



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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With Kelly Avants

UNIFICATION DIVIDES BEFORE IT UNITES

By Charlotte Hutchison

The four-to-three vote

From the beginning, the unification issue continued as a source of controversy for the new governing board. Local control of school issues was very important to the people, and local powers were not willing to give up any of their authority. The chasm that divided the members of the board into pro-unification and anti-unification was evident long before their first meeting in April of 1960.

The pro-unification faction consisted of trustees Rank, Cook, McFarlane and McCrummen. They were aware of some of the more immediate benefits unification offered, like pooling services such as purchasing, bookkeeping and transportation to eliminate the need and expense of duplicating these services in each district.

The anti-unification faction of Oliver, White and Parks, favored keeping the status-quo and allowing each of the seven original districts to continue to operate as separate entities with separate administrations, budgets, curriculum and transportation.

The first major item of contention among the two factions was the appointment of a district superintendent. Each trustee was looking to the future and what he felt was the best direction for the Clovis educational system to take. They interviewed many applicants for the position including the former superintendent of Jefferson Union School District. Dr. Floyd B. "Doc" Buchanan.

The pro-unification trustees were aware of the changes and improvements Dr. Buchanan made during his three years at Jefferson. They thought Buchanan and his visions for a unified district would serve the best interests of Clovis. On the other hand, Oliver, White and Parks viewed Buchanan as a "newcomer" and saw him as a threat to the farming community's status-quo. Most early board meetings ran late into the night, and many did not end until the early hours of the next morning. Discussions became heated, and tempers flared. During a recent interview, former trustee, Everett "Bud" Rank, Jr., described how, at the board's first meeting, "... the [acting] President got so angry that he threw the gavel at me."

On April 29, 1960, with a simple majority vote of four in favor and three opposed, a motion



passed to appoint Buchanan as superintendent of the Clovis Unified School District. But at that time, Buchanan's appointment was not a done deal. Three days later, a large group of citizens arrived at the board meeting to voice their opposition to Buchanan's appointment. The trustees went into executive session to discuss the matter further and agreed to table further consideration of Buchanan's contract until additional applicants were interviewed.

Over the next 10 days, the board continued the interview process for the superintendent position. When they met on May 12, the four-to-three vote remained unchanged, and the motion to offer a four-year contract to Buchanan passed again with a simple majority vote. Afterward, a second motion to appoint Buchanan acting superintendent until the district became an official entity on July 1, 1960, was carried unanimously.

The clerk phoned Buchanan and invited him to come to the meeting. Buchanan arrived at 9:25 p.m., he accepted the offer to be the district's first superintendent, and 10 Clovis teachers submitted letters of resignation. By the time the board met on June 9, another 10 teachers had resigned. And the pro-unification and anti-unification factions evolved into pro-administration and anti-administration factions.

The four-to-three vote became a mainstay for deciding district issues until October 21, 1960. On that day, William White submitted his letter of resignation as the Area 1 trustee to Walter G. Martin, superintendent of schools for Fresno County. Martin forwarded White's letter to the Clovis board informing them they could legally accept the letter of resignation and appoint a successor. With a four-to-two vote, Phillip V. Sanchez was appointed to fill the seat vacated by White.

Two weeks after he was appointed, Sanchez presented his letter of resignation to the board. He described the dissension among the board members and cited their factionalism as the basis for his withdrawal.

I have become aware of the existence of two distinct factions [a pro-Buchanan and an anti-Buchanan faction] within the membership of the board, and a decided rift between the two. . . . On this board there exists a minority group opinion which seeks to maintain its status as such, regardless of the consequences. This. . . is unfortunate . . . these [two factions] could more logically, intelligently, and profitably be merged into one faction: a pro-Clovis Unified School District faction.

After all, six trustees refused to accept Sanchez's resignation, "It was moved by Mr. Oliver and seconded by Mr. Parks and carried unanimously that the governing board give Sanchez a unanimous vote of confidence."

