

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

**Seventy-Third Session
March 7, 2005**

The Committee on Education was called to order at 3:49 p.m., on Monday, March 7, 2005. Chairwoman Bonnie Parnell presided in Room 1214 of the Legislative Building, Carson City, Nevada, and, via simultaneous videoconference, in Room 4401 of the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, Las Vegas, Nevada. [Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda. All exhibits are available and on file at the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ms. Bonnie Parnell, Chairwoman
Mrs. Debbie Smith, Vice Chairwoman
Mrs. Sharron Angle
Mr. Kelvin Atkinson
Mr. Joe Hardy
Mr. Brooks Holcomb
Mr. William Horne
Mr. Garn Mabey
Mr. Mark Manendo
Mr. Bob McCleary
Mr. Harvey J. Munford

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:

Assemblyman Richard Perkins, Assembly District No. 23, Clark County
Assemblywoman Marilyn Kirkpatrick, Assembly District No. 1, Clark County

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Carol Stonefield, Committee Policy Analyst
Rachel Pilliod, Committee Manager

Paul Partida, Committee Attaché

OTHERS PRESENT:

Andre Agassi, Founder, Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy
(AACPA), Las Vegas, Nevada
Perry Rogers, Chairman, Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy
(AACPA), Las Vegas, Nevada
Brian Thomas, Interim Executive Director, High School Principal, Andre
Agassi College Preparatory Academy (AACPA), Las Vegas, Nevada
Lawrence Weekly, City Councilman, Las Vegas, Nevada
Cynthia Watson Catha, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada
Anit Earl, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada
Tammy Green, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada
Dedra Edmond, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada

Chairwoman Parnell:

[Called meeting to order and roll called.] Good afternoon to everyone—an exciting meeting for a freshman Chairman. I am delighted. I would like to welcome all of you in the audience in Carson City and those of you in at the Grant Sawyer Building in Las Vegas. As our first order of business this afternoon, I will open the hearing on A.B. 162.

Assembly Bill 162: Revises provisions governing charter schools and educational personnel. (BDR 34-934)

For the Committee members I have provided a sheet with a synopsis of this bill in your folder so that you will be helped along. It is a 58-page bill. I thought that might help you through it. Assembly Bill 162 is introduced by the Committee at request of Andre Agassi. He is at the table and I will introduce them momentarily. The Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy (AACPA) serves students who live in the heart of Las Vegas' most "at risk" neighborhood. Its goal is to offer academic programs designed to enhance a child's character, their sense of respect, motivation, and self-discipline, and in doing so, combating lowered academic expectations while creating a climate of hope among the community's most challenged children.

About three months ago, I had the pleasure of visiting the Agassi Academy and was very thrilled with what I saw and with the people that I met. I had moments that day where I wished that I was back in the classroom. As we discuss charter school bills this week, I thought it would be most helpful for all of us to learn about one of Nevada's very best charter schools. Mr. Agassi will

be joining two others in introducing A.B. 162. At the table with Mr. Agassi are Perry Rogers, who serves on the Board of Directors of the Agassi Charitable Foundation, and Mr. Brian Thomas, who is the Interim Executive Director of the Agassi Academy. Welcome to all of you, and welcome, Mr. Agassi.

**Andre Agassi, Founder, Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy (AACPA),
Las Vegas, Nevada:**

I wanted to thank the Assembly for their time, and I wanted to share with you my vision for what has taken so many years to create and how we found ourselves here. I go back 11 years ago when we conceived of starting my foundation. We dreamt about making a difference, and the community has been so good to us, meaning Perry Rogers and I, who I will introduce shortly. He has been my best friend since I was 11 years old. We dreamt about how one day we would be able to do something together for this community. Life gave us an opportunity to do a lot more than we could have ever dreamt of. It started with a vision to affect children's lives. We started with the Boys and Girls Club, where we built a 25,000 square foot recreational and educational building that would give children a place to go to keep them off the streets during those hours after school.

We became involved with Child Haven, which is a shelter for abused, abandoned, and neglected kids. We clothe over 3,000 children per year through Assistance League and Operation School Bell. We realized, through our impacting these children in this way, that the greatest way to truly impact their lives is to educate them. So that was what led us to the vision of the charter school. We created a school that has taken these children from one year to two years behind in education, even as early as third grade, and brought them up to speed inside one year's time. The success of it has been incredible. We searched the country for the best educators in the world to have them help direct us and how we go about running this school.

We have eight-hour school days instead of six-hour school days. That means two-thirds time on task. Instead of 12 years of education, these children are receiving 16 years of education. We have the children sign contracts committing to a certain level of behavior. We have parents sign contracts committing to signing off on every homework assignment, committing to volunteer work, and getting involved with the children and with the school. We have the teachers sign contracts, being reachable by their students 24 hours per day, if needed. This is a school that takes pride in not only what it teaches its children, but in the manner in which it teaches its children. These children are learning how to respect themselves, which ultimately makes them respect others.

[Andre Agassi, continued.] It gives them a platform to make better decisions for themselves. We don't do this by throwing money at the problem. As all of you know, the national school average—I could be a little off on my figures—is just over \$7,000 allotted for each child, and our state allows \$5,600 or so. Our foundation subsidizes that difference. What we are accomplishing at this school is being accomplished with the national average.

I think it is a testament not only the teachers, but it is also a testament to what a child can do with a little hope and a little opportunity in their lives. It has been a lifelong mission for me, a commitment and a vision that is only possible with the help of my best friend from childhood, Perry Rogers, who has been so important to executing these dreams and goals. You are very kind about the words you expressed to my accomplishments on the [tennis] court, but I would give up every one of them just to see one more child have an opportunity.

