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Senator Sandra Tiffany
Testimony on S.C.R. 21

Before the Senate Committee on Legislative Affairs and Operations
April 29, 2003

INTRO:

Currently, school district boundaries are the same as our county lines. This system was created nearly 50 years ago when Nevada's total population was 240,000 statewide. The Clark County School District now has more students than the *total population* of Nevada in 1956. Clark County currently has 256K students, and is the 6th largest school district in the U.S. Washoe County has over 68K students, and is the 71st largest school district in the U.S. But compare, Esmeralda County with only has 74 students. Fully 1/3 of our school districts have less than 1K students. Nevada has grown and changed dramatically in the past 50 years.

These issues are not new. We've been studying issues of school district boundaries since the 1860s—before Nevada was even a state. The Legislature examined the problems in school district size and structure in: 1861, 1863, 1865,1879, 1895, 1911, 1915, 1925, 1937, 1947, 1953, 1957, 1971, 1977, 1989, 1991, 1993, and 1995.

The last time the Legislature commissioned a study to look at the structure and size of our school district was eight years ago, in 1995. Since then, our school districts have grown and changed immensely. Clark County has grown 60% in eight years. Washoe County 40%. And Esmeralda has *shrunk* 70%. It's time to look at our county school district size again. Studying the disparity between our school districts to ensure that we are effectively educating our children and responding to community concerns is nothing new: we've been doing it regularly for over 140 years. It's time to do it again.

DEFINING "EFFICIENT" or "BETTER" EDUCATION

- Improved Student Achievement: Increased choice between school districts has a statistically significant improvement on student achievement, even more than smaller classes do. *From two articles by Dr. Caroline Hoxby of Harvard.*
- Create the Flexibility to "Custom" Educate: Creating school districts that are the optimum size allows them to cope with unexpected problems (such as discipline issues or the need for advanced education courses)
  - "[M]ultiple and smaller decision units have a better chance of productively coping with unexpected, and divining useful solutions, than does a central authority which acts slowly and perhaps ridgely." *MAP study, Page 80.*

- "Exceedingly small school districts risk not being able to provide specialized academic courses, such as physics or other advanced sciences." *MAP Study, Page 83.*
- Increased funds to students by minimizing administrative overhead: Although multiple, smaller school districts appear to duplicate certain administrative functions (i.e. a school board), they streamline administration by removing bulky agencies necessary to implement services in a large district. For example, a large district would need a student registrar but a small district would not. *Mission Creep*.

THE 1995 STUDY

In 1995 the Legislature commissioned an interim study to determine the feasibility of reconfiguring the structure of our school districts. The Committee hired a consultant, Management Analysis & Planning Associates (MAP).

MAP's Process: After talking with Mr. James Guthrie of MAP, I learned that they:

- Went to all the school districts in the State of Nevada
- Visited every population center they could—including Reno, Sparks, Elko, and Clark County
- Examined the situation with their background in education and financial analysis.
- Used five criteria to evaluate the Nevada's school districts and any proposed changes:
  1. Educational Effectiveness
  2. Racial and Ethnic Composition
  3. Organizational Scale
  4. Governmental Responsiveness to Community Interest
  5. Financing

MAP's Recommendations: After doing all this, MAP recommended consolidating our smaller districts and deconsolidating our larger districts:

1. Deconsolidate Clark County to create 8 or more smaller districts and increase district responsiveness
2. Consolidate Carson City and Douglas County School Districts
3. Deconsolidating Douglas County and creating a new Lake Tahoe/Zepher Cove School District
4. Consolidating Elko and Eureka County School Districts
5. Consolidating Esmeralda County and northern Nye County School Districts
6. Consolidating Grass Valley in Pershing County with Humboldt County School District
7. Deconsolidating Nye County School District into two districts based from Tonopah and Pahrump

8. Consolidating Mark Twain in Storey County with Lyon County School District
9. Consolidating Lockwood in Storey County with Washoe County
10. Deconsolidate Washoe County to create a new Incline Village School District

MAP Study Still Good: These recommendations are still valuable. The issues of population sparsity and density, and population growth, that MAP based it's recommendations have only gotten worse in the last 8 years—making these recommendations even more important today.

