



Clovis Unified School District

Doc Buchanan
Leadership Academy

50 UNIFIED YEARS

Building a Tradition of Excellence in Clovis Unified Before, During and After Unification

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The Competition Model

To achieve the district's goal of getting 90 percent of Clovis students on grade level, the administration implemented Buchanan's Competition Model, a program he began developing while earning his doctorate degree at the University of California at Berkeley. He based his competition program on the theory that every organization must have a product if it is going to succeed.

"In education, we don't admit we've got to have a product," Buchanan said. "If we don't have a product, this is going to be useless, why do we stay in business? . . . In Clovis, I tried to develop a product. . . . we defined the product. And you know how we defined it? If you're going to be in business, [and if] you're going to be successful, you've got to decide how successful you're going to be. So, we set a ninety-percent goal in reading and math. So that was the start with the reading and math programs. . . . You have to have a product, and you have to define what it's going to look like when it graduates from the twelfth grade."

Competition was instituted as a means of evaluating students' performance. Its success depended on monitoring the work of everyone involved in each child's education at intermediate and long-range levels. Every child must feel important, and everyone involved with a child's education must give evidence that they are concerned with the child's performance. The theme of the competition program implemented in CUSD was designed around a concept of teams of schools, teams of teachers, and teams of students competing against each other and against themselves to improve.

In 1976, construction on the CUSD second high school was complete. When the new Clovis West High School opened, the district was divided into two competing teams. Clovis High and all of its feeder schools made up the "Blue Unit," and the "Red Unit" was comprised of the new Clovis West and its feeder schools.

State-mandated testing provided feedback for the effectiveness of the educational methods in Clovis Unified. The evidence of success in the Clovis system was available at the end of the 1970-71 school year. Test results revealed that the number of students on grade level had increased by 25 percent, and the results continued to improve.

Site-based management

One of the most unique elements of the Clovis Competition Model, site-based management, was implemented in 1972. Site-based management consisted of four elements: mission, content, method, and accountability. Mission and accountability were the responsibility of the governing



board and the administration. Content and method were delegated to the site manager/principal.

The role of the superintendent was to provide leadership. The principal of each school was given the authority and flexibility to evolve their programs at the site level. Every teacher developed an individual program for their own classroom; and the administration provided all tools and supplies that each teacher requested.

In 1972, the laughter stopped, and the disbelief was replaced by amazing pride in the district's 90% Goal when Tarpey Elementary School's first grade teachers, Leola Minors, Dorothy Luthord and Ester Smith, reported 90 percent of Tarpey's first grade students were on grade level. In 1977, Fort Washington Elementary School was awarded the district's first Golden Bell Award as the first school to have ninety percent of the entire student body on grade level.

Together we stand

The momentum of increasing student performance and athletic excellence continued to build through the 1970s, with community and staff fully behind the district's efforts to build a school system that served its students well. In 1978, what could have sent this momentum to a crashing halt became another defining moment in Clovis Unified history. California voters, frustrated with soaring property tax rates, passed the Jarvis-Gann Act (Proposition 13) in June of 1978. The bill would revolutionize both the way the state calculated property taxes and the way it funded its public schools.

Immediately, school districts around the state were thrown into disarray. Unsure of what was to happen to their ability to pay for teachers, textbooks, classroom supplies and the other basic necessities of education, schools began to lay off teachers and slash transportation, performing arts and athletics programs. But, not in Clovis Unified. Spurred by mounting panic among other education agencies, Buchanan called an emergency meeting of all Clovis Unified employees in the summer of 1978. Tucked into an un-air conditioned Clovis High School gymnasium, employees listened as Buchanan laid out the Clovis Unified plan to respond to the state's new funding mechanism: Clovis students weren't going to lose important resources or the programs that had begun to define a Clovis Unified education, and Clovis Unified employees weren't going to lose their jobs. Buchanan told the assembled employees, "We're all in this together, and if we have to close school early and all go home, that's what we're going to do."

Confident that their jobs were secure, teachers, custodians, bus drivers and school leaders threw themselves into working even harder to build an unmatched educational experience for their students. When the end of the school year rolled around and classes were still in session, employees knew that Clovis Unified could get through anything so long as they remained united.

