



A Decade of Change

- The polio vaccine, developed by Jonas Salk, was introduced to the public in 1955. Within a few short years, a disease that had crippled or killed tens of thousands of people a year nearly vanished in developing countries.
- The Soviet Union gained in power and world prominence with the launch of Sputnik 1 in 1957, spawning fears that America was slipping as a superpower. In response, the United States passed the National Defense Education Act of 1958. This act funded science and math media-based instruction in America's schools.
- In 1962, the US Congress took further action and enacted the Educational Broadcasting Facilities Program, which funded seventy-five percent of the construction and equipment of a national network of educational television stations.
- Fidel Castro overthrew the Batista regime in Cuba in 1959, seizing and redistributing land owned by American companies, and forging an alliance with the Soviet Union.
- By the early 1960s, television became a fixture in American homes. Kitchen appliances were invented that provided greater efficiency and convenience. The suburbs became the preferred neighborhoods for raising families away from the hassles and vices of large cities.
- The GI Bill made it possible for thousands of young men to go to college and gain opportunities for higher wages.
- The country was shocked by the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. The time of prosperity, the Beatles, and cultural security was being shaken as the world became less certain.
- The civil rights movement that began in the 1950s, gained momentum. In 1964, Congress passed a civil rights act forbidding discrimination on the basis of race or gender in hiring, promoting and firing, as well as denying federal aid payments to any school district that applied discriminatory practices.

From Many, One 1955–1964

Education changes came to southern Nevada on the wings of major technological advances for the times: local electric power generators, inexpensive access to phonograph and records, moving film, radio, television, touch-tone telephones, and audio visual teaching projectors. In 1956, the newly-formed Clark County School District was positioned to take advantage of these benefits and to make great leaps forward, not only in education, but in its use of new technology in the classroom.

Clark County in the 1950s was a much different place than we see today. Las Vegas had less than fifty thousand people, though it was still the largest city in the county. To the southeast stood the industrial towns of Henderson and Boulder City, a company town that did not allow gambling and, at that time, outlawed the sale of alcohol.

To the northeast, the conservative towns in the Moapa and Virgin Valleys boasted communities that did not rely on entertainment, industry, or government projects for their existence. The residents were the descendants of the original settlers who struggled to create a stable environment for ranching, farming, and other agriculture.

A number of old mining towns also ringed the county. These communities had seen better days

before 1956, but the rugged characters who worked the mines and their descendants made sure their communities survived.

When it came to education, the rugged independence of these diverse communities resulted in a rather complicated system of schools and school districts. An early state law allowed for many school districts within counties. This law gave county commissioners the authority to establish a new school district whenever their area had five or more school-aged children. Once established, the schools would be eligible for state education funds, assuming a legally qualified teacher was present in the district and the school term lasted a minimum of six months with a daily attendance average of at least three students.



The Rhythmettes

In 1949, Evelyn Stuckey, a young physical education teacher at Las Vegas High School, formed a precision dance troupe, the Rhythmettes, as a way to give young women the sense of accomplishment, camaraderie, and leadership opportunities that team sports gave to male students. Modeled after the Radio City Rockettes, the Rhythmettes program gave women the opportunity to develop confidence, discipline, and self-esteem. Community service was also an important aspect of the program.

The Rhythmettes quickly gained recognition and popularity. Within a few years, they were unofficial ambassadors for Las Vegas, giving the city a more wholesome image. The troupe appeared on national television programs such as *Wide World of Sports* and *The Ed Sullivan Show*. In 1964, the community raised money to send the Rhythmettes to the New York City World's Fair.

Over the decades, 307 young women were Rhythmettes, supporting the troupe's motto: *Perfection in performance reflects perfection in living.*



This law resulted in schools springing up throughout Nevada. Any time a mining camp opened or a group of farmers gathered together, a new school was created to capture state funds. Even after mines closed down and farming communities began transporting their children to larger schools, many of the small, rural schools and districts remained. By the 1950s, there were 173 elementary districts and thirty-five high school districts in Nevada. Clark County itself had at least fourteen school districts, several with only a single school.

