

An Oral History of Paul Gray

4th Street | Prater Way History Project

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Interviewer: Paul Boone

A native of Idaho, Paul Gray moved to Nevada as child for his father's teaching job. After graduating from Carson High School and the University of Nevada, Reno, Paul began his own teaching career at Reed High School, where he taught math, coached basketball, and eventually became Dean of Students. In 2011, he became Dean of Students at the Dilworth STEM Academy.

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Interviewed on May 3, 2012

Paul Boone, Interviewer

A native of Idaho, Paul Gray moved to Nevada as child for his father's teaching job. After graduating from Carson High School and the University of Nevada, Reno, Paul began his own teaching career at Reed High School, where he taught math, coached basketball, and eventually became Dean of Students. In 2011, he became Dean of Students at the Dilworth STEM Academy.

Photo by Patrick Cummings

Boone: I am here with Paul Gray, who is the Dean of Students at Dilworth Middle School. We are on the campus of the University of Nevada, Reno, and today is Thursday, May 3, 2012. So why don't you tell me about your background.

Gray: I was born in Blackfoot, Idaho, and we lived in Aberdeen, Idaho, which is a small town in central Idaho. My dad was a schoolteacher, and I lived there for the first six years of my life. Then he got a teaching job in Douglas County here in Nevada and we moved to Gardnerville, and lived there for two years. My mom was working with the state school lunch program, and she had been commuting back and forth from Gardnerville to Carson. So they decided it was time for my dad to do the commuting and we moved to Carson City, where I essentially started school at third grade, and went all the way up through graduation in Carson, Carson High School.

After I graduated from Carson High School, I attended the community college for two years, one in Carson City and then the second year I spent at Western Nevada here in Reno.

I left school for a couple years and saved up some money to come back, went back to school here at UNR and graduated from UNR. After that, I got a teaching job that started at Reed High School. I spent pretty much my whole career there up until this past year and became the Dean of Students.

Boone: What did your dad teach?

Gray: My dad was a shop teacher, a vocational teacher. At that time he taught the metals classes, the woodworking classes, and the automotive classes. Douglas High School was a pretty small school at the time we moved to Gardnerville.

Boone: What was his teaching philosophy? What was his take on education? What did he hand down to you in that regard?

Gray: I think he just had a love for what he was doing and really enjoyed sharing that with kids and watching them grow. I think with the shop classes you see the growth. You

can really see kids starting to learn skills. I think that's pretty much what he passed down. He had a love for sports. I had two older brothers. One was very successful in sports, and I followed him, so I played sports also.

Boone: What sports did you play?

Gray: I played football and basketball, played three years on the varsity basketball team at Carson and one year on the varsity football team.

Boone: What years were those?

Gray: From '74 to '76 were the years in basketball, and then just my senior year, football. I played in the lower levels and then decided not to play my junior year.

Boone: What were the coaches like that you grew up with? Do any of them stick out? You coached for a while, too. What did you glean from them as you were coming up?

Gray: I think you take something from all the different coaches, and some of them are things that you would prefer not to do and some of them are things that excited you as a player. The basketball coach I had was Tom Andreasen, and he was a person who instilled a lot of confidence, and I felt really comfortable and successful under him. I enjoyed playing basketball and football. It was more the hard-driving mentality, and maybe that wasn't me.

Boone: So what are some of the activities you got involved in as a young man and a teenager around Carson and Gardnerville?

Gray: Well, it was always something based around sports, like sandlot baseball, which relates to *The Sandlot* movie a little bit. You don't see that as much anymore. I think it's more organized activities and sports today than just pickup games where kids will get together and they'll carry a bat and a ball out and have some gloves, and they'll play with whatever number of guys they have.

It was always based around sports, from the Little Leagues to the Youth Leagues in basketball, flag football and football, and that's where my friendships came from. Those were the kids that I hung out with, other kids playing sports.

Boone: Through elementary, middle school, high school, what was school like for you as a young man? Were there teachers you remember from that time, and maybe why you remember them?

Gray: Different teachers for different reasons. There was a science teacher in seventh grade who really stood out. He was tough, but it seemed like I learned a lot, and he did some fun things, he had some fun activities. He tried to do a little more hands-on demonstrations than just teaching straight out of the book. I think one of the things that I remember is he had a live rattlesnake in his class in an aquarium, which I don't think any school district would probably allow today. But it was cool to see a live animal, and he

showed how they responded, the sensory glands and those things. It was fun.

Boone: Since both your parents were involved as educators or part of the school system, did that change your perception of school or how did it impact your experience as a student?