In 1973, six years before California voters passed Prop 13, the Clovis community expressed strong support for Clovis Unified's building program through the passage of a special override tax. The facility tax was used to establish a recreation, cultural and athletic (RCA) fund specifically for special facilities and is credited with setting the standard for high quality facilities for CUSD students. This emerging commitment by the local community to provide



resources for school facilities was stalled by the passage of Prop 13, which removed local tax override measures then in place and prohibited future measures at the local level. Though CUSD continued to receive approximately 90% of the original RCA fund from the state, it wasn't until 1986, when Prop 46 modified the prohibition on school facility bonds included in Prop 13, that the CUSD community was able to cast their vote in support of a \$59 million school bond measure; which they did again in 1993 (\$49.2m), 1996 (\$98m), 2001 (\$79m) and 2004 (\$168m). The continued support residents in Clovis Unified have shown for facility bond measures demonstrates their faith in how the district has managed tax dollars and the importance placed on state-of-the-art schools and athletic/performing arts venues in providing an outstanding educational experience for students.

The Sparthenian Concept

A cornerstone of Clovis Unified's successful educational system is Dr. Buchanan's revolutionary Sparthenian Concept. His idea of a "Sparthenian" education was derived from two ancient Greek words, Spartan, and Athenian, and epitomized the district's goal to raise students who were well-rounded in mind, body, and spirit. The Spartans were physically fit and courageous, while the Athenians were intellectuals and artistic.

During the summer of 1989, the governing board completed two years of studies and analysis in response to the recommendations of the Competition and Testing Advisory Committee (CTAC), the annual School Assessment Review Team (SART) survey, and the Superintendent's Advisory Committee (SAC). One of the results of these studies was to incorporate Buchanan's Sparthenian Concept into the Clovis mission statement:

The mission of the Clovis Unified School District is to provide excellence in education through exemplary programs, services and activities to a diverse community that fosters lifelong learning, service to society and a commitment to the Sparthenian concept – be the best you can be in mind, body, and spirit.

A list of seven priorities was appended to the new mission. The following seven areas were identified as relevant to accomplishing the objective and guiding Clovis schools into the next decade: developing the Sparthenian concept, student achievement, human resources, financial resources, cultural diversity, organizational effectiveness, and community involvement. It was the responsibility of the superintendent and administration to develop a plan and to monitor the progress of the governing board's clearly defined mission.

Accountability Model

During the first 30 years, the Clovis' administration and governing board concentrated on building the proverbial, "better mousetrap" and "the world beat a path" to their schoolhouse doors. By 1990, approximately 22,000 students were enrolled in Clovis schools. And at that time, less than 50 percent of the people in Clovis had lived in the district for more than five years.

New people meant new ideas. During the late 1980s, some of the newcomers began rejecting the values that had created CUSD's successful approach to education. They joined forces with a few



anti-Buchanan supporters from the past, and attacked the district's most basic concept, competition.

In 1985, the faces on the governing board began to change again when voters elected Jan Biggs to serve as the trustee for Area 1.

Two years later, the Competition Model continued to be a highly visible issue. In a déjà vu mode, an anti-Buchanan faction materialized during the hotly debated campaigns to fill three seats on the board. On November 3, 1987, incumbent board members John Coffman, Paul C. Anderson and John Davis lost their bids for re-election. They were replaced by three more new faces, Ralph Lockwood, Richard Powers, and Dr. Allen Clyde. In 1988, the Competition and Testing Advisory Committee was organized to study the district's competition program.

In 1990, the Competition Model was replaced with a revised Accountability Model, and the red and blue attack units were formally disbanded, but competition remained ingrained in CUSD. The new model retained some the elements in the old program, by reiterating an emphasis on mission statement, clearly stated goals and methods of tracking progress. One major difference was to replace "ranking" with "rating" in a move toward the creation of a model that emphasized continuous improvement and individual competition. At this time, many longtime Clovis residents would probably agree with Deborah Strother's lamentation in her book, "Clovis California Schools, A Measure of Excellence," that "Clovis Unified was the only district in the United States to change its program because children were achieving so well."

The five-to-two vote

Turmoil continued, on the governing board and in the community, and on the evening of July 11, 1990, more than 500 Clovis citizens attended the Clovis Unified School District board meeting held in the Clovis High School cafeteria. On the agenda was a decision whether or not to extend the contract of Superintendent Floyd "Doc" Buchanan, and the large turnout was indicative of the passionate opinions on both sides of the debate. Many people in the audience carried banners that read, "Don't Knock the Doc," to show support for the current leadership. Later in the meeting, the trustees retired into executive session to discuss and vote on whether to renew Buchanan's contract. At approximately 2 a.m., with a five-to-two vote, the decision was made to allow Buchanan's contract to expire on June 30, 1991.