Perry Rogers, Chairman, Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy (AACPA), Las Vegas, Nevada:

My job is to implement Andre's vision. It is about providing children with an opportunity to make a better decision for themselves, which is what Andre's foundation is built on, and it is what the school is built on. We have spent a lot of time looking at the best resources, finding the best personnel, and making sure that with any changes that needed to be made—whether it was to staff, to structure the school day, or whether it was to legislation itself—that we spent a lot of time focusing on what was really needed. I think the one thing that we can be certain of, is that we have now been a school that has been functioning since the fall of 2001. We have not come to any of our partners and asked for something that was not necessary.

Before we get into this, there is a video that we are going to run on the school, we will take this time to show the short video on the school. [Video is played for the Committee, [Exhibit B](#).]

This is about their dreams, and it is about recognizing what is possible when you allow these kids to dream. Andre has said, when you expect a lot of a child it is because you think a lot of a child. Clearly we expect a lot from our kids. That is actualized every day by our Interim Executive Director, Brian Thomas.

Brian Thomas, Interim Executive Director, High School Principal, Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy (AACPA), Las Vegas, Nevada:

I am going to show you a PowerPoint presentation ([Exhibit C](#)) that we have put together. That is the first time that I have seen the video, which was from last year's event. Looking into a child's eye and seeing those images, especially at the end, of determination. Mr. Rogers mentioned focus and what we try to do in

the day to day, which is to create high expectations, to move the bar pretty high for them, making sure that we are there to support them. That is what it is really about, pushing the bar up higher and higher; I think it is certainly what we are inspired by. It is also what we are inspired by, the name of the children, whose eyes that we see every day. Getting to our mission, we really do feel that we are defined by educational excellence. That means that we will have tremendous support, not only from the community, but from within ourselves. We make sure that no student will be wanting in terms of textbooks or anything else. We make sure that we try to create opportunities for children, so that they can succeed in that learning atmosphere. I am going to read the mission statement and tell you a little about what it is [slide 2 of [Exhibit C](#)].

Defined by excellence, the Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy (an independent K-12 public charter school) maximizes the potential of every learner. As a center of strength, AACPA provides an array of choices and opportunities to underserved communities. By harnessing the talents of gifted educational entrepreneurs, AACPA works to produce inspired, creative, ethical, compassionate, and reflective leaders who offer solutions to the problems posed by a democratic society.

[Brian Thomas, continued.] We are trying to do something different. Within the mission statement, it shows that difference is within not only the statement but within the people that we hire, the kind of textbooks that we use, how we expect and demand other things from our families. To give you a little in terms of key information about the school [slide 3 of [Exhibit C](#)]:

- Current enrollment is 289 students
- 60 percent come from the surrounding ZIP codes
- 4 percent Asian/Pacific Islander
- 4 percent Hispanic
- 4 percent White
- 88 percent African American
- 52 percent female
- 48 percent male

Other key points not listed here are that we start early, we start at 7:25 a.m., and typically the day ends around 3:30 p.m. for the actual program. Because we have tutoring and after-school activities, we go to 5 p.m. or 5:30 p.m. That is important. We have a longer school year as well. Instead of the typical 180 days—that the Clark County School District has—we have a 190 school day year. Our students are there for a lot longer. We do feel that time on task will create better learners. It will drive what we are trying to do from kindergarten all the way through twelfth grade, which is a different model as

well. A K-12 school on one campus, that is developmentally appropriate in terms of where the children fall and where they are in terms of divisions of the school; a middle school, an elementary school, and soon, a high school. Other student information [slide 4 of [Exhibit C](#)]:

- 53 percent of our children come from single-parent households.
- 44 percent come from two-parent households.
- 2 percent are being raised by grandparents.
- 1 percent comes from foster care.
- Average family income within the surrounding area is \$43,122.50.

[Brian Thomas, continued.] But I talked to Councilman Weekly a couple of weeks ago. He said that it is probably a lot lower than that, because the folks from the surrounding areas really do live in subsidized housing, housing projects, and some rental units. That is probably around \$14,000, in terms of the median income, for that. We are taking care of children for a lot longer. A lot of our children are dropped off by 6:45 a.m., 6:30 a.m. sometimes, and sometimes parents, because of work schedules, can't pick them up until 6:00 p.m., so we are there to provide tremendous support for them. I want to talk a little about our code of respect and what it means.

Every morning after the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence, we ask all of our students to recite this [slide 5 of [Exhibit C](#)]:

- The essence of good discipline is respect.
- Respect for authority and respect for others.
- Respect for self and respect for rules.
- It is an attitude that begins at home, is reinforced in school, and is applied throughout life.

So you can hear nearly 300 voices ringing with this code of respect every day, as we explicitly in assembly explain what we expect from them. We will have a word of the day that is rooted throughout the school for the rest of the day. We will talk about some challenge that a teacher or another staff member has overcome. We will also explicitly talk about what it means to be disciplined. What does it mean to set aside your personal needs, your wants for today, for something that you are pitching so far into the future that you can't even see it? The day that we showed our eighth graders the high school, which was only about two weeks ago, in terms of the plans, there was a different look in their eyes.

There was a different focus that they had for the rest of the week. If you extrapolate that out a little bit and if you show students their future beginning in third grade, they can begin to see it and tangibly touch it. We want our students to go to the best colleges and universities. We want them to interact with

people who have been there. I started out in a place very much like where our students are from, I live in Las Vegas right now, but I grew up in a housing project outside of Chicago, Illinois, in a small town called Robbins. I had no idea of what Yale, the University of Illinois, Northwestern, Stanford, or Harvard, what any of those things were.