Unfortunately, recognition of education in Clark County was slow in developing. The majority of state legislators represented rural communities with different needs than those of Clark County, so resources were sparsely allocated to schools in Clark County. As the Test Site developed and the casino industry took root, more people began moving to Las Vegas, yet more money was not allocated for basic education. School buildings, classrooms, even textbooks were in short supply. Often, textbooks were passed from one school to another.

The prospect of having to raise taxes in order to improve the quality of education was not a priority for the Nevada legislature. In the 1930s, business leaders in Reno pushed through a constitutional amendment that prohibited estate and inheritance taxes

while limiting property taxes to five cents on the dollar of assessed property valuation in hopes of attracting wealthy people from other states to move to Nevada. Gambling fees and licenses during the 1940s and 50s covered the expenses of running the state, but these funds weren't enough to cover the state's continuing educational crisis. This dance between the school districts and legislature never ends.

The lack of education funds reached a point where the Las Vegas Union District had to rely on surplus military barracks from Nellis AFB for added classroom space. Many area schools were in serious disrepair. Las Vegas Union Superintendent Dr. R. Guild Gray commented that cracks in the floors of some buildings were so wide that any pencils students dropped would be lost through the floor.

Without funds to build new schools, Las Vegas

Union again resorted to double sessions, where teachers at crowded schools taught one-half of the student body in the morning and the other half in the afternoon. While this approach seemed to be a solution to overcrowding, it lessened the amount of time students spent in school each year. On double sessions, the students received 220 minutes of instruction a day instead of 300. This meant that students were spending much less time



Dr. R. Guild Gray.

in school than students in other parts of the country.

The situation was so bad that in 1953 the Las Vegas Union School District could not balance its budget. Dr. Gray requested that the grand jury investigate the state's failure to finance public schools. In a letter he wrote to Governor Charles Russell, he said:

The several school districts in Clark County are in serious financial difficulty. Some are operating on deficit budgets at the present time. Unless something is done to alleviate the present situation we fear a breakdown of the educational system. The normal repair of buildings has been seriously neglected; there isn't sufficient money to buy books and supplies required by Nevada State Law; and substandard teachers have been employed because there aren't sufficient funds to meet the salary competition of other states. At present 44 teachers in Clark County are employed with provisional certificates.

Thanks to Gray's efforts, the state legislature began looking for a solution to the educational problems. But it couldn't arrive at a solution soon enough. In 1955, Governor Russell called a special session of the legislature to make sure the situation did not continue.



Legislature in action, Carson City, 1969.

Consolidation

The Peabody Study commissioned by the legislature recommended the consolidation of small, individual school districts into large county-wide school districts, thereby creating only one school district for each of Nevada's seventeen counties. The legislature also enacted a state sales tax to support the newly-formed school districts.

Interestingly, this recommendation may have been influenced by the work of James B. Conant, a president of Harvard University and an influential member of the NEA Education Policies Commission. His book, *American High School Today*, advocated for large school districts and large comprehensive high schools.



Clark County Education Center, circa 1964.

All three high schools that opened during this era fit the new standard of large student populations: Western, with 2,357 students, Clark, with 2,530, and Valley, with 2,531. In addition, Clark and Valley High Schools were designed with open spaces to encourage team teaching, student collaboration, and flexible grouping, all new educational strategies aimed at closing the academic performance gap between American and Soviet students.

Innovations were implemented at Ruby Thomas Elementary School, which also opened in 1964: a unique building design, as well as special curriculum that included open classrooms, the schools without

walls concept, team teaching, and collaborative teacher planning time.

The district is born

Dr. Gray, who was the superintendent of the Las Vegas Union School District before consolidation, was named superintendent of the new Clark County School District. He came with a wealth of experience, having served as the Nevada Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Superintendent of the Yerington School District, and the Curriculum Director of Contra Costa County in California.

According to the law for consolidating a county's school districts, seven school board members were

elected from the membership of the old school boards for the newly-consolidated Clark County School District. Three seats were allowed from Las Vegas. The other members came from the different communities and cultures throughout the county. Henderson and Boulder City each had a representative; Moapa and Virgin Valleys shared a seat. The final member was selected to represent the remaining rural towns.

When the Clark County School District consolidated in 1956, there was a serious shortage of school

The newly-formed board worked together to quickly establish Clark County's first realistic educational operating budget of \$7.5 million.