Gray: I have three brothers, two older and one younger, and I'm actually the only one who went into education. My wife, who was my high school sweetheart, we started dating our sophomore year in high school and got married after her junior year in college, because I had left for a couple years. We got married and she finished up. She was an exceptional student. Then I went back and got my degree after she finished up. But we both went into education.

So the impact from my parents being educators is hard to say. I'm sure there's some impact there, but I think it was just the fact that my dad always enjoyed getting up and going to work and seemed to like what he was teaching. It wasn't until I had gone off to community college and done college myself and he was teaching a community college class in welding and I had taken that class, that I'd actually seen him as an instructor. But, ironically, my oldest brother got the skills of the shop classes. He's really handy with his hands. He can build things, he can fix things, he can do all those things. I can't. That wasn't the direction I went in education. My direction was more in mathematics, and so after I got my degree, I became a math teacher and followed coaching. So those two things were my love.

Boone: You've been around schools for quite a long time. When you were in high school in the seventies and in elementary school, middle school, in the sixties and seventies, what was it like then and what are some of the similarities, differences you see being a student and now being an educator?

Gray: That's interesting, because being the son of a teacher, I saw toward the end of my dad's career—and he was in his fifties when he retired, probably his late fifties—what I saw was he was feeling like the kids of that time, which wasn't too far off of where I was at in school—I was probably just graduated from high school about the time he was getting ready to retire—the thing that he was saying was, “The kids today don't have any respect.” Well, that was my generation of kids going through, and having had some friends who have retired from the school system that I've been a part of, that's what they say. “Oh, kids today don't have any respect.”

I think it's more you reach a point where you don't have those close connections with them. You're not watching the same movies, you're not listening to the same music, and you probably don't have those same connections with the kids. So it may feel that way, but I don't think that the kids today are less respectful. I feel like the percentage of kids today are the same. If it was 95 percent of the kids that were real good kids, had real strong values and respect, it's 95 percent today. But I think some of the schools are bigger, so you see more kids who struggle with some of those issues. There are times that they're trying to find themselves. Yeah, there could be some issues with respect at times.

Boone: Did you first move up to Reno for junior college? Is that when you first came up

here?

Gray: Yes. The first year in college was junior college. It was all the Western Nevada Community College system at that time, and it's separated since then. It's now Truckee Meadows, and I think it's still Western Nevada out in Carson. I'm not sure. But I started at Western Nevada in Carson, and then the second year came to Reno and lived in Sparks in an apartment with some friends, and went to the community college there.

Boone: What were some of your first impressions of Reno, and what was it like when you first were up here as a young man and as a young married man too? You said you got married your junior year in college, right?

Gray: Right. It was much smaller. It's fun to see the changes that Reno's undergone over the years. I think probably during my lifetime the biggest change that I saw here in Reno was when—at that time I believe they called it MGM—it's called Grand Sierra Resort today, was built, and the number of jobs that that brought to the area, and then it brought about this growth with other casinos. So we started seeing Harrah's getting bigger and some of the downtown casinos getting bigger, and it wasn't too long after that you started seeing the Peppermill sprout up and Atlantis, and more of the casinos that are here today. It was very active and construction jobs were here. There was a lot of housing that was going up.

When I played basketball in high school, we played at the Centennial Coliseum, which is now the Convention Center across the street from the Atlantis, and that was the outskirts of town. You felt like you were arriving in Reno when you got to the Convention Center. There was the Magic Carpet golf course, which is a little further out. That was out of town.

At that time my wife was my girlfriend and we were in college, and something happened with my car and we'd ended up parking in that parking lot and had to walk back to use a phone. It was in the wintertime, so I don't think they were open at that time. We walked back and it seemed like we walked forever to get back to the Convention Center. So it's just that Reno has gotten much bigger than what it was at that time, and it grew so fast. Now it seems like it's leveled off a little bit. But those are probably some of the biggest changes.

Boone: What was Fourth Street like when you were a young man here? What was your impression of Fourth Street?

Gray: Well, that was how you got from Sparks to Reno. That was the main road and it was a little more lively then, I think. Now, some of the businesses have gone away—it's quiet.

Boone: What were some of the lively businesses there? Is that where you'd go out at night?

Gray: No, if we went out somewhere, we'd go to some of the places downtown, and some of those places that were favorites then are gone now. You look back on them with

fond memories. And later when we got married, we liked to go to the Glory Hole. That was on Fourth Street headed west. It still is on the outskirts of town, but it's changed. I think it's Washoe today. So that's changed. And there was a hamburger place downtown not too far from the Pioneer, a little bit over toward Vassar Street, called Bailiwicks, a great place to get a hamburger. Loved to go there, and it's gone.