The recall election



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Over the next four years, some of the faces on the board changed. In 1963, Ralph Lynn was appointed to fill the vacancy left when William McFarlane did not run for re-election. Other new members were Alfred Biglione, Claude Shellenberger and Douglas Dresser. Even though some faces had changed, the division between the pro-administration and anti-administration factions remained intact and spilled over into the general public. Many items on the agenda still produced heated debates and caused board meetings to continue well into the early morning hours.

On March 31, 1964, the evening before the next regular school board meeting, a Citizens Committee met to discuss how they might help unite the members of the governing board and find a way to resolve the anti-administration problems that were surfacing at the high school. When the trustees met on April 1, a large number of Clovis citizens were in the audience to ask the board to develop a plan that would give rise to harmony in the district. After considerable discussion by visitors and board members, the following Five Point Program was adopted.

1. The board unanimously resolves that the present administration is doing a good job and will have the complete support of the entire board.
2. The board expects the unanimous support of the administrative staff and all the employees in carrying out the policy set by the board.
3. The board desires that the superintendent meet with the president of the board and discuss the agenda before it is mailed.
4. The board requests that the people of the community act with dignity and restraint in matters involving our school district.
5. The board pledges they will work together in accord, realizing that there is room for differences of honest opinion commensurate with our duties as a policy making body.

In retrospect, there was a bit of irony in the fact that the Five Point Program was passed on April Fool's Day. During the summer of 1964, the discord between the two factions reached fever pitch. When the board met on May 6, the factional split had not changed, and Members of the Citizens Committee attending the meeting concluded that the problems facing the board have existed for so many years that they must find a way to resolve it. Charles Preuss, Chairman of the Citizens Committee, informed the trustees during this meeting, ". . . that certain people had been receiving anonymous phone calls late at night or early in the morning." This was later reiterated by Myrlee "Molly" Buchanan. In a statement to the Fresno Bee, she recalled the anger and threats made against her husband (Dr. Buchanan) during the first four years of consolidation in the Clovis district. She said, "I used to get phone calls at night after meetings, saying he wouldn't make it home."

Petitions to recall the four pro-administration trustees, Rank, Lynn, Shellenberger and Biglione, were submitted to the County School's Office on September 11, 1964. Two of the most controversial issues contributing to the Recall Election were ousting Buchanan and opposition to the proposed location of the new high school at the corner of Fowler and Barstow avenues. The



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status-quo trustees were opposed to using sixty-acres of good farmland to build a school.

However, all seven members of the board were aware that the discord within their group was creating animosity throughout the community. With the Recall Election coming up, both sides agreed that after the election, the losing side would quit (Rank). In order to ease the tension on the board, on December 14, James Oliver sent his letter of resignation to Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Harold L. Coles.

On December 22, 1964, exactly five years to the day after voting to unify the district, Clovis voters elected to retain Rank, Lynn, Biglione and Schellenberger as trustees. Oliver's resignation was effective January 15, 1965, and on that day the board appointed John Coffman to fill the Area 4 vacancy. Parks chose not to run for re-election and retired in June 1965. A short time later, Clovis voters elected Dr. Calvin Wise to represent Area 3 on the governing board.

War on illiteracy

The result of the recall election was the turning point for uniting the trustees. The pro-administration and anti-administration factions were gone, and a strong governing board united in efforts to support a rigorous educational program. However, the district had no centralized curricular schedule in place and less than fifty percent of Clovis students were on grade level in reading and math. In his "Historical Overview of Clovis Unified School District," Buchanan described the low student achievement.

By 1968, it was possible to review student achievement results to determine how well the district was preparing its students academically. The figures were staggeringly appalling: only 42 percent of the students were on grade level in mathematics, and 44 percent were on grade level in reading. Realizing that fully six of every 10 students in school were able neither to read their books nor to do their math at the appropriate grade level, district administrators knew something had to be done.

During the administrative staff meeting in December 1969, Buchanan outlined a plan for getting 90 percent of the district's students on grade level in three years. The method for accomplishing this goal was competition.