- Nevada is the fastest growing state in the nation (US Census, 2002).
- Nevada's grown by over ¾ million people in 8 years.
- Clark County is the 19th largest county in the country and one of the 100 fastest growing counties (US Census data, 2002).

All we need to do is update this portion of the study.

WHAT SCR 21 WILL DO

The MAP study was a recommendation on how Nevada might redistrict. SCR 21 will create a plan on how to redistrict. As recommended by MAP, there are several ways we can choose to redistrict: by the Legislature enacting a new district scheme, by letting school boards choose to deconsolidate or consolidate as appropriate, or by petition of voters within a school district. SCR 21 is a "how do we. . ." study.

MAP only touched on a few technical issues inherent in redistricting. SCR 21 would look in depth at these issues and make a plan to implement a restructuring of our school districts, taking the technical problems into account. This interim study would look at:

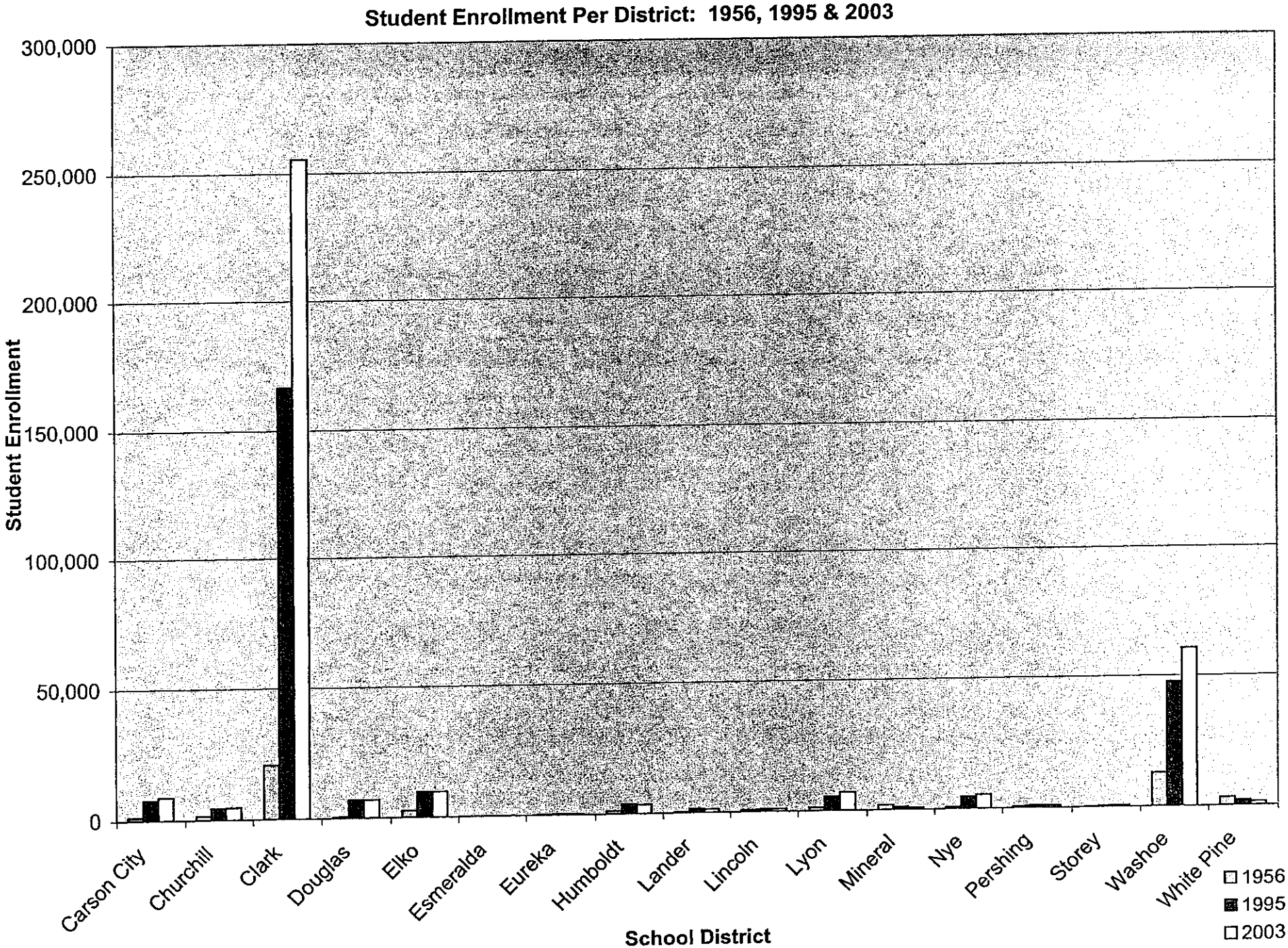
- Boundaries for new school districts
- Appropriate schools (elementary, jr. high, high school) for a district
- Bond Indetedness
- Asset transfer and distribution
- Effectiveness of redistricting: education, community involvement, district responsiveness
- Organizational structure for proposed new districts: boards of trustees, size of administration
- Employment contracts and related employment issues
- Equity (financing for operation, construction, and maintenance)
- Transportation
- Student enrollment
- Student diversity (race)
- Costs