Boone: What were the hamburgers like there? What was that experience like?

Gray: It just seemed like it was a bigger hamburger. For me, being a big guy, that was always a good thing. The fries were fresh-cut fries, and nice juicy patty, big patty. It just seemed like it was a fun place to go. It wasn't a place where a college kid or right out of college would go all the time because it wasn't something you could afford all the time, but it was something, it was a nice treat to go to Bailiwicks, and then on a special occasion it was the Glory Hole.

Boone: What was the Glory Hole like?

Gray: It was a rustic setting. It was what you would think Nevada would be like. The feeling to me was like walking into a mine shaft place. It had that rustic old feel. They had a nice salad bar and it was just a steakhouse place.

Boone: What was it like for you as a student to come to UNR—or University Nevada, Reno, after a couple years of junior college?

Gray: The classes seemed more personal with the community college because they were smaller, and it was a nice transition going from high school, where it just seemed like the instructors, because it was smaller, got to know you a little bit better.

When you get into a little bit bigger environment, like the university, the learning's more on you. Some of those classes can be bigger, and, of course, as you go higher up, the class sizes start to thin a little bit. But I enjoyed all those experiences. I enjoyed the experiences at the community college and still look back at those with fond memories. Then the experiences I had here I enjoyed, too.

University of Nevada has grown too. I'm sitting here in a beautiful facility [the Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center]. They've really added some nice things to the campus.

Boone: Did you play any sports when you were in college?

Gray: I played junior college basketball for two years, and had an opportunity to go on to Eastern Oregon University, and it just seemed like the best thing was to stay here. It was reaching that point where you realize it's going to end sometime, you're going to stop playing sometime, and maybe the sacrifices that I had to make to continue to play for two more years were not sacrifices that I was willing to make. So it was time to hang it up. At that point the decision was, well, I'll go to work for a couple years and earn some money and go back to school.

Boone: What did you do when you were out of school, what did you do to earn money?

Gray: It was an odd journey for me. I'd actually been working a little bit for an armored carrier, and they had a car service part of that where they'd just drive around and pick up bags of checks, I guess. I'm not sure exactly what were in the bags. After doing that for a few months, I worked my way up to the armored trucks. So for a couple of years I was in an armored truck, carrying a gun, carrying money. I had some interesting experiences through that, but I came to the realization that this is not what I love and this is not what I want to do for the next thirty years of my life.

Boone: What were some of the experiences that helped you make that decision?

Gray: Well, we'd see articles on armored car, or armored truck robberies. Then there were a couple of experiences. A couple of our guys had walked in on a robbery—it wasn't a robbery at the truck; it was a robbery of a business. It was a Long's at that time in South Tahoe, and they walked in on it. Fortunately, there were no gunshots or anything like that, nobody got hurt. But there were a couple times where you have people who are following you and you wonder a little bit about this person—what are their intentions here and am I ready to pull out a gun? And it wasn't me. I'm not a gun guy. Strange being from Nevada, with the great outdoors where people like to hunt and shoot. It's not me. I'm different in some of the experiences of Nevada because there are a lot of good hunters here and people who like to ski. Because of basketball, I didn't ski, so I never snow skied, I've never been hunting, but those are great experiences for people here.

Boone: So when you came back to college, did you know what you wanted to do? Did you have a major in mind? Did you have a career in mind?

Gray: I did one of those career-interest tests, and because of the math background, it kept pointing me toward accounting. So I thought, well I'll go—at that time it was managerial sciences, and that has accounting in it. I was on that track, and at that time when I came back I was married, and I reached a point where I said, "I'm not sure if I'm really a mid-management guy," because that's where you're going to start out. I think my wife helped me clarify that education and coaching were the things that I really wanted to do.

After my junior year and a bunch of credits, I made a change and ended up going into education, and my major is actually in business and my minor's in math. So I ended up getting a job teaching mathematics, which wouldn't happen today because of the high qualifications, but that's the direction I went.

Boone: So you just needed a B.A. back then to get a teaching job? You didn't have to go through the credential program or anything like that?

Gray: No. Yeah, things have changed. [Laughs]

Boone: You started at Reed. What was the interview process like? How did you find yourself at Reed?

Gray: Well, that's interesting, too. Having played basketball in the area, on a team that was pretty successful in Carson, I got to know some of the other coaches a little bit, and they got to know me a little bit while I was playing.