[Brian Thomas, continued.] Our students, right now, understand that. They have a working knowledge of what that is. They have not seen it, but it certainly has been explained to them, as you can tell from the video. From over years of repetition, of saying, "This is where I am going to school," students get it. When I started out as a child, I had no clue as to what that was. By the time I was 18 years old, I had a very good knowledge of what that was and went on to Yale. It was certainly a bigger feat, because I had no idea of what it was like. I did not have the money to go and visit, didn't go on college trips. I am hoping that our students will have the opportunities that a lot of the folks within the community have never had. I would consider myself lucky. I am hoping that many of our students will be more than just lucky, because of the opportunities that they have been given.

The student commitment to excellence sounds like this [slide 6 of [Exhibit C](#)]:

- I will attend school from 7:25 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- I will attend school on certain Saturdays, one Saturday per month.
- I will attend AACPA's summer school.
- I will work, think, and behave to the best of my ability.
- I will complete my homework every night.
- I will raise my hand in class if I do not understand something.
- I will always make myself available and state my concerns to parents and teachers.
- I will always tell the truth and accept responsibilities for actions and mistakes.
- I will always behave to protect the safety of others.
- I will show respect for all.
- I will follow the AACPA dress code.

There are children in the community right now who, because their parents can't, will place themselves on the lottery. They will get themselves to the informational meetings, which talk explicitly about the school. There are children within the community that really want to be given that chance, but because of circumstances, sometimes they can't be given that chance or that opportunity. There are parents within the community who really try hard, who work very hard; our parents are very hard working people. They are involved, in tune with the school—maybe not all, but a great many of them. We have 289 parents

within our parent body, and 98 of them made it to the last board meeting, which is astounding. It is certainly a credit to them that a full one-third of them made it to the last board meeting. They get how important education is for them, and they also understand what this charter school has been for them.

[Brian Thomas, continued.] Our focus this year, because of the board, has been on literacy. We know that without being able to read, write, and speak effectively, the chances of them going on to any of these great places won't be as good.

Information about literacy [slide 7 of [Exhibit C](#)]:

- In every classroom there are SMART Boards.
- McGraw-Hill/SRA partnership, where they have come to the school on a weekly basis to teach our current teachers how to teach using their materials. That is the Open Court Reading Series Kaleidoscope, corrective reading, and a series of others.
- Inspiration Software.
- Monthly poetry recitations.

Literacy is the backbone of what we do, certainly reading and writing. None of our third graders—this is an astounding statistics—were reading at grade level. I saw last week's test scores, and with the exception of maybe one or two, all were at least at grade level or reading two or three grade levels above. There is one little girl who is reading at a seventh grade reading level. So she jumped probably four grade levels in the past six months. The time on task, the attention to detail by those teachers helps; it makes a huge difference. If you consider that some of the kids were coming in at two grade levels below, that is an important feat. We have other partners. Inspiration Software agreed, because they heard about Andre's vision, to donate visual mapping software, which will make our students not only good test takers, but we also want them to be great writers as well. We want them to see their thinking, visualize it, and then turn it into words. We also have monthly poetry recitations. Our kids are very verbal; they can tell you and think through ideas and problems, which is how they get to information.

We also have the Agassi Coalition of Excellence (ACE) [slide 8 of [Exhibit C](#)]:

- Elementary sports
- Middle school sports
- Doctor for a day
- After school clubs:
 - Choir club
 - Band
 - Drum line

- Cyber club
- Model cities
- Yearbook club
- Drama club

[Brian Thomas, continued.] An important part of who we are is being able to offer students after 3:30 p.m., in addition to tutoring, for those students who aren't there, a host of other options so that they can be safe and well protected. We want them also to be accomplished in other things, not only academics. We want them to have a real appreciation for their communities. We feel that our students, once they go to college, come back and give back to their communities. That is what excellence means to us. Student health: Sunrise Children's Foundation Health Center provides us a full time nurse for our campus.

Many of you may know that within Clark County, one nurse is sometimes shared by two high schools, so up to 5,000 or 6,000 students. We have a nurse not just for the students—and our expectation is that it will be a community-based program that other folks from in and around the school can use—that within the nurse's station there will be dental screening, vision assistance, and we also have a school psychologist onboard for problems that students might have. Of the 50 third graders that we have, 24, I would say, had never seen a dentist before. Of those, 8 needed urgent care, really important care. A couple of years ago there was a little girl who had an abscessed tooth. She had probably lived with that for a long time—months, or maybe years—without complaining.

The teacher commitment to excellence [slide 10 of [Exhibit C](#)]:

- They will arrive by 7:15 a.m. and stay until 3:45 p.m. Most of our teachers are there until 6, 7, or 8 p.m. in the evening. Some of them coming in as early as I do, at 6 or 6:15 a.m. It is a long school day.
- They come to the school on Saturdays.
- They always teach the best that they know how. They have dived into best practices, not only in Nevada, but nationwide. They are challenged to go see great programs from around the country.
- They always make themselves available to students, 24 hours per day.
- They look out for the safety, interests, and rights of all the individuals at the school.

They are an amazing group of people who have given a tremendous amount of themselves to the kids at the school. Certainly we have had some issues in the past, but it is huge, the commitment that our teachers have shown with the hours, sometimes upwards of 80 hours per week, to students.

[Brian Thomas, continued.] Parent participation [slide 11 of [Exhibit C](#)]:

- Board meeting attendance
- Eight hours of service to the school yearly
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Homework support
- Parent sponsored activities:
 - MLK [Martin Luther King, Jr.] parade
 - Elementary basketball
 - Family picnic/spring concert
 - Career day
 - Promotion
 - Parent Ambassadors

Our parents are there oftentimes. There is one parent who gives 2 full days of her time to the school, 16 hours per week. Over 210 of our parents so far have earned their hours of the 8 hours for the year. The parent commitment to excellence, which is the cornerstone to what we do—without the parents we cannot do what we do.

