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INSIDE THIS BRIEF

- SUMMARY
- EMPOWERMENT AND SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT
- EMPOWERMENT AND DECENTRALIZATION
- PROGRAM OF EMPOWERMENT SCHOOLS IN NEVADA

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RESEARCH BRIEF ON

HISTORY OF EMPOWERMENT SCHOOLS PROGRAM IN NEVADA

SUMMARY

The following timeline displays how the concept of empowerment has been implemented in the State of Nevada:

1993	1993 Legislature approves laws governing school-based decision making. (<i>Nevada Revised Statutes</i> [NRS] 386.4154–386.4158)
2007	Clark County School District (CCSD) implements first 4 empowerment schools.
2008	2007 Legislature approves laws governing empowerment schools. (NRS 386.700–386.780) CCSD operates 8 empowerment schools.
2009	CCSD operates 14 empowerment schools.
2010	CCSD operates 17 empowerment schools.

EMPOWERMENT AND SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT

The concept of empowerment schools was built upon a model of school administration called participatory management.¹ One such model is school-based management or, as it is referred to in the State of Nevada, school-based decision making (*Nevada Revised Statutes* [NRS] 386.4154 through NRS 386.4158).

According to the Education Encyclopedia—StateUniversity.com:

School-based decision-making is a concept based on the fundamental principle that individuals who are affected by the decision, possess expertise regarding the decision, and are responsible for implementing the decision, should be involved in making the decision.

A document from the Education Encyclopedia—StateUniversity.com, titled *School-Based Decisionmaking – Key Elements, Scope of Decision-Making, Decision-Making Structures*, provides a wealth of information concerning implementation of school-based decision making; below is the hyperlink to the document:

<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2386/School-Based-Decisionmaking.html>

Although State laws concerning school-based decision making have been around since 1993, review of responses from a Quick Poll Survey of school districts in 2008 indicates that only the Washoe County School District has actually implemented a policy concerning school-based decision making, titled “Shared Decision-Making 6000.”

EMPOWERMENT AND DECENTRALIZATION

During the 2005-2007 Biennium, the Legislative Committee on Education invited William G. Ouchi, Ph.D., Anderson Graduate School of Management, University of California, Los Angeles, to provide a presentation concerning an article titled, *Power to the Principals: “Decentralization in Three Large School Districts.”*² In the presentation, he made the following points about decentralization in Edmonton, Alberta; Houston, Texas; and Seattle, Washington.

- In a strongly decentralized district, an individual school may choose on its own, without permission, to vary the mixture of types of teachers, the proportion of full-time, part-time, paraprofessional, and outsourced teachers, and other personnel.
- The principal is free to set a daily school schedule different from the district schedule.
- Each school may decide to hire its own internal staff to perform specialized functions, to buy those services from the central office, or to purchase them from vendors of its choosing.
- Each school is free to choose its own teaching methods and to purchase teaching materials of its own choosing.

¹ Delaney, Jerome G. (1995), *The Development of School-Based Management in the Edmonton Public School District*.

² Ouchi, William G., “Power to the Principals: Decentralization in Three Large School Districts,” *Organization Science*, April 2006.

Based upon his research, Dr. Ouchi made the following comments concerning effective decentralization.

- Effective decentralization must grant to each school, autonomy over staffing, scheduling, and teaching methods.
- District central offices and state and federal education agencies should set standards and then audit performance.
- The public should have clear information on school performance.

During the same meeting of the Legislative Committee on Education, Walt Rulffes, Ph.D., M.B.A., Superintendent, Clark County School District (CCSD), made a presentation to the Legislative Committee on Education concerning a pilot program to implement local school autonomy in four district schools—named empowerment schools.

