

## Helping teachers excel in the classroom

By Dwight Jones | Sept. 24, 2012

This community is dedicated to a renewed push to increase our unacceptable graduation rates, and so far we are seeing results. Graduation numbers from last school year aren't finalized yet, but it's clear the Clark County School District's rate grew by several percentage points — some of the fastest-improving results among all large districts in the nation.

Experience and research tell us the only way to ensure even more students are "Ready by Exit" is to give them great teachers year after year, class after class, until the day they cross the graduation stage. That is why our next priority — and our duty — is to give teachers the attention they deserve and the support they need to excel in the classroom.

It's safe to say that most school districts lack the tools they need to give teachers a clear picture of what excellent teaching looks like. Most teacher evaluation systems, including the one in Clark County, rate nearly all teachers "good" or "great," and fail to give them useful feedback on their performance. The average teacher receives feedback on no more than one or two lessons out of about 180 delivered throughout the course of the school year. Our teachers largely figure out for themselves how to refine and improve their instruction.

Thankfully, last year the Nevada Legislature created the Teachers and Leaders Council to determine ways we can better evaluate and support our teachers. The council has studied the successes and pitfalls of other teacher evaluation systems nationwide and listened to feedback from educators doing the hard work in our schools every day, including teachers and principals from Clark County.

I am impressed by the work of the Teachers and Leaders Council, whose efforts are supported by

Gov. Brian Sandoval and the Nevada Legislature. It is critical that teacher voices be part of the design of our state's evaluation system. It appears the Council's proposal will ensure all Nevada teachers — novices and veterans — get regular feedback on their performance, opportunities for professional growth and recognition when they do exceptional work. While the council is allowing flexibility to each district in its final system, it set five core instructional principles to give teachers and administrators a clear understanding of what great teaching looks like.

Here in Clark County, we will begin piloting pieces of a new evaluation system, including a new observation rubric based on the core principles identified by the council, in a small number of schools. As part of the pilot, we are training and supporting principals so they have the knowledge and skills to give teachers quality feedback on their performance and help them continuously improve. The pilot will be a useful dress rehearsal that provides teachers with valuable feedback on their lessons while giving the district an opportunity to hear what's working and what can be improved. We will refine the system before rolling it out to all of our schools and ensure that it is based on a shared vision for excellent teaching.

This "Great Teachers, Great Leaders," initiative in our district will not only change our feedback to teachers, it will help us better recruit quality teachers, and retain and extend the reach of our best teachers. It is one of our top priorities in moving the Clark County School District from the nation's fastest-growing district to the nation's fastest-improving district and to better serve our kids.