At the time, the district had 20,240 students, 1,300 employees and teachers had a starting salary of \$4,000 a year.

buildings, both in number and in physical conditions of the structures. Dr. Gray presented a twelve million dollar building program to the school board. Unfortunately, this program would have required the largest bond sale Nevada had ever seen. Dr. Gray realized that the citizens of the county were not ready for such a bond after they had just been subjected to a new sales tax. Still, Dr. Gray and the school board asked voters in Clark County to pass a \$10.6 million bond for the new school district. While only fifteen percent of eligible voters turned out to

CCSD's first School Board, 1956. L-R front row: Helen Hyde, clerk; Sherwin F. Garside, President; Dr. Claire W. Woodbury, Vice President. Second row: Chester Sewell, member; Milton Keefer, member; Robert White, member; Del Robison, member.





Guidance counselors

One of the requirements to be accredited by the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools was the implementation of guidance services, which established the framework for high school counselor positions in Clark County schools. Through accreditation, standards of counseling services and job responsibilities were established, as was the ratio of 400 students to one counselor at the high school level, and 500 students to one counselor for middle schools. In the early 1950s, in response to the Sputnik challenge, the job of the high school counselor was expanded to provide vocational counseling to students, particularly to encourage students to pursue careers in math and science, in addition to monitoring student achievement toward graduation. Counseling positions were expanded to the junior high schools in the late 1950s, though the positions were only halftime in the beginning; the other half of the day they returned to teaching seventh, eighth, and ninth graders.

vote, it passed by a healthy margin. The future looked bright for the new school district.

The school board worked with Dr. James MacConnell, a consultant from Stanford University, local architects, contractors, manufacturers, and suppliers to determine the most practical and economical construction design for the area. Through these meetings, CCSD created an elementary school building model that cost only \$6.75 a square foot instead of the expected \$8.60. This design used improved heating

and ventilation systems and lowered maintenance costs. The new elementary schools also had less need for artificial lighting because they had more windows and natural light into the classrooms. All plumbing and utilities were placed above ground to make them more accessible for repairs, maintenance, and future upgrades. The partitions between the classrooms could be removed or modified as the classroom needs changed.

Anticipating more growth, the district cooperated with the City of Las Vegas to establish shared school-park playgrounds. During the school day, the parks were used by the bordering school as playgrounds and athletic fields. After school and on the weekends, the community used the parks. At some sites, the city built a swimming pool at a park and CCSD built the gymnasium and dressing rooms that would be used by students during the school day and by the community after school hours. This school-park partnership not only helped the school district keep up with growth, but it also saved taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars.

These partnerships still exist today.

The new Clark County School District faced the challenge of educating twenty thousand children scattered across an area of eight thousand square miles and had the daunting task of bringing together the different



In 1946, there were only three hotels of note on the Las Vegas Strip: the El Rancho Vegas, the Last Frontier, and the Flamingo. By 1960, the Desert Inn, Thunderbird, Sahara, Dunes, Tropicana, Riviera, Sands, and Stardust hotels were added. Downtown added the Pioneer Club, the HorseShoe Club, the Golden Nugget, and the Fremont hotel.

community cultures into a unified education system: the children of professional, technical workers in Boulder City; the blue-collar families of Henderson; the business owners and plant managers who worked in Henderson, but chose to reside in Las Vegas, and the small mining towns scattered along the outskirts of the county.

Plus there were the rural and agrarian communities in the outlying regions of Las Vegas. The people in Moapa and Virgin Valleys predominately belonged to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and professed the values of the church. Even during the 1950s, their communities stood in stark contrast

to the glamour and carefree lifestyle of Las Vegas' around-the-clock entertainment community.

In addition, there were the military and federal personnel that populated the communities around US Air Force installations at Nellis and Indian Springs. These families had different educational concerns from other families in Clark County. They often came from out of state and did not expect to remain in the county after their tours concluded. They expected their children to be educated in a manner that was competitive with other parts of the country, where they might very well be assigned next.





Madison Elementary School teacher and students.

To complicate matters further, as the Cold War developed, the nuclear test site outside of Las Vegas expanded operations, hiring ten thousand employees. New casinos opened their doors, requiring thousands of workers to accommodate the flood of tourists. Neighborhoods exploded with new families.

