, limitations and habits. They remind us of all the others who didn’t make it, and in vivid detail they tell us why. They give us warnings, cautions and helpful hints about alternative things we can do. When they are finished, we have been effectively talked right out of our dreams. If we have a dream we want to come true, the only way to it is through it. We must take a chance, a risk and a leap. If we believe in ourselves and our ability, we will be taught how to fly. *We can do it because we believe we can do it.*”

- *I’ve seen empowerment work, and it worked because we believed we could do it. I am hopeful more and more schools will utilize the model. It’s the best way I’ve seen to rally an entire school community around improving student achievement. Thanks so much for allowing me this opportunity to speak.*

Karen Egger, NBCT, Duane Keller Middle School

Good Morning Madame Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Karen Egger. I am a National Board certified teacher and the School Librarian at Fay Herron Elementary School in North Las Vegas.

During the start-up of Empowerment schools, I was at Duane Keller Middle School. Our principal at that time, April Key, wanted Keller to become an Empowerment school and asked me to write the proposal. That proposal was accepted and we were included in the schools who received a portion of the \$8 million grant contributed by the Lincy Foundation for the first 3 years we were Empowerment. We also had a community/corporate partner who contributed funds, volunteers, and in-kind donations of food and venues for the staff.

We formed our School Empowerment Team, which was comprised of teachers who either volunteered or were asked to represent their department peers. We included two parents whose names were suggested by the principal and our community partner representative. This group elected a chairman who was responsible for conducting the bi-weekly School Empowerment Team meetings and I continued on as the secretary responsible for the meeting agenda, communication with all of the team members, minutes of meetings, and budget. Administration was represented by one of the assistant principals. I reported back to the principal when asked.

The District provided a coach for us the first year to help get the model in place. Once we were on the right track, we saw less and less of her, but she was always available to answer questions. With the first allocation of funds, we decided to increase the minutes in the school day and add additional teachers in order to reduce class sizes. Each department prepared a wish list of items they felt would help increase student achievement and presented their reasons to the Team for approval. Most were approved, but some were denied or tabled for additional information. All decisions effecting staffing and budget went through the Team. If the principal had a request, she presented it for a vote. If she had concerns, they were brought to the Team. The Team was empowered to be the decision making body for the school, and we all took it seriously.

There were very few growing pains because each member of the staff became involved in the improvement process to the extent they wanted to. School climate refers to the quality and character of a school and is based on patterns of peoples' experiences of school life. It reflects norms, goals, values, inter personal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. Our staff became cooperative and collaborative, and because each person was contributing to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment, the staff was energized.

Teacher retention is directly related to the quality of the principal leadership. In the case of Empowerment, it takes a principal who can release responsibility to a staff of professionals with varying life experiences that contribute to establishing a healthy school climate that results in a safe school that fosters academic success, positive student and staff development, and teacher retention. We experienced high teacher retention during our Empowerment years and internal recruitment was fabulous because my colleagues wanted like-minded colleagues to come to work with us. ***We had exceptional math achievement and growth in literacy.*** The school climate was very positive as evidenced by increased numbers of students coming to school.

At the end of 3 years, the additional Empowerment resources dried up, but we continued with the School Empowerment Team governance model and sought grant monies for our wish lists. Eventually our principal moved on to another Empowerment school. Our staff was allowed to interview principal candidates. We wrote 5 questions and assigned them to various staff members to ask each candidate. After the questioning process we secretly voted on our first, second, and third choice. Unfortunately, the district selected our third choice at the school. It wasn't long before the decision making was taken away from the Team and the model fell apart. Teachers felt like they were no longer important members contributing to the school climate. Two way communication stopped and teachers and staff members began to transfer out of Keller. It has been 6 years since I left and I understand almost all of the staff has moved to other schools.

The Empowerment governance model works with the right kind of administration: one that can step back and include teachers in making decisions that affect them. Teacher leadership responsibilities help teachers support one another and gain a voice in their schools, which in turn improves working conditions and out-comes for students. Our principal trusted us to make good decisions—so we did. We spent the money like it was coming out of our own pockets. We each had a voice. We got along and conducted ourselves like the responsible adults we are. We were treated like equal members of a community.