The 90% Goal

The governing board's reaction was that a 90 percent goal seemed outrageous and unattainable. In a 2008 interview, former trustee Ralph Lynn described his reaction to the administration's proposed 90% Goal.

At the time, the 90% Goal appeared to be unrealistic. It was BOLD – it was VERY BOLD!!! But it turned out to be a very wise move. . . . Doc had a very picturesque way of putting it. I remember his saying, "Well, a lot of people are happy or content with this fifty percent. But how would you like to line up fifty



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percent of the parents and tell them, your kid can't read and he's not going to be able to read. Ask the teachers, do you want to tell these parents that their kids aren't going to be able to read?"

Eventually, the governing board saw the necessity and the advantage of getting 90 percent of Clovis students on grade level, and the 90% Goal was adopted. Afterward there was a lot of laughter and disbelief on whether the new goal was attainable. In a 2009, interview Buchanan described the teachers' reaction: "When I told the teachers we had to get ninety percent of Clovis students on grade level in reading and math, they thought I was absolutely out of my mind. I asked them, 'Well, look, do you want to have a conference with the parents and tell them which ones aren't going to be able to make it?' Everybody in the state laughed at Clovis. Two of my teachers came in from Jefferson. They sat down to talk to me. They said, 'Doc, do you mean all we have to teach is reading and math?' I said, 'Well, if the kids can't read, what else are you going to teach them?'"

By implementing the 90% Goal, the governing board and the administration declared war on illiteracy, and in Clovis, that meant that low test scores were no longer accepted as the norm.

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 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.

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 Clovis Unified’s 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



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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.

Accountability Model

During the first 30 years, 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."



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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.

New leadership

The challenge of finding a new leader led to a widespread superintendent search. On July 1, 1991, Dr. David Sawyer became the new superintendent. Sawyer came to Clovis Unified from a South Carolina district without any existing ties to Clovis Unified. But the stormy waters from Buchanan’s departure were still churning.

The depth of the early 1990s disconnect between the changing community and the school district also revealed itself when a \$95 million facility bond measure failed in November 1991. The bond measure was desperately needed to keep pace with an ever-increasing student population. The district failed again the following year when voters rejected a \$79 million facility bond.

By 1992, resources to build new schools had stalled, and Clovis Unified had to turn to alternate student housing plans. Cole, Gettysburg, Tarpey, Miramonte and Weldon elementary schools opened in 1992 on year-round, multi-track schedules to obtain 100 percent state funding for school districts with 30 percent of K-6 students enrolled in year-round programs, and would help accommodate swelling enrollments and to allow the district to find classroom seats for a student population that hit 26,000.

The tide began to turn the following year. With enrollment continuing to grow, a \$49.2 million bond measure was finally approved by the community. In 1994, the state’s year-round school funding rules changed, and the district’s 21 elementary schools returned to a traditional calendar year, poised to begin building new schools to accommodate enrollment.

Governing board stability was slow to return but first began to turn around when, on November 5, 1991, Ginny Hovsepian, Clint Barnes, and Susan Walker defeated incumbents Kris Maul, Ralph Lockwood, and Richard Powers to gain seats on the governing board. Kent Kunz was elected to replace the seat vacated by Dr. Allen Clyde’s earlier resignation. In 1992, Richard Lake replaced Barnes who resigned shortly after being elected. A year later, Jan Biggs announced he would not seek re-election. That November, his seat was assumed by Sandy Bengel; Jim Van Volkinburg, D.D.S. defeated incumbent Naomi Strom; and Robert Rowley



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defeated incumbent Betsy Sandoval. In 1996, Brian Heryford was elected to replace Kunz and Betsy Sandoval was re-appointed following the resignation of Rowley. The board of Hovsepian, Walker, Lake, Van Volkinburg, Bengel, Heryford and Sandoval served together for many years and brought stability to the district on many levels. In 2008, board members Lake and Walker retired from service on the board and were replaced by Scott Troescher and Chris Casado, respectively.