Parent commitment to excellence [slide 12 of [Exhibit C](#)]:

- They will make sure that their child is at school at 7:25 a.m. and will stay until 3:30 p.m. and sometimes until 5 or 5:30 p.m. in tutoring and after-school activities.
- They will make arrangements for their children to be at Saturday schools.
- They will make sure their children attend AACPA summer school.
- They will help their children.
- They will commit to 12 hours of volunteer time.
- They will check their children's homework.
- They will read with their children.
- They will make themselves available to their children.
- They will notify the school if their children are absent.
- They will make sure that their children can go on field trips.
- They will make sure that their children follow the AACPA dress code.
- They will make sure that their children adhere to behavioral responsibilities. Our parents are responsible during the school day; they cannot absolve themselves of their children's behavior.

All of this, in a nutshell, is what we do and who we are. We have tremendous success stories and I would invite people, as the Chairwoman has said, to come by and visit the school. It is an important part of who we are. Assemblyman Munford was there a couple of weeks ago. He stops by periodically. It is an impressive place. It is where we are headed in terms of

education in this country; really specific, really tailored, personalized, tremendous amount of time and attention, and not only about test scores.

Chairwoman Parnell:

There is one more thing that I would like you to share with everyone listening. When I was down there you told me how many students were on the waiting list, which was quite phenomenal. Could you share that number with us?

Brian Thomas:

Right now we have 289 students in the school, and we have 327 children on the waiting list. We could create another school. Probably next year, it will be three times the number of children on the waiting list. I know that we are all capable of doing the math. We have something here; it is very important and people are excited about it. Students and parents are excited about it. It is a tremendous opportunity for some children and for those children to take it up; they may be sitting where you are sitting right now.

Assemblyman Manendo:

I was invited to the opening of the school in August 2001 and I appreciate that, because I had an opportunity to see the school firsthand. Mr. Agassi was there and it was wonderful. My question is that one of the big things we hear about is trying to find ways to get parents involved in schools, and on the slide that you had, what exactly do you guys do? Do you have the parents sign a contract? We are always trying to find ways to get the parents involved. There are a lot of things going on nowadays. They are working two jobs, and they are busy. What happens? How do you go about doing that? What happens if a parent cannot fulfill those obligations; what happens then?

Brian Thomas:

This is the contract that they sign actually [referred to the "parent commitment to excellence" slide in [Exhibit C](#)]. It says that they will make sure that their children are there, and that they will do homework with them. The stipulation is if a parent is not doing that, then their child can no longer be in the school. It is very clear. There are so many children waiting for that opportunity, that we have to educate and advocate just as strongly for those children, who are on the waiting list, as the ones who are in the school. By the end of the year we can take a look at the log to see who has done what, who had come to board meetings, where their children stand, certainly academically, but that is not it. Some of our children are coming two years below grade level, which will not get you tossed out of the school. But if your child is rude and unruly, that might. If your child is coming to school hungry, we want to make sure those parents are there and that they know that, so that we can do something about it. If their child is not at the place where we want them to be academically, we

will do everything in our power to make sure that we help that happen. The parent participation part of it is nonnegotiable.

Assemblyman Manendo:

I think that is a key. I was wondering if that has ever happened, where you had to disallow a child entrance in the school, because of the parent's failure and not so much the student's failure?

Brian Thomas:

Not so much entrance, but exit.

Assemblyman Manendo:

I mean exit.

Brian Thomas:

Yes, it has happened. We had a parent in the fall who was very disrespectful to the staff, and their child was failing in more than one domain. The parent was very unhappy and pointing fingers at the school, so we asked the parent to leave and they did.

Andre Agassi:

I wanted to add to that as well. There are potential exceptions. As an example, a fourth grader who called and was very clear; he had gotten into the school and was very clear about the fact that his father would not be able to live up to the standard that was asked of him, that he didn't want that to stand in his way. He has now been there for four years; he is an eighth grader now. There would be exceptions, but generally speaking, we have to keep it something that everybody accepts responsibility for.

Chairwoman Parnell:

Thank you for sharing that. I heard that story when I was at the academy and that little boy, I think, was more mature than probably those he lived with. He realized what a wonderful chance he would have if he could stay at the school.

Assemblyman Munford:

I wanted to say that is the district which I represent; it is where the school is. Some of you might not be aware that Mr. Agassi has a Boys and Girls Club, which is also located in my district. I cannot find adequate words to express to him how grateful and how much I appreciate how much he has done. He has really taken steps to revitalize our community. He is a major player and I really appreciate it. With those 300 kids on the waiting list, maybe you could build us another school over there. I drive by the school practically every day; his Boys and Girls Club is across the street from my house. He is always extremely

attentive and active. Kids are out there playing tennis late into the night; he has four or five tennis courts out there. I watch the kids playing basketball and tennis every night. It is really great, and I cannot find enough to say to show my appreciation. I have been to the school on many occasions and it is quite a showplace. The atmosphere it presents is unbelievable and it is very conducive for learning, and I know that is why the kids are able to accomplish what they do.

Andre Agassi:

Those are very kind words that, to be quite honest, I aspire to. That motivates me very much to hear those kind words. It is why we chose that area, because it was that area which needed this attention the most. When we wanted to start this school there, it was told to us on many occasions that we wouldn't want to put it there, because I was going to put my name on something and build something that is going to be defaced. It was going to be vandalized and broken into. I didn't believe that, I believe that if you give a community something to truly care about, you give them ownership of it and they will respect it. Sure enough, they have and that is something that I take, probably, the most pride in. It is the pride that I see that community take in itself. In reference to why the tennis and the lights over there, to give you a quick story, six years ago we started a tennis program there. There is a young girl in the program named Asia Muhammad, who six years ago did not know how to hold a tennis racket. She is 13 years old now and she is ranked number 1 in the world in doubles and ranked number 5 in the world in singles. That is another example of what a child can do if they are only given the chance.