PROGRAM OF EMPOWERMENT SCHOOLS IN NEVADA

Clark County School District

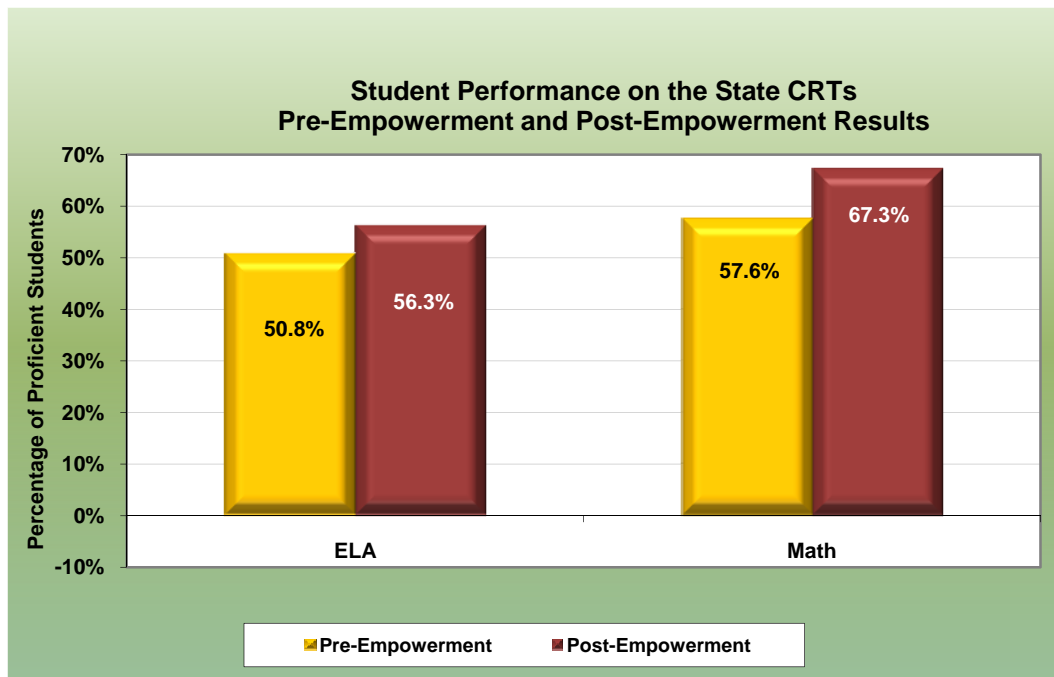
According to CCSD's *Overview: Empowerment Schools*, the concept of empowerment is anchored in the belief that critical decisions affecting instruction should be made at the school level by those most closely involved with the children. If schools are to be held accountable for student achievement, they should be given adequate resources and the freedom to determine how to attain targeted, specific goals by deploying those resources effectively and engaging the school community in the process.

Utilizing school district funds, the Clark County School District implemented its pilot program of empowerment schools during School Year (SY) 2006-2007. Four elementary schools were selected to receive \$600 per student in additional money to be used to cover the following:

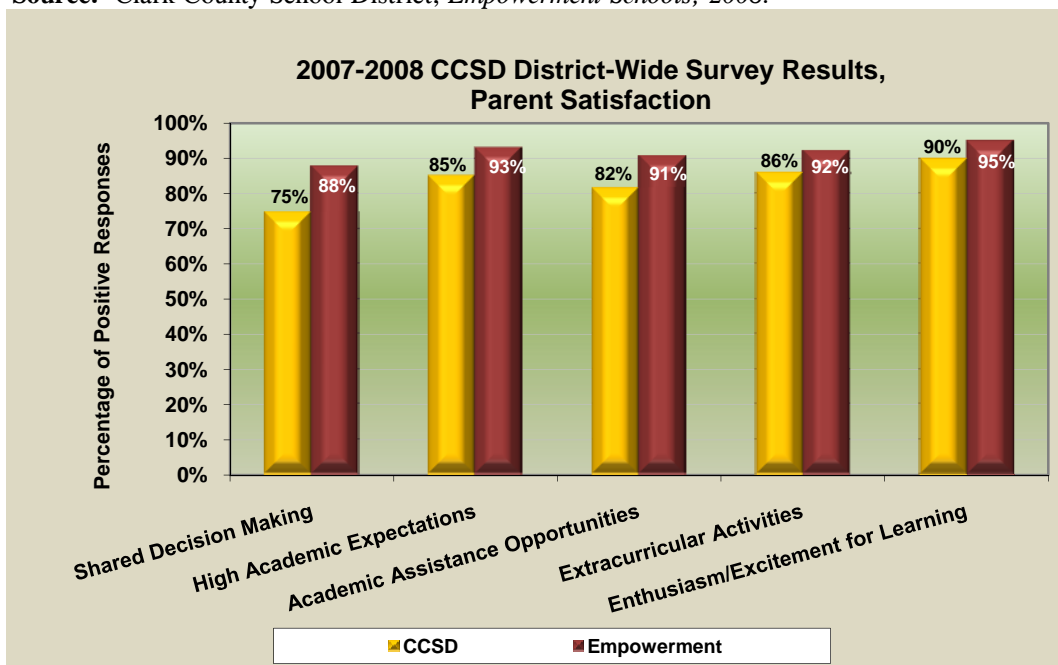
- Smaller Class Sizes: The maximum student-to-teacher ratio in the empowerment schools is 25:1 in the core classes.
- Extended Day: Twenty-nine minutes per teacher per day.
- Extended School Year: Five additional days per school year per teacher.
- Discretionary Dollars: \$150,000 per year.
- Increased Principal Salary: 5 percent.
- Teacher Pay for Performance: Up to 2 percent pay for performance for all licensed staff if specific achievement targets are met.

Today, CCSD has implemented a total of 17 empowerment schools funded with school district general funds and grants. The effectiveness of the program has been measured through student performance, student attendance, and parent satisfaction. The following summarizes the results from SY 2007-2008:

- **Student Performance:** Empowerment schools have increased the percentage of proficient students in mathematics by 9.7 percent and in English Language Arts by 5.5 percent when compared to their pre-empowerment proficiency percentages.
- **Student Attendance:** Attendance rates in all empowerment schools have consistently exceeded the CCSD average.
- **Parent Satisfaction:** All empowerment schools received higher parent satisfaction scores on a district-wide parent satisfaction survey.



Source: Clark County School District, *Empowerment Schools*, 2008.



Source: Clark County School District, *Empowerment Schools*, 2008.

State of Nevada's Program of Empowerment Schools

Taking its direction from the Governor's 2007 State of the State Address, the Legislature approved Senate Bill 238 (Chapter 530, *Statutes of Nevada 2007*), which established a program of empowerment schools in Nevada. Below is the hyperlink to the NRS section containing State laws governing the Program of Empowerment Schools in Nevada:

<http://www.leg.state.nv.us/NRS/NRS-386.html#NRS386Sec700>

The State of Nevada's Program of Empowerment Schools provides a framework for the control that school personnel exercise over school resources. An empowerment school may control 90 percent of its apportionment from State and local resources, enroll students who are not zoned to attend that school, and create an incentive pay structure for all school personnel.

Based upon the Governor's recommendation to establish a Program of Empowerment Schools in Nevada, the 2007 Legislature approved funding of \$180,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2007-2008 and \$8.9 million in FY 2008-2009 for the program. For planning purposes in FY 2007-2008, \$50,000 each was to be allocated to both the Clark and Washoe County School Districts and \$10,000 each to eight other school districts that apply to participate in the program. In FY 2008-2009, 5 percent of the schools in Clark County (15 schools) and Washoe County (5 schools) and 1 school in each of eight other school districts were to be selected to operate as empowerment schools. The total number of empowerment schools statewide is capped at 100. Additional funding of approximately \$400 per pupil is provided to these empowerment schools.

NOTE: State funding to implement empowerment schools in FY 2008-2009 was eliminated due to budget reductions. The 2009 Legislature did not approve State funding to support the program during the 2009-2011 Biennium.