During the tumultuous years of the late 1980s and early 1990s, many of the district's long-time school principals and teachers remained and kept the educational focus on providing students with the high-quality education expected from Clovis Unified. Sawyer departed after just two years as superintendent. He was followed by long-time Clovis Unified administrator, Dr. Kent Bishop, as the district's next superintendent. A year later, Bishop's term ended when he was dismissed due to misconduct, and Chief Business Official Dr. Terry Bradley took the reins on an interim basis. In 1995, the governing board selected another newcomer, Dr. Walt Buster, from Northern California's Cotati-Rohnert Park as CUSD's next superintendent. Buster focused on rebuilding lines of communication and the understanding that the desire for every child to succeed in mind, body and spirit was still the shared goal of both the district and its community. When Buster retired in 2002, Dr. Terry Bradley was appointed to the district's top post.

Bradley first came to Clovis Unified in 1976 from Wisconsin and had played a large role in developing Clovis Unified's financially stable foundation. Having served twice as interim superintendent, he brought to the job a well-defined sense of the district's history. During his seven-year tenure, Clovis Unified saw student achievement and co-curricular performance soar to some of the top levels in California. On Bradley's retirement in 2009, Dr. David Cash joined the district from Southern California's Claremont Unified and assumed the leadership role. With funding to California's public schools slashed as a result of a nationwide recession, Cash's initial year in the district was focused on balancing the budget while avoiding employee lay-offs and preserving high quality educational offerings to students in good times and bad.

Epilogue

Looking at Clovis in a rearview mirror might reveal a deeply embedded competitiveness ingrained in the little town itself. Early Clovisites competed city to city with Fresno. A basic competition was highly visible in the board room during the early days of the pro-unification/administration and anti-unification/administration school board. It was an angry competition that raised its ugly head during the 1964 recall election. At times, during later Clovis school board elections, "political competition" over Buchanan's Competition Model received a great deal of unflattering attention in the local press. And through it all, the district kept winning its war on illiteracy.

The district's history was fraught with divisiveness, turbulence and "competition" as new trustees, administrators and staff members came and went. But even though they did not always



agree, most of the district leaders always kept one important goal in sight, to make Clovis Unified students the best they could be in mind, body, and spirit.

In 2010, Clovis Unified celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, but 1970 will long be remembered as the district's defining year. By 1975, the board had adopted a strict dress code that not only changed the look of Clovis students but flew in the face of the anti-cultural movement of the "Flower Power" generation. Long flowing locks and headbands were prohibited. Shoes, socks and shirts superseded sandals, fringed vests, and love-beads. It was the year students were first in attendance at the new high school and C. Todd Clark Intermediate School. It was the year the 90% Goal was adopted, and the Competition Model was implemented. And it was the year Dennis Lindsey was hired as the new football coach for the Clovis High Cougars.

In 1970, the rivalry between the Clovis Cougars and Bullard Knights was still ongoing. In a recent interview, Buchanan described the animosity that had existed between the two schools during his first ten years as superintendent.

Before Dennis came to Clovis High, all the Clovis kids wanted to do was fight. They didn't have discipline. They didn't know how to play football, but they wanted to be physical . . . and to beat up the other team so badly that they wouldn't be able to win their next game. And they used to spend Friday nights down in the parking lot behind Bob's Big Boy at Shaw and Blackstone and have fights with the Bullard High kids.

The 1970 North Yosemite League football championship was up for grabs, when the Cougars and their new coach met the Bullard Knights at Radcliffe Stadium. The teams were already on the field, when suddenly a blue and gold helicopter appeared overhead, and descended, down, down onto the playing field. The Clovis band began marching and playing as the Clovis cheerleaders jumped out of the chopper, bounced across the turf, cheering, and waving their pom-poms.

That night, with a final score of 21 to seven, the Clovis High Cougars wrested the Valley championship away from their archrivals. And, after the game, the parking lot down behind Bob's Big Boy was quiet, because back in Clovis these "cowboys" were heroes.