Granted, it's a challenge for some administrators to let go and trust their staff. This Empowerment model is predicated on shared trust and decision making. To be honest, I can't imagine any school that could improve and reach its full potential without tapping the expertise and experience of the teachers on its staff.

Emily Poeltler, Jay W. Jeffers Elementary School

Good Morning Madame Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Emily Poeltler. I currently teach second grade at Jay W. Jeffers Elementary School. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak today. I believe that teacher autonomy is crucial to a strong school culture and community. I arrived in Las Vegas 11 years ago as a first year teacher. I have taught at Jeffers for my entire career. I am passionate about teaching, learning, and community building.

Jay W. Jeffers is in a low socio-economic area, with 100% of the students receiving free or reduced cost lunch. The majority of the students at the school are Hispanic (89%). Language development is a concern for the school with 82% of the students being classified as having Limited English Proficiency. The school opened in 2005 as an inquiry-based science school.

Before Jeffers became an empowerment school, our leadership understood that teachers need a voice. We are the ones who are closest to the students and can make decisions to meet their needs. Our leadership also understood that teachers need to be supported, *especially* if the staff is new to teaching. Our first year, the district provided our school with a new teacher mentor. This person would ultimately help support staff with curriculum, instructions, management, and program needs. This was something that we all benefited from as a staff. The next year, the district made cuts and we were told this position would no longer be provided. When we were told about the situation, we as a staff were given the autonomy to decide if we would like to fund the position through our title budget. We voted and the outcome was to keep the position. Being able to have the autonomy as professionals to make the decision was *powerful*.

As the years went on, Jeffers eventually became an Empowerment School and had the autonomy to use the monies in the budget as we saw fit. The school, staff, and students benefited from it. The decisions we made impacted the teachers, students, and the community.

We as a school community decided to allocate money to hire mentors. We developed the job descriptions and expectations based on what teachers and ultimately students needed. We invested the money in people not materials. We hired a math mentor, science mentor, and literacy mentor. All of these decisions were made by teachers for teachers and again, ultimately the students.

Nothing at our school was off limits. Everything was transparent! We were all informed of everything, good or bad. We made the decision about what we would teach and how we would teach it. We decided on how the monies for the budgets would best be allocated; what programs we would buy, what professional developments to have, what materials were needed, when tutoring would begin, and what community activities would be provided.

We had created, developed, and improved our school community. *The opportunity to be empowered allowed our school to build a community of lifelong learners.* We all had *ownership* and were invested in the success of everyone and everything. We were “**Jeffers**”.

Even when our empowerment label went away, we still kept the most powerful part: **teacher autonomy**. During the 2014-15 school year, 68% of our staff in grades K-5 had been at Jeffers for 3 or more years. During the middle of the year, we learned that our principal would be moving on. Although heartbroken, we were told we would have a voice in the new hiring. We were asked what qualities we thought were important in a new leader for Jeffers. The district asked 3 people to sit on a panel to help with the hiring. They were given a list of questions, and sat through three interviews. In the end, the panel was asked to rank the interviewees by choice. After about a week, we were told who our principal would be. The staff members, who were a part of the panel, were shocked. This was their last choice. How could this be possible? We now knew that what we thought didn't really matter. Our autonomy was slowly being ripped away.

Our new leadership started in March of 2015. Everything seemed to be transitioning smoothly as the year went on. As transfer season opened up and we got our new budget, we knew something was truly different. The lack of transparency and communication was evident throughout our school community. We were slowly being shut out. Everyone wanted to know what was going on, we had been afforded this autonomy, and now, our voice and professional insight was not good enough. Some of the staff at Jeffers decided to leave and seek out other positions. A majority decided to stay at Jeffers and see if it was just a learning curve.

This year at Jeffers, we currently have 51% of the staff positions being held by teachers who have been part of the community for more than 3 years. *We also have 28% vacant positions. In grades K-2 35% of these positions are vacant, meaning more than a third of the staff in primary grades do not have a licensed staff member.* This will and has impacted our students, staff, and school. With over 230 students this school year, not having a highly qualified teacher instructing them, the outlook for these students is grim.

As a Victory School, we were given over a million dollars to help improve our school, teachers, students, and community. Did any of us have a say in what was to happen with the money? We were now even more discouraged our community was slowly falling apart. As we got pushed further away from the decision making process we began to ask why? We got no response. We began to become more and more frustrated and our morale was dropping.