Assemblyman Munford:

I have taught school in Clark County for many years, and Andre could have gone to my high school, but he had other plans. His family went; he had a sister and cousin that went to my high school. I recall them very well. They were never in my class, but I saw them in the hallways all the time. They even accomplished a great deal in the area of tennis; they were state champions and so forth. I have a little connection with him indirectly.

Assemblyman Horne:

The first thing that hits me is that most of us who went to school, we don't get to know the role model in which the schools are named after. I think that is a benefit. While in school you learn who the name of the school may be named after in the history of the school, but rarely do you ever get to meet them and see their accomplishments in life as it goes on. I think that is of benefit for these students. Watching the video of when the students are saying what colleges and universities they wanted to go to was incredible. When I was going to junior college in California, I participated in Unity Among Brothers. Our goal

was to get “at risk” students to change their ways of thinking on where they were going to go, not if they were going to go, or not going at all.

[Assemblyman Horne, continued.] Here, they are already there mentioning these top schools, Harvard, Yale, and Northwestern—any one of those schools. UNLV [University of Nevada, Las Vegas] or UNR [University of Nevada, Reno] would be a plus to get, if they chose not to go to one of the other schools. Furthermore, in 1972, I was 10 years old and I had a teacher tell me, when I mentioned that I wanted to be a fighter pilot and being one of the better students in the class, she still told me that I might want to have a fall back position, because that required college. To think where we are today and you can hear these kids say they want to go to Yale, that is incredible and fantastic.

I am curious about the classroom size. There has always been a big debate on it, and I’m a proponent of small classes. You talk about the commitments that the teachers have to make by doing that. What are the sizes of your classes?

Andre Agassi:

We have two classrooms to each grade, and there are 25 kids in each classroom. There is a teacher and an assistant in each classroom. It would be 1 teacher and 1 aide to 25 children ratio.

Assemblyman Horne:

Was that K-12, or was it broken down?

Andre Agassi:

Right now it is third through eighth grades. We are adding a grade every year, so every child that is there will continue. It is my commitment. This entire school project has been about a \$70 million undertaking, because it is going to take a lot of the foundation money to subsidize this over the years. We are adding a grade every year that we still have to follow through on and then to come back to K-3, but we are now discovering that the earlier that you catch these children the better off you are. Starting in third grade was a “two-minute drill,” down the field to try and score a touchdown. Starting in fourth was a “Hail Mary” into the end zone. That was the difference of what we learned. Now in our experience, we have quickly realized what is better than third grade is kindergarten, getting them even earlier.

Perry Rogers:

Specifically in kindergarten, the current plan is to start kindergarten with only 19 children per class. Then 21 in first grade, 23 in second grade, and then up to 25 children, our stable level, by third grade. We will start out with an even smaller class size in kindergarten, first, and second grades.

Brian Thomas:

The high school will go back to smaller class sizes, from 18 to 22 students in each class. This is because we want to, again, personalize their education, because smaller high schools equal more attention to students and more time on task. Personalized education really, in terms of recent studies, makes a huge difference in terms of what kids and how kids learn. They have to know their teachers and professors on a very close basis, in order to get at what the students know and to maximize that in terms of information.

Chairwoman Parnell:

I would like to welcome Speaker Perkins and Assemblywoman Kirkpatrick.

Assemblyman Munford:

How do you go about selecting your faculty staff? Do you recruit? Are your salaries comparable to Clark County? How much competition do you have with Clark County in obtaining teachers?

Brian Thomas:

I think in the beginning of the school's time—I have been with the school for nearly eight months—there was direct competition with teachers from the district. But we have always looked outside of the district, Las Vegas, for faculty. I think in a vibrant school, you will certainly have people locally who have gone away, understand what college is all about, and have come back and become educators. You will have teachers nationally and internationally who will understand what best practices are all about, and they pick our school because they know it is doing some cutting edge type of stuff. We have recruiters out who are looking for some of the best minds in elementary, middle school, and high school education. We are fitting them into our mold of what a really great teacher will be. We are transforming some of the models of current education. There are very few K-12 schools. To be an eleventh grade high school social studies teacher and be responsible for a second grader is a pretty remarkable thing. To be a third grade teacher and to know what the seventh graders are doing is a pretty remarkable thing. It is called "vertical responsibility," and our task as a school is to build that web of educators—very creative educators locally, nationally, and internationally—to make a difference.

Assemblywoman Smith:

It seems to me that when charter schools came about, the idea was that we should be looking at best practices and replicating them in our school systems. I'm really interested in that and looking at the successes that charter schools have and what we can learn from them. One of the questions that I have is about professional development and how you work with teachers and train

teachers on the academic standards, for example, in our state. What are you doing in that area for professional development?

Brian Thomas:

We definitely look at the standards within the Clark County district, statewide, and nationally and we hold ourselves to that, somewhat. We take a series of tests: CRTs [Criterion-Referenced Test], the Progress Towards Standards [PTS], as well as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and that is like how you tune with other people around you. That is our tuning mechanism to see how we are doing compared to everybody else. As we begin to recruit faculty from around Clark County, nationally, and internationally, we also need to compare ourselves against schools nationally. I am coming from the independent school world. In the independent school world, you only take tests in high school.

You might take the ERBs [Educational Records Bureau], but pretty much the only tests that really matter are the SAT™, PSAT [Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test], and the ACT™. Everything else is not as important. For me, we have to do a couple of things well. We have to understand that children and teachers need to be held accountable to standards locally. We do that. We made our Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), one of the few schools in the area which did that last year.