Many of these new families were displaced Cuban refugees, fleeing from Castro's new regime. The fact

that casinos and gambling had been prevalent in Cuba before the takeover made Las Vegas a popular and practical destination for those seeking employment. Unfortunately, their knowledge of the industry was hampered by language and culture.

The fledgling school district was unprepared for this growth; once again, there were not enough schools or funds to accommodate all of the children in the county. Schools were forced, yet again, to implement double sessions, significantly reducing the amount of instructional time given to students.

The new hotels brought prosperity for Las Vegas, but with the prosperity came a social and political dilemma that was hard to ignore: The fact that a large number of new employees coming to town were black. "Although Blacks were free to live and own businesses on the east side of town, subsequent segregation practices forced most of the minority population to relocate to the Westside." (Mooney, 2005) The influx of African American hotel workers and their families deeply impacted the schools of the Westside community.

By federal law, schools were not segregated. High school students of all races were represented in classrooms across the county, as there were only a few high schools available. Elementary schools, however, were de facto segregated, as Las Vegas casino policies and housing practices of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s discouraged integrated neighborhoods. No African American student was ever excluded from a school based on race; instead, the housing practices made it unlikely that any elementary school would have a racial mix of students. In fact, though Clark County escaped the initial mandates of



Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, the elementary schools located in the Westside neighborhood had a student body that was ninety-eight percent African American.

A newcomer arrives

Dr. Gray resigned as superintendent of the Clark County School District on September 1, 1961 to take a position as vice-president of the First Western Savings and Loan Association. During his tenure, he managed to bring the district together and handle a

student population that jumped from over nineteen thousand to close to thirty thousand, as well as convince the legislature to recognize the needs of Clark County. He was instrumental in garnering community support and parental involvement, as well as handling growth and development with fiscal responsibility, establishing a model for future superintendents to follow.

Harvey N. Dondero, a senior administrator during the Gray administration, agreed to act as an interim superintendent until a replacement could be hired.

Harry Dondero was originally hired for a position at Las Vegas High School in 1931.

His intimate knowledge of the district and its operations, and having served several superintendents during his career, helped him manage the district in its transition period. He held this position for three months until the arrival of Leland B. Newcomer, who had been recruited from Southern California and hired for the position on December 1, 1961.

The month before Newcomer took office, a special election was held to vote on a \$6 million bond to build nine elementary schools and a junior high school. The bond failed, leaving the school district in a tight spot as student enrollment continued to grow at a rate of thirteen percent during 1960 and 1961.

An article in *Time* magazine noted Newcomer's arrival, as well as the fact that he was taking the helm of a school district facing tough times. Roughly half of the

F 818 N

TELEGRAM
BELL TELEPHONE COMPANY OF NEVADA

CLASS OF SERVICE

TELEGRAM	DAY LETTER	SYMBOL DAY L	NIGHT MESSAGE	SYMBOL NITE	NIGHT LETTER	SYMBOL N L
----------	------------	--------------	---------------	-------------	--------------	------------

IF NONE OF THE THREE SYMBOLS SHOWN ABOVE APPEARS AFTER THE CHECK (NUMBER OF WORDS) THIS IS A TELEGRAM. OTHERWISE ITS CHARACTER IS INDICATED BY THE SYMBOL APPEARING AFTER THE CHECK.

RECEIVED AT

570d 71 L
Las Vegas, Nev.
Sept 24-1931

Harry Dondero,
Hawthorne, Nev.

Do you want position in High School
stop. Requiring salary at rate of sixteen
hundred twenty for full year.
with raise if you remain 2 years.
work will be overflow classes in algebra
Public speaking and possibly other subjects
stop. We need General handy man to relieve
overworked classes. Stop. Work to get immediately.
Please wire reply - Maude Frasier.



Left: Leland B. Newcomer.

conflicts within the district, but garnered support from the community.

In fact, with the help of the PTA, a new bond issue, the largest single bond in Nevada history, was put before voters in January 1963 and passed. Yet despite its twenty-one million dollar price tag, it only provided enough funds to address two-thirds of the Clark County School District's building needs.