As a staff, we believed in supporting all students. We pushed to find a way to help support our long term subs. We knew the students didn't choose to have a less qualified educator as their

primary teacher. This was a reality and we needed to step up and somehow give our students a voice.

We didn't know what was in our budget, but we knew we had the right to see it. We stood up because we wanted our voices back. We started to help bridge the gap of communication, and help get back the transparency that our students, staff, and community deserved. We started a Teacher Advisory Committee to voice our concerns and solutions. To say the least this process was long and frustrating. We worked hard to ask for professional support. We didn't receive it. We were told our proposal was great and would be implemented next year. We were all very discouraged. If education is freedom, how are our students supposed to brake the chains of poverty if the one thing that frees them is lacking?

If we had the autonomy to provide our long term subs with modeling, lesson study, curriculum and program based professional development we would have been stating "**we care**". Instead we allowed the door to be shut, no observation to be done, and no professional development or support to be given. *This to me shows that the top down centralized model is failing our students, staff, schools, and community.*

This year 77% of the staff in grades K-5 at Jeffers is transitioning out. Next year, only 14% of the staff in K-5 will have been at Jeffers for more than 3 years. Now remember, during the 2014-15 school year when we were using a site-based model, 68% of our staff in grades K-5 had been at Jeffers for 3 or more years.

It is sad to me that most of the 230 students who had their primary teachers as long term subs will most likely be in that same position next year. This is an incredible disservice to our students. We are failing them. Remember, people don't leave because they don't like their jobs; they leave because of poor management.

Thank you for allowing me to share my experience. I hope I've provided insight by showing the drastic contrast between how successful we were by using an empowerment model versus the current central admin model. Thank you.

Mark Nacinovich, Paul Culley Elementary School

Good Morning Madame Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mark Nacinovich and I have been employed by the Clark County School District for 13 years. Seven years ago I was hired to work at Paul Culley Elementary School, one of the first four schools in our school district to become an empowerment school. When I joined the staff at Culley Elementary, the empowerment model was in full swing. I was hired as the schools computer and technology coordinator and was immediately given the privilege of serving on the schools site-based decision making team, known as the School Empowerment Team.

Our team is made up of a representative from each grade level, support staff, fine arts specialists, our principal, assistant principal, a parent and a team chairperson. The team chair is never an administrator and is selected by the sitting Empowerment Team through a vote. Members are selected by the department they represent. My situation is somewhat unique in that I, being the schools computer and technology expert, have served on the Empowerment Team every year I have been employed at Culley Elementary. Other members typically only participate on our team one to two years to give others the chance to serve. Over the course of my time at Culley, I was selected to be a team chair for a two-year period.

Our Empowerment Team meetings are open to all staff members. Non-team members are free to provide input on any topic from that days agenda; however, only the team members may vote on that topic.

When a new Empowerment Team is selected, the first two or three meetings are dedicated to training on how to be an effective governing body. The first, and most important, topic we cover is the voting process. Each member MUST understand that every time they vote, they have to take their personal preferences and situations out of the equation. ALL votes MUST be based on the best interest of our students.

Votes in our meeting are made by a show of thumbs. A “thumbs up” indicates that the team member and at least a majority of the people they represent agree that the decision being made is in fact in the best interest of our students. A “thumbs sideways” indicates the decision is something they may be able to give a “thumbs up” to but they would like some more discussion on the topic. A “thumbs down” vote indicates that the team representative and the people they represent have an issue with the decision being made and do not support it. In either the case of a vote of “thumbs sideways” or “thumbs down” the team representative must explain their rational for voting the way they did fostering further discussion.

The second part of a new Empowerment Team’s training involves communication.

Communication is key to an Empowerment Team making the best decisions possible. I’m sure you have heard the expression, “two heads are better than one.” We believe that ALL our heads are better than one and this does include input from our students as well. On several occasions

our students have had ideas about how to make our school a better place. Students communicate their ideas to our Empowerment Team via our student government. As an example, many of our students felt that it would be beneficial to our school to adopt a program called “Be Kind” which promotes and encourages every member of our school community to simply be kind to each other. Our student government put together a short presentation on the “Be Kind” program explaining how it would work and what they believe the benefits of such a program would be to our school. Three student government members were selected to present their case directly to our Empowerment Team. Their argument for adopting this program was that they felt it would help cut down on incidents of bullying. After the students presented their case, our Empowerment Team discussed the pros and cons. Each representative then took this information back to the people they represent for further discussion. At the next Empowerment Team meeting we voted on the student government proposal and it was approved. Paul Culley is now a “Be Kind” school as a direct result of our students participating in the Empowerment process.