We also understand that we are trying to pitch this project pretty high for our kids. They are going to have to score tremendously on some of those other national tests as they go up against other charter school kids from around the country, because that is the pool that they will be in. They will be in with the KIPP [Knowledge Is Power Program] academies; they will be in with the SEED [Saturday Engineering Enrichment and Discovery] schools; they will be in with the Amistad [Academy] charter schools. Most of them are back East or in the South, and they are going to have to compete with that pool of students as well, when they graduate from school. If not, they will not get into those Yales, Harvards, or Stanfords. We have to keep our eye on the prize of what is happening nationally as well as locally.

Assemblywoman Smith:

I'm really trying to get to professional development, what type of program you use for the professional development for your teachers. Do you do it in-house? Do you on a national level?

Brian Thomas:

We do a few things. We are in partnerships right now with UNLV and we are having classes happen at the school right now, classroom management and different sort of educational theories and philosophy. We have the

McGraw-Hill/SRA [Scientific Research Associates] folks come in to teach us on not only best practices on their products, but also best practices in literacy. I wasn't sold on the idea of "direct instruction," which is the new buzzword right now in reading, particularly in the early grade levels. It is very scripted, dry, and veteran teachers do not like it, but it works. Students get up to speed, who can't read, quickly. We have our partners from Inspiration Software, UNLV, and McGraw-Hill/SRA who come in to service us. Our faculty is also encouraged to go look at other schools around the region to make sure that they are gleaning best practices as well. They can bring that back to the school to enliven us all and they teach us in in-services.

Chairwoman Parnell:

Mr. Rogers, are you going to walk us through the bill? I know that Councilman Weekly is in Las Vegas, but I would like you to briefly go through the sections to highlight, and then we'll allow the people who are in the audience today, hopefully, have time to speak.

Perry Rogers:

Section 13 provides for greater legal autonomy, what this allows a charter school to do. We don't ask for things that are unnecessary. There are some states' statutes which allow charter schools to be completely exempt from the laws that govern school districts. We are not looking for that; we are not asking for that. This simply provides that when a charter school has already been in existence for three years and has its charter renewed, that after the renewal, the sponsoring agent will not be able to impose additional rules or regulations after that three-year period, other than what is required by state statute. What you don't want to do is create a tension between the sponsor and the charter school that creates a jump-through-hoops mentality. Remember that after the first three years, there is another renewal after the next three years. If a charter school is not performing, you could simply not renew them. To allow, during these three-year periods, for rules to be changed, simply is not the most efficient use of what we want to create. This would only be upon renewals. There would already have to be some success at the charter school level.

The next one is sponsorship. There are seven states: Indiana, Minnesota, Michigan, Missouri, Wisconsin, Ohio, and New York. They all allow public universities or colleges to be the sponsoring agent. This is a critical point, and is actually one that you, Assemblyman Horne, addressed earlier. In 1972, when you were in school, they told you that you needed to figure out what your fallback position is. This is about creating a horizon that can be seen from day one. It is about making sure that the sponsoring agent—it could be the state university system; it could be UNLV—creates a continuum. UNLV has become a great partner for us, but it also is an opportunity for the public school system,

and I can't stress that part strongly enough. This is still a public university; it is still the public education system in Nevada. It creates a partnership and an accountability both ways from day one. That is the sponsor part, which is Section 15.

[Perry Rogers, continued.] Section 19 is a preference for admissions. We had, this past year, 38 ZIP codes in Clark County apply for admissions to Agassi Prep. It is a telltale sign to our success, but it also could be the undermining of our success. Because the school was built to address a population that has specific needs, it is not designed to be a backdoor for those families that can afford a private school and do not want to pay for it. This is designed to provide an excellent education, as so many in Clark County are doing, for the kids in the neighborhood in which it was built. This would allow for a preferential lottery. It wouldn't make 100 percent of the kids be within two miles, but it would create a percentage. It would allow for a large majority of our kids to be in the neighborhood that we were designed to serve. It also would allow for siblings to have a preferential lottery. It is difficult on parents when they have to take one student to one school and one student to another school. Currently, we don't have a preferential lottery, so parents would need to get lucky twice. This would allow for a small section of those students to be carved out, only for siblings.

The next issue is the collective bargaining agreement. This section would allow the school to not have two different types of citizens when it comes to its personnel. That is, a teacher can choose to leave the school district, and they would be allowed to come back to the school district. There is a period of time that has been defined. This would allow, when a teacher is at our school, for the collective bargaining agreement to not be the controlling entity or the rule of law that we would have to be governed by. As it stands now, when teachers are hired and they are from South Carolina or Michigan, they come into our school and they are not subject to the collective bargaining agreement. So to create one group of teachers that is and one group of teachers that is not doesn't make any sense. It is inefficient. This would provide teachers with all the protections of the collective bargaining agreement if they choose to be in the school district, which is their choice. We do not mandate teachers who come and work for us. If they would like to, we would certainly appreciate it, this would be an informed choice. That is Section 20.

Section 23 deals with teacher licensure. As Brian mentioned earlier, he is from the independent school world. I find this fascinating. If you are from the independent school world, you don't need to be licensed by that state. You can be a great teacher; you can have an undergraduate, master's, or Ph.D. in a specific subject; and you can have 10 or 11 years of teaching experience, and

yet still, it would be that if you weren't licensed in that state, you will not have reciprocity, and it will be difficult to be licensed here in Nevada. This would allow those teachers that have five years or more of experience, who have a bachelor's degree in the subject area to be taught, to be licensed. This is only about experienced teachers.

[Perry Rogers, continued.] I think that in closing, as Andre mentioned earlier, this is a \$70 million project, \$35 million in facilities and \$35 million gambit. We are not here trying to ask for anything that we are not serious about. We are not here trying to ask for anything that would complicate matters. You need to know that we are not looking for loopholes to licensure, because we are trying to lower the bar. We have raised the bar, as far as we are concerned, and the size of the project speaks to how serious we are about it. This isn't something we are trying to get around. It is something we are serious about, being able to increase the pool of qualified excellent teachers from which we can draw.