My wife got a teaching job at Reed High School for a woman who left who was pregnant, and the coach at that time, Paul Kautz, who was a longtime coach for Reed High School, needed a freshman basketball coach. I was still taking classes here at the university. He asked my wife if I'd be interested in coaching, so I said, "Oh, yeah, sure." So that's where it started.

I coached for two years before I'd actually started teaching at Reed High School. The first year was with the freshmen, and the second years were with the JVs, and my third year of coaching, which was my first year of teaching, was as a varsity assistant. I did that for three years.

I did another year of JV basketball in between, in that period of time, and after six years of being an assistant under Paul Counts, he recommended me for the job as the head coach. He was at that time ready to retire and he had actually been the first coach hired when the school opened. At that time I think he had thirteen or fourteen years in and he was ready to step down, and he recommended me, and it worked out that I ended up getting the job.

Boone: How did your coaching change from your start coaching the freshmen and JV to becoming an assistant and then the head coach? What was the trajectory for you? What were your initial plans or hopes or thoughts of being a coach, and how did that mutate over the years?

Gray: Well, I knew that I wanted to be a varsity coach, but I was just happy doing what I was doing at the time. I felt very fortunate to have a great mentor. He was one of the best coaches and most respected coaches in the area and still is.

It was great to have that experience, and he taught me to be a student of the game. I think that was one of the lessons among a whole bunch of other lessons, but I think that was one of the things that I continued to do throughout my eighteen years of being a head coach. So that was how I got started coaching.

Boone: What philosophy did you develop as a coach? What were your goals through your progression?

Gray: Well, I started with just a simple statement and grew outward, and it was "athletes first, winning second." The belief behind that was that I was going to do what was right for the athlete, rather than what was best for trying to win games, and tried to always place the athlete first, getting to know my players, connecting with them, understanding them as people, and not seeing them as pieces in a game, something you would move around like on a chessboard. I was always trying to make sure that I treated them fairly and respected who they were as people.

Sometimes doing the right thing wasn't necessarily what they felt was the right thing. If they made some mistakes, I had to correct them. We had an incident in one of my seasons where six kids decided they were going to drink on a road trip. I felt like the lesson needed to be learned that they had signed a contract with the school to say they

weren't going to do that and they broke that contract, and it was my job to make sure that they understood that there were consequences to that. One of the players was the son of a judge, and the judge sent me a letter and said, "I wouldn't have done anything differently from the way you did this. This is what I do in court every day. You make sure that they have consequences, but you treat them fairly."

There were a lot of things that I learned from Paul Counts in coaching, and the values part of it was one of the things I learned.

Boone: What was unique about coaching at Reed? What were some of the challenges, some of the advantages, some of the best memories or just memories of coaching at Reed?

Gray: I enjoyed my whole experience there, even the year that we had the kids who were suspended for drinking. It created its own set of challenges, and I've seen some of those kids since then and we've had good conversations.

I guess to get back to your question; Reed High School when it opened was the second high school in Sparks, and Sparks High School had had a lot of successes with athletics. Now a new school comes along—a shinier penny, so to speak, comes along—and attracts a lot of kids to that school. So we had good talent, we had good players, we had good kids. It was just a great experience to be around kids who had that passion.

I think over the eighteen years I've always seen coaching as two lines—and there's the mathematical part—two lines on a graph. One is going up and that's the wisdom part, the learning part, learning and understanding more as a coach. The second line is one that's starting high and going down, and that's the part that's the energy. I started with a lot of energy and probably not a lot of knowledge, but I had a lot of enthusiasm for what I was doing and ended with a lot more knowledge and, I think, just by nature, not as much energy.

Boone: Did you have a system you ran or did you adapt to your players as they'd come and go?

Gray: There are some coaches who are really system people. They're going to run the same system no matter who comes through their system. I felt like—maybe it's being overconfident or cocky, I felt like I could adapt to them, that we needed to have something in place that was best suited for them.

So there were years, my first couple years, we ran like crazy, and they were putting up some numbers that hadn't been seen in the area, I don't know, for sure in a long time and maybe not at all. The first year we averaged eighty-eight and the second year we averaged ninety-two, and over a two-year span we had something like sixteen 100-point games. But that fit the talent.

When I took over the team, we had six returning guard types. So conventional wisdom said two guards. I could play three guards and play them in two ways. So we pressed a lot, we ran a lot, we were fast breaking, we were looking to shoot fast, and it was a different game than a lot of people were used to. At the time, it was pretty similar to what Loyola Marymount was running, and they were putting up huge numbers. It wasn't that I designed a game to fit Loyola Marymount. It wasn't until after we started

playing the way we were that I had seen what Loyola Marymount was doing.