Bus service

By 1963, the budget woes worsened for the Clark County School District. The school board worked to cut five hundred thousand dollars of the operating expenses. This reduction in expenses would have been manageable without growth, but people continued to stream into the Las Vegas Valley.

The solution was to cut various services. On August 8, 1963, the school board announced that it was ending free transportation for high school students who lived less than ten miles from school. This measure saved the school district one hundred thousand dollars .

Of course, parents and students were not happy about losing busing services. On the first day of classes in 1963, a small group of students protested the cessation of busing. They showed their displeasure by walking along Las Vegas Boulevard from the Tropicana Hotel to Las Vegas High School. Parents drove next to the students, supplying them with refreshments.

students were attending double sessions and teacher turnover was thirty-three percent.

Before Newcomer agreed to become the superintendent of the Clark County School District, he negotiated terms whereby the school board would not interfere with the day-to-day operations of the school district. Newcomer, feeling the environment was ripe for dramatic change, reorganized the district, dividing the county into five sections with a new cabinet member to oversee each area. These members acted as liaisons between the schools and the superintendent's office. The removal of the old guard with the replacement of "outsiders" caused

Student Health Services



When the school districts in Clark County were consolidated, Genevieve Arensdorf was appointed to coordinate school nursing for the new district. She and her staff of five women were responsible for the health of more than twenty thousand students.

Duties included charting the height and weight of each student twice a year, checking the vision, hearing, and dental health of the students, and delivering health education. School nurses also screened children for special education.



Probably the most time-consuming duty was visiting the homes of children who had head lice. School nurses also handled tuberculin tests of food service workers and held immunization clinics.

There was no way these few school nurses could adequately complete all of the tasks and still address the health needs of individual students. Many nurses became discouraged, and the salary was not enough to keep them with the school district.



As they walked along Las Vegas Boulevard, buses partially filled with students beyond the ten-mile limit passed them, increasing the anger and frustration of the protesting students and parents. This cost-cutting measure was quickly rescinded.

To counter the shortfalls in previous budgets, Superintendent Newcomer and the

Bombs on campus

A series of bomb threats was made against junior and senior high schools in March of 1963. Protocol called for the schools to be shut down for twenty-four hours following each threat. Schools were closed on a dozen occasions.

This tactic meant a huge loss of revenue for the school district since teachers, support staff, even bus drivers were still paid during these closed days. It was estimated that each bomb threat cost \$1.80 per student for every school day missed. This financial strain caused a change of policy: The city agreed to close schools only overnight following a bomb threat, returning students to classes as soon as possible.

Superintendent Newcomer also declared that students would be required to make up lost instruction time from the bomb threats. Clark County schools soon returned to normal.

Paradise and Airport, 1969.



*Superintendents
during this era:
R. Guild Gray, 1956-1961;
Leland B. Newcomer,
1961-1965*

board of trustees drew up a \$26.4 million budget for the 1964–65 school year. This was a sizable increase from the \$19.9 million budget for the 1963–64 year and \$15.2 million the year before that (1962–63).

And so it was that the first decade of the new school district began in controversy. In a time of expansion and growth, when new ideas and fears were emerging, the fledgling school district struggled not only to deliver quality education, but also to address the concerns of the community. These themes would resurface throughout its history.



Clark High School science class..



Schools built 1955–1964

Elementary Schools:

O. K. Adcock
Rex Bell
Walter Bracken
Marion Cahlan
Kit Carson
Lois Craig
Paul E. Culley
Laura Dearing
Ira J. Earl
Ruth Fyfe
E. W. Griffith
Doris Hancock
Fay Herron
Halle Hewetson
Matt Kelly
Robert E. Lake
Lincoln
Jo Mackey
J. E. Manch
Quannah McCall
J. T. McWilliams
John F. Miller (later converted to a special school)

Red Rock
Lewis E. Rowe
C. P. Squires
Ruby S. Thomas
J. M. Ullom
Vegas Verdes
Rose Warren
Tom Williams

Middle Schools/Junior High Schools:

Jim Bridger
K. O. Knudson
Frank F. Garside
Robert O. Gibson
Roy W. Martin
Hyde Park

High Schools:

Ed W. Clark
Valley
Western

Alternative/Special Schools:

Desert Rose Adult High School