Chairwoman Parnell:

I would like to let everyone know that the hearing on A.B. 162 will be continued on Wednesday. So for those of you wanting to get into detail and have a position in support of or against, this will continue on Wednesday. We will also be hearing a couple other charter school bills that day. I felt with the time given to the presentation that we would not want to be here, and I know you all have an event in about 30 minutes, so we won't keep you too much longer. Those in the audience who will not be here on Wednesday, I will give preference to. I know we have Councilman Weekly at the Grant Sawyer Building and a couple of parents who wish to speak.

Lawrence Weekly, City Councilman, Las Vegas, Nevada:

I wanted to comment and put on the record our support here in southern Nevada, in reference to what Mr. Rogers, Mr. Agassi, and Mr. Thomas are speaking in terms of here today. I am here today to talk about the possible revised provisions, not only as a councilman here in southern Nevada.

Assemblyman Munford and I both overlap and share this particular district in which the school was built. To talk about thinking outside the box here today, Madam Chair, and talking about how is it that we can come up with creative ways and more choices in education here, what Agassi's school has done, in reference to the community, it has most definitely enhanced an alternative for parents to have different choices in schooling. I was not only involved in the implementation of the school, but I also invested in the school with one of my most precious resources, and that is my son.

[Lawrence Weekly, continued.] My son also attends the school as a fourth grader. We have had some trials and tribulations at the school, but I believe in what the school has to offer. As a council, we here in Las Vegas are committed to helping as much as we possibly can to make sure that this school thrives and does everything it has set out to do, which is to provide the highest-quality education that it can possibly provide for these children. One of the things that I am concerned with—I think Perry pointed it out—is that, as far as the school is concerned, even with the Clark County School District, I live in the neighborhood as well, and for Mabel Hoggard Elementary School—let me give you a prime example—which is a magnet school for math and science. Their school is on a lottery system as well.

One of the things that I had a problem with the school was that children, who live in the adjacent neighborhood, still can't get into the school because of the lottery system. You may have a situation where the parent puts their child's name in the lottery and one child may be selected, and the sibling may not be selected. That is a problem, because the lottery does not give that type of exception to where the sibling is also guaranteed a spot in the school. That is a big negative for us in the community.

We would like to see that something like that happens, as far as the charter schools are concerned, so that if we find ourselves in that situation, it would work out. I remember Agassi's first lottery, and we had a situation where twins went into the lottery and one was selected and one was not selected, so that posed a huge problem for the parents. As we go back to talking about best practices and what we think is best, I too am concerned about the collective bargaining agreement and how all of that is worked out. We are in strong support of trying to think outside of the box and provide whatever resources we can to make this work for our community. When you come back to discuss, before you make your final determinations, we will be back on Wednesday to participate in that.

Assemblyman Atkinson:

Mr. Weekly brought up something that I was going to ask, and that was the selection process. I know we are going to hear this bill on Wednesday, so I won't get too in-depth with the bill. I do know that Mr. Agassi's efforts were to make sure that "at risk" kids in "at risk" communities are getting the help that they need. That was going to be my question. I was wondering if one of you would expand on it a little bit. I hope the effort is to continue, because once people see a good thing, they want to be a part of it. I think what you are doing is great, and I think that people who want to be a part of it. I would like to know if there are people on this waiting list who do not fit that criterion, who are trying to get their kids in, who don't meet the "at risk" criteria.

Perry Rogers:

I think that there are not only people on the waiting list that aren't from the area that we wanted to serve, but there are people in the school. That is why this change needs to be made. We have to make sure that the long-term prospects of this school are reflective of the initial vision—which was to enter into this community and to provide an additional choice—so if we could create a lottery, where the majority of the students are from a two-mile radius of the school, then we are serving the needs of Andre's initial vision. We are then starting to hit on what we wanted to accomplish. The truth of it is that we didn't know that so quickly, there would be so many kids from so many ZIP codes that would apply. But as you saw earlier, only 60 percent of our current students are from the surrounding ZIP codes. While that is good, that is not what the original intent of the school was. We need to improve upon that, and we need this legislative change to be able to guarantee that improvement. If we don't, then we will be, over time, subjected to a position that we did not anticipate—which is more and more students that are not "at risk."

Assemblyman Atkinson:

You have covered what I asked, but I also wanted to know of that list of 300 kids. You have already identified which ones are and which are not "at risk." What happens to those individuals?

Perry Rogers:

Every year the waiting list is made anew. If this were enacted, this would apply to the fall class of 2005. The people that are currently on our waiting list, if they want to stay on the waiting list, they need to reapply. What would happen, if this were enacted, would go into effect for the fall of 2005 class. That would apply to both the students admitted and to the waiting list. It would be a new list.

Assemblyman Atkinson:

They would have to reapply and meet the new criteria?

Perry Rogers:

That is correct. They don't stay on a waiting list ad infinitum; they need to continue to reapply.

Assemblyman Atkinson:

No grandfathering is my question.

Brian Thomas:

No grandfathering in. The waiting list is not only created anew, but what we do, we try to get more savvy about who we target. We go into the neighborhood

with flyers. We will say, "This is coming up," to the rest of the people in Clark County. We will go to, if we are adding kindergarten and first grade next year, the Head Starts in the area and say, "Look, this is an opportunity for you next year; we weren't going to bring on kindergarten for another three years. We would like it, if you are interested, to come in and put your name on the lottery." We are trying to get really savvy about targeting the people in the neighborhood, because that is all we can really do. By having more people from within that two-mile radius come in, we had our own parents scour the neighborhoods to put those leaflets out. That way we are, perhaps, assured a better chance at getting the people from the neighborhood. I think what you can do here is to make that more of a certainty.

