

Las Vegas Sun editorial:

Transparency, accountability set apart school district's funding plan

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Opponents of funding for public schools love to say they'll support more funding for K-12 education as long as districts show them how it will be spent.

Well, the Clark County School District is doing just that.

Last week, CCSD Superintendent Jesus Jara outlined an upcoming five-year strategic plan to raise student achievement levels, establish greater equity in instruction and discipline of students across ethnic lines, increase the efficiency of district operations and find areas where costs can be cut.

Getting there will require more funding for public education from the state, Jara says. But he's not asking lawmakers to act on blind faith. Instead, he's putting his money where his mouth is by building the strategic plan largely around an exhaustive new report that examines the district's operational services and expenditures.

For CCSD supporters, that report can be difficult reading. It reveals dozens upon dozens of shortcomings in the district's operations, some of which are simply jaw-dropping. Among them:

- CCSD has no overall plan for predictive, preventive or routine maintenance, which has fueled a deferred maintenance backlog of around \$6 billion. Yes, that's billion with a "b."
- In several departments, some supervisors oversee only one person. As the report's authors point out, that's a sign of "poor use of resources, funds and bloated staffing layers."
- The district generally doesn't evaluate contractors that provide CCSD with goods and services. "There were no documented instances of vendor removal due to contractor underperformance," the report stated.
- The district generally doesn't require formal business plans for expenditures. Those plans would include such key components as goals and objectives, cost-benefit analyses and return on investment data that would be used to determine whether the expenditures are in the district's best interests.

Page after page, the list goes on.

Again, it's tough reading. The inescapable conclusion is that CCSD's house is an absolute mess.

But Jara deserves credit for ordering the review and spotlighting its findings. The report was conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of 74 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. It can be found [here](#).

Identifying the district's problems is an essential step to making improvements. With Jara presenting this warts-and-all evaluation of the district and using it to build his strategic plan, no one can accuse him of trying to pull the wool over lawmakers' eyes in asking for increased state funding.

Clearly, CCSD has a long way to go. But the review makes it just as clear that the state needs to up its funding to the district. CCSD's total expenditure per student — \$8,964 — ranks last among all of the dozens of districts that report data to the council.

With the state legislative session scheduled to begin Feb. 4, that needs to change.

In a State of the District speech last week to a crowd that included Gov. Steve Sisolak and other leaders, Jara urged lawmakers to adopt a weighted funding formula this year that would provide a proportionally larger share of tax revenue for students with special needs, such as English language learners or those receiving free or reduced-price lunches.

Jara's right. It's time to update the state funding formula, which has been around since the late 1960s, to reflect modern educational needs.

Meanwhile, Jara has shown lawmakers what CCSD must do to get its house in order. He's committed himself to doing that — now lawmakers need to join him in helping the district move forward.

“Governor, trustees, community partners, colleagues — we have a lot of work to do,” Jara said during his address. “That is the state of our schools. But it's my intention to stand here before you, five years from now, and tell you that we will be the most-improved district in America.”

We look forward to seeing Jara take his next step when he issues his strategic plan.