One of the best decisions our Empowerment Team has made in my time on the team, involved making an adjustment in the way we help students that are not showing adequate academic growth. Our team regularly reviews several sources of data we use to assess the progress of our students. In one situation, we noticed that our students were showing little or no academic growth in reading and mathematics. Many ideas were discussed on how to deal with this issue. Ultimately, we decided to use some of the flexibility we were given under the Empowerment model to make some changes. We decided to create four teaching positions where the teachers were not assigned to a class. These four teachers, known as intervention strategists, were tasked with pulling groups of struggling students into small groups and focusing on the areas they were having difficulty in in the areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics. After only one year, according to the Nevada Academic Growth Model, Culley went from showing little or no growth in almost all student groups, ***to showing adequate growth in almost every group***. This was true for both English Language Arts and Mathematics. This was an accomplishment that as a staff, we were very proud of creating. ***It proved that when we all put our heads together and utilize the varying expertise of each of our staff members, we could have a huge impact on our students.***

Based on my experience, when you participate in a site-based decision making model, like our empowerment model, ***it creates a climate where you feel invested in the school***. Teachers no longer think about *just* the students in their individual classes. They become invested in the success of every student in the school. When fifth grade teachers help make decisions about Kindergarten students, they now feel invested in those Kindergarten students. The success of the Kindergarten students becomes the success of all the staff. It creates a sense of ownership that goes beyond each staff member’s individual students. The success of one becomes the success of everyone involved in the empowerment model. Thank you for allowing me to share my experience.

Teri Mann, E.W. Staton Elementary School

Good Morning Madame Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Teri Mann. I am a teacher at E.W. Staton Elementary School. I have been a teacher with the Clark County School District for the last 12 years. I have worked at Staton Elementary School for 10 of those years and have taught, Third Grade, Fourth Grade, and currently teach Gifted and Talented (GATE). I have been actively involved in my school since the first day I set foot in the building. I had the honor of being elected the Empowerment Chair when Staton first became an empowerment school in 2009.

Empowerment is not just a label you place on a school. Empowerment is a philosophy. Using empowerment you conduct business at the school level through shared decision making. Empowerment at Staton meant forming a team that created a vision that empowered teachers, support staff, parents, and administration all of whom made decisions that impacted the needs of our school students and community. We used Robert's Rules of Order during meetings in order to ensure that everyone's voice was heard.

To me, empowerment meant much more than that. It meant that I now had a school family. Family means strength and having a support system in which every member has a role, responsibility, and a sense of belonging. Through Empowerment, Staton became a family. Many people think that they are only as strong as their weakest link; however, empowerment at Staton meant that you had a support network of professionals that not only wanted everyone to succeed, but also it meant that every student at that school was now your own. Just like a family, their struggles were your struggles and their victories were your victories. With this family philosophy in mind, ***I worked harder than I had ever worked before because I felt valued. I had a voice and knew what I said and did mattered. It impacted our children at Staton and the school community.***

Not only did empowerment impact me, it impacted all the employees at Staton. Critical school decisions were made based on school data and looking at the needs of all of our children. When a person had an idea for our school, they presented their idea to the Staton Empowerment Team. This team made decisions based on the school budget, use of staff, scheduling, curriculum, resources, and implementation of school programs.

Having the autonomy that empowerment gave us allowed us to control decisions about our school budget. However, every decision was made based on factual information from our school community and data; which included annual yearly progress reports, staff surveys and community surveys. Using this information it became clear that we had an overwhelming consensus that Staton wanted to become a science and technology based school. As a team, we decided that in order to have the staff to teach science and technology, we were willing to add one or two students to each class in order to have funds to hire a science and a computer teacher. We also realized that seven hours and eleven minutes was not enough time to include additional

instruction for these programs. As an empowerment team, we elected to increase the instructional day by fifteen minutes. This time came from before school contract time, which typically was utilized for teacher preparation and staff meetings. This extra instructional time was the equivalent of approximately ten additional school days.