Lawrence Weekly:

I know you are going to hear the bill on Wednesday, but there are a few parents here that are not going to be able to make it on Wednesday. Is it okay if they put their brief points on the record?

Chairwoman Parnell:

That would be terrific. Have them come to the table. We do have a few questions here in Carson City first.

Assemblywoman Angle:

It says in the bill that you want to only require a graduate degree. Is this graduate degree a bachelor's degree, not a master's degree?

Perry Rogers:

It is a master's degree.

Assemblywoman Angle:

You said, "Bachelor's degree."

Perry Rogers:

I meant master's degree, which was my fault. I apologize for that.

Assemblywoman Angle:

Okay, a master's degree and 5 years of experience teaching?

Perry Rogers:

Yes.

Chairwoman Parnell:

Welcome to those of you in Las Vegas.

Cynthia Watson Catha, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada:

I have a son who is in the fifth grade, and this is his third year of attending the school. I feel that it is important that they serve the community that surrounds the school. We are zoned for Marion Cahlan Elementary School, which is a school that has fallen below and failed the students who attend there for as long as I can remember. My son's option for a quality education is not available if he didn't have the opportunity to attend AACPA. It is also much appreciated that they have the longer day and also offer the after school opportunities. Once again, Marion Cahlan is a school that doesn't see the need to provide safety, and they have very limited after-school activities. It has been a godsend for me that my son has the opportunity. He is also taught on an individual basis in the classroom that he attends. The teacher has the opportunity, with the assistant teacher, to share the responsibility and segregate the class, so they may teach the children on a more singular basis. I do not believe that would be his situation if he were to attend Marion Cahlan.

Anit Earl, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada:

I am a parent of a student from AACPA. My son has been attending since the third grade, and he is now in middle school. He is a sixth grader. My child came from Clark County School District, from the south. The resources I have found at Agassi, when my son was picked the first in lottery, have benefited him tremendously. He was with the Clark County School District at that time; he went from straight Fs to Bs and Cs at Agassi in the first year. The Clark County School District did not allow him—he has ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder]—to prove that he could do the work. Agassi has formed a program for the students who have ADHD or who cannot learn as quickly as the other children, giving them the chance to catch up in progress and make progress for the next level. They also provide after-school tutoring from 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m., which has helped him tremendously. To even bring in a child who was totally lost, it is a huge change for me. As far as the sibling, my son has been on the sibling list. He is on the waiting list now and I put him back on this year. It has been, as a single parent, very hard on me to transport him and to have him at school by 7:25 a.m., and then go sit at another bus stop to wait for the other child to get on the bus, and then work an eight-hour job also. I appreciate all of your efforts; thank you very much.

Tammy Green, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada:

I would like to say as a Las Vegas native, I left Las Vegas for eight years, so I am very familiar with charter schools. The fact that charter schools are now catching on here on the West Coast, to me, is very important. A number of items that they are asking to be changed through this legislation would allow Las Vegas, Nevada to be caught up to different parts of the East Coast, where their charter schools have allowed children in low-income levels or children in

disabled communities to be caught up to speed and to be given the same opportunities as other students in higher level incomes or higher educational communities surroundings.

[Tammy Green, continued.] Charter schools on the East Coast allow for siblings to be added in the lottery. They allow for universities and other entities to sponsor charter schools, affording them a greater opportunity of achievement—even with the independent schools that the principal spoke of—allowing for our students to be exposed to different levels of education and different teaching styles, which the public schools seem not to be interested in. The public schools in Las Vegas, Nevada are failing our children. For many parents, the charter schools are our only options and our only hopes for our children to be educated properly at this time. I am asking as a parent in the community that these legislative changes will be amended, so that the Agassi charter school can go forward.

Dedra Edmond, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada:

My son is a third grader. This is his first year at AACPA. I have been very fortunate with my children; I have been through the regular system. My daughter Brianna, who is a sophomore at the University of Notre Dame, was on the lottery pick for Mabel Hoggard Elementary School when it first started, going from there to Kenny C. Guinn Middle School and graduating from Bishop Gorman Catholic High School. I am a strong advocate of the educational process. I know how important it is that education can take these kids to places where they never would have dreamed of. I wanted to say that I appreciate everything that is going on at the school. I appreciate all of the experiences that my son has had, and we are looking forward to him being the best that there can be, along with all of the other children in the community.

Chairwoman Parnell:

Thank you again, gentlemen, for being here today. I think we have all been inspired. I know that I was inspired when I visited, and again today. Someone will be here on Wednesday to carry your voice into the discussion, when we get into A.B. 162. On behalf of the Committee, thank you all and we look forward to seeing you later this evening. That concludes the meeting at this point in time. Everyone indicating an interest to speak today on A.B. 162, for the record, we will continue the hearing of this on Wednesday. Wednesday's meeting will be back in Room 3142 at the regular time. We have a little more business before we adjourn. There is a BDR awaiting Committee introduction. If we can add that today, we will be able to add that to our list of charter school bills to hear on Wednesday. Is there a motion?

- BDR 34-1034—Revises provisions governing charter schools.

ASSEMBLYMAN MANENDO MOVED FOR COMMITTEE
INTRODUCTION OF BDR 34-1034.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SMITH SECONDED THE MOTION.

THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Chairwoman Parnell:

I wanted to let you know, on Wednesday, in addition to our charter school bills, we will be dealing with the school breakfast program resolution. We will be hearing that first on Wednesday. It will not take much time. We'll tackle that and then go on to our charter school bills. Is there any other business before the Committee? Seeing none, this Committee stands adjourned [at 5:11 p.m.].

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Paul Partida
Committee Attaché

APPROVED BY:

Assemblywoman Bonnie Parnell, Chairwoman

DATE: _____

EXHIBITS

Committee Name: Education

Date: March 7, 2005 Time of Meeting: 3:49 p.m.

[illegible]