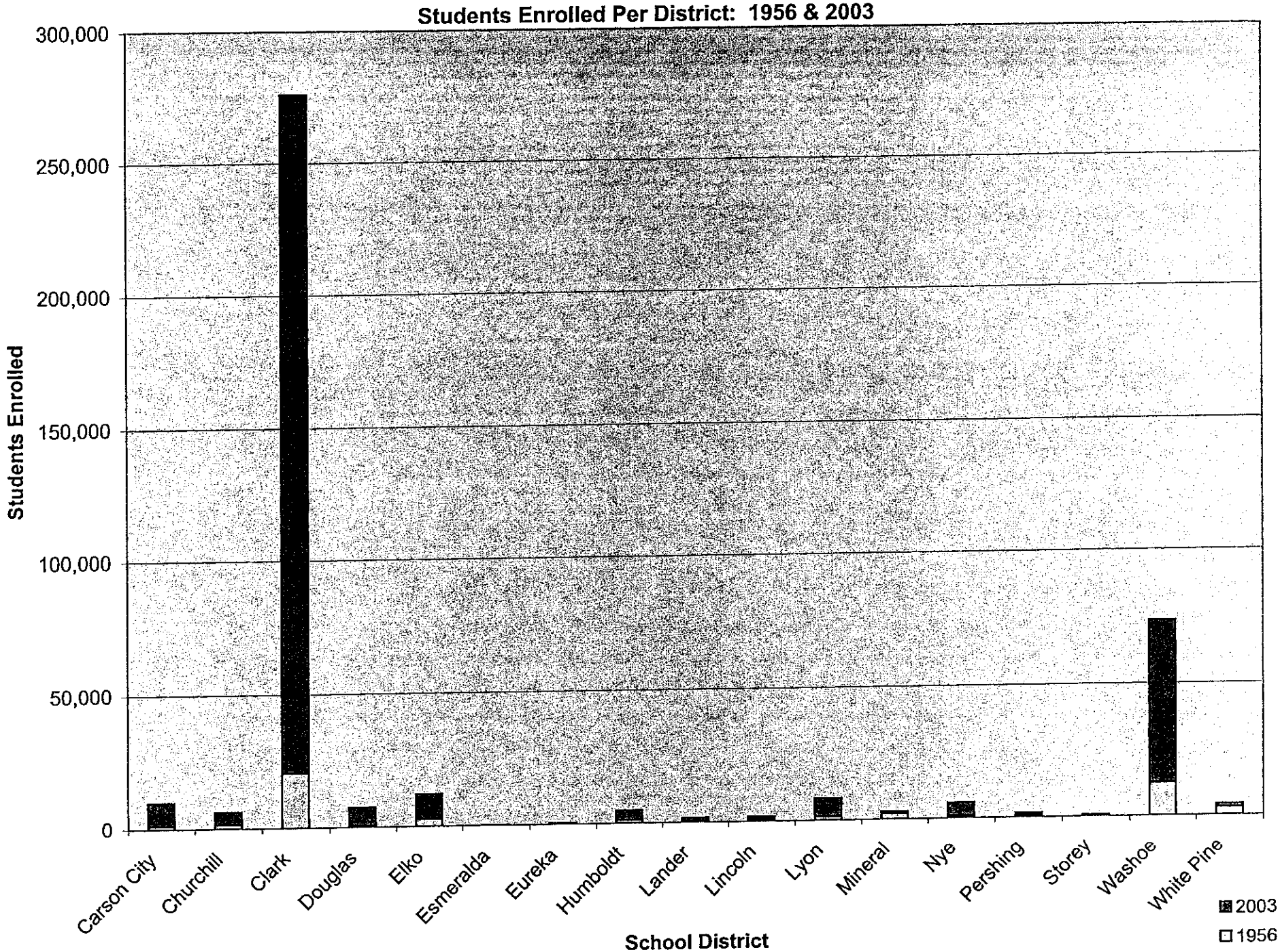
CONCLUSION:

It's been 8 years and we still need to fix these problems with our school district structure/size. It is do-able. MAP--the Consultant from the 1995 study--praised us for the Nevada Plan as one of the most effective revenue distribution and balancing systems *in the country*. He saw the Nevada Plan as one of the best tools we could use in restructuring our school districts. Besides changing school district boundaries, the Consultant also recommended instituting charter schools and a education technology board—which we did. But we still need to fix the problems with huge discrepancies in school district sizes. We need to redistrict in order to better educate our children, improve community involvement, and streamline school administration. But the first step in redistricting is figuring out how we do it; how we deal with problems like boundaries, equity, diversity, and employment contracts. Redistricting is do-able, we just have to find the solution. SCR 21 is meant to help us find that solution, to figure out how we do this.

	1956	1995	2003
Population of Nevada	240,100	1,525,777	2,298,336

Number of Students Per District			
	1956	**1995**	**2003**
Carson City	1,217	7,694	8,763
Churchill	1,551	4,470	4,724
Clark	20,672	166,788	255,328
Douglas	514	7,090	6,989
Elko	2,615	9,861	9,847
Esmeralda	67	124	89
Eureka	196	308	285
Humboldt	1,245	3,845	3,616
Lander	377	1,639	1,355
Lincoln	817	1,109	1,014
Lyon	1,404	5,426	7,046
Mineral	2,041	1,160	774
Nye	721	4,528	5,279
Pershing	688	967	898
Storey	102	480	480
Washoe	12,724	47,572	60,388
White Pine	3,085	1,980	1,464
Total	50,036	265,041	368,339


Student Enrollment Per District: 1956, 1995 & 2003
300,000
250,000
200,000
150,000
100,000
50,000
0
Student Enrollment
Carson City
Churchill
Clark
Douglas
Elko
Esmeralda
Eureka
Humboldt
Lander
Lincoln
Lyon
Mineral
Nye
Pershing
Storey
Washoe
White Pine
School District
1956
1995
2003


Students Enrolled Per District: 1956 & 2003
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0
Students Enrolled
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Douglas
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Esmeralda
Eureka
Humboldt
Lander
Lincoln
Lyon
Mineral
Nye
Pershing
Storey
Washoe
White Pine
School District
2003
1956