In addition, being an empowerment school gave us the ability to purchase an assessment tool that truly measured the abilities of our unique student population. Based on district data, 75% of our students were in the meets or exceeds categories of standards. We purchased an assessment tool called MAP (Measuring Academic Progress). This tool provided individual student growth data over a year's time. No other district or state assessment tool provided us data on student growth. This was a K-12 assessment tool and therefore did not have a K-6 cap on measuring a student's placement or growth throughout the school year. For example, we had two students who were achieving at the high school level in math as measured by this tool. In order to meet their needs, we were able to hire a high school math teacher to tutor and challenge these students. The choice to purchase this assessment tool gave the staff the ability to help each student reach their maximum potential.

As a school in a more affluent community, we were not eligible for any Title I or ELL funding. However, our student population varied from students with special needs to highly gifted students and included different demographics. Through empowerment, we were able to provide programs such as: accelerated classes, tutoring before and after school, and a homework club. Also, we created learning strategist positions that focused on math and reading interventions. We were also able to start a program called Explorations. This program was 30 minutes at the end of the school day on Fridays. Explorations empowered students to increase social and emotional growth, make real world connections, and provided multicultural opportunities as well as opportunities to connect with secondary curriculum. For example, some of the Exploration choices included foreign languages, rocketry, science, sports, music, dance and much more.

The examples that I just told you about are just some of the programs that contributed to making Staton a high achieving five star empowerment school. In order to achieve these successes, we had to go through an arduous and competitive process which included multiple steps. We had to work together to create a vision, write a plan and provide a presentation to district, community, and teacher union members. Once the proposal for our school empowerment plan was accepted, we carried out a secret ballot school-wide vote to ensure all staff members were onboard to move forward. At that time 87% of the staff voted to become an empowerment school. ***Throughout our three year empowerment term, there was virtually no teacher turnover.*** Almost 100% of our staff not only remained, but found their place in our family.

Once again I want to stress that empowerment is a philosophy and not a designation. It takes many voices to make it work. It takes a team to build a successful empowerment school. The entire school community including administration must embrace this plan in order for it to succeed. At Staton, we were run as more of a democracy and everyone had a say. Before we

were designated as an empowerment school, teachers had to fill out a form for school supplies that were locked away in a closet. After filling out the form teachers would have to wait until it was approved and an office clerk would give you your supplies. After we became empowerment, teachers decided that they wanted to change the process and have an open store room of items. After all, if you could trust us with children, you should be able to trust us with office supplies. Our principal was not in agreement at the time. She stated her concern was that teachers would hoard the supplies and we would have to increase spending out of our budget. However, when it came time to vote, she was only one vote out of many and the team voted to open the supply closet saving us time and unnecessary paperwork. This illustrates how the principal in the empowerment school model must be willing to also embrace the philosophy of group decision making and be willing to support teacher ideas and opinions.

A teacher always analyzes data and reflects on their teaching. ***As I look back, I realize that the best years of my teaching were during my time at Staton Elementary when it was an empowerment school. I felt like my ideas and opinions were valued and I was supported in not only my own classroom, but by my whole school. It made me feel as if I was part of something bigger than myself that gave me a purpose and a sense of belonging.*** It was like being a part of a family. I love my job and I am passionate about my calling as an educator. Yet lately, instead of feeling like a part of something bigger, I feel like only an employee, and that this is just my job. Staton has changed also. Since empowerment ended several years ago and our principal retired, we only have about 20% of our original staff left. About 80% of my family of teachers has moved on.

Empowerment is something I highly recommend if it is done with the right mindset. The teachers, administration, and community must be flexible and willing to buy in to the team mindset. The school must be willing to become part of something bigger. Thank you for allowing me to share my experience.

Vikki Courtney, President, CCEA

Vikki Courtney, President of the Clark County Education Association.

We really want to thank you for the opportunity to be here today. As you heard, there were common themes experienced by Empowerment School participants. The outcomes are evident and tangible by the achieved success of our students.

We look forward to the ongoing dialogued and to finalizing recommendations.

Thank you.