After two years of that, those players graduated and it changed. We had some big guys that who a little more methodical, and running wasn't going to suit them. It would go against our strengths. So we slowed the game down and became more methodical and worked the ball inside more and didn't press much.

So it was constantly adapting, and I can't say that I was always right in evaluating the style of game that we were going to play, because we tried to run the gamut with some players who I thought were going to be well suited for it and it didn't work out at all. It became a year of bad decisions, bad breaks, and bad luck and I felt bad for the kids because we were reaching for answers, too, and it just didn't quite fit.

But through that span there are lots of things that I remember. I never got into coaching to coach my own sons because when I started, they were little. One was four and one was one. But I stayed in it long enough that I ended up coaching them both. Obviously those are some good memories. I enjoyed the entire time. It was the nature of who I had become as a person, as was running out of energy, not having maybe the energy to do a full program, a year-round program, which is the direction that high school basketball has gone. That's what led me to decide it was time to leave.

Boone: Is that the big change you saw as a coach over the time you coached?

Gray: Yeah. There are a couple of changes. Probably two biggest changes from the time I started till the time I ended was that, I definitely agree with that. It was the keeping up with the Joneses thing. One person would start to add a few more things in the off-season, another coach would start to do that, and before long the entire league. Then how do you keep ahead of the pack?

I would say that when I left coaching, there were about three down months and the rest of the time you're playing, you're doing something. There's more outside programs available for them, the AU-type things. There's the Jam-on-Its and the Ballers and those programs weren't there when I started. That's definitely one.

The second was in my last year or Paul Counts' last year when we went to a tournament in Las Vegas, a Christmas tournament. He was haggling with our athletic director on how much money per day the kids would get for the per diem, and everything else was paid for by the school. My first year I was haggling with the athletic director—in that one year it had changed—on how much, if any, money we would get for the trip. By the time I had left, we were pretty much self-sufficient. We did our own fund-raising; we paid for pretty much everything at that point. We'd get some money from the school, but not much. It was maybe about a tenth of what we needed. So the financial part of it changed over that period of time considerably, and the amount of off-season had changed also.

Boone: How did coaching form you as a teacher and administrator?

Gray: I think as a coach, you really have to make sure that all your players are understanding. You're constantly doing checks and some of the assessments that you would have in a sport would be the games. So you get good at evaluating where you're at, what you're doing, and what you need to do differently. As a classroom teacher, that's

what I think you want, is you want to make sure that the student who's having the toughest time understanding is still coming along. You're making sure that they're still there and they're still with you, and you're not moving too fast. You still want to move at a speed where you don't lose the kids who are picking it up fast themselves, but you're constantly doing those checks for understanding and assessing things in an ongoing day-to-day, every-class-period basis. I think it's understanding where kids are coming from.

I wasn't the star basketball player. I started and I felt like I had some pretty good success, but I wasn't the star. So my perspective is I had to make sure that I was learning what I was I had, to make sure that I was learning what I was doing when I was playing, and I think a natural-gifted athlete doesn't necessarily have to learn it, they can just do it, and sometimes they can't explain it.

I think you see some great players like Magic Johnson, who maybe had a little trouble coaching because it came easy to him and he couldn't understand why other people don't get it. I think that for me it didn't come easy and I understand you've got to take some time with this and you try to help bring those kids along. So that attitude, that philosophy is what I carried over into the classroom.

Boone: You mentioned as a coach you had the athletes-first philosophy. Did you have a similar philosophy in the classroom or do you have a different name for it?

Gray: No. I'm sure that existed, but I didn't ever formalize it in words. I just like to see kids succeed. There was a class that I had, it was an algebra support class. Those were kids who were struggling to understand algebra and failed it at some point. It's a requirement to move on, to graduate. So I have these kids in class who have already had some failure and they've already got some resistance and dislike for mathematics. "I don't understand it, I don't get it and I don't like it." I don't even know what point in the year it was, but there was a girl in there and she said, "I don't understand it. I don't get it."

I explained it again, and she said, "I still don't understand it. I don't get it. I hate this."

I explained it again. By now I'm starting to get a little frustrated because she's putting up some walls that are really tough to get around. I didn't get angry at her, but I got a little more forceful and said, "You do understand this. You do get it, and we're going to get you through this."

Later on, I didn't have her after that class, she had gone on to other classes, but she ended going on and taking trigonometry and did pretty well. It was one of those feel-good stories. You never know exactly where they go or how much they're understanding and how much impact you have, not as much as you see on a court, because you're seeing them. I think that's probably what my dad experienced in his teaching. He could see it. He could see them. He could see them understanding what it was that he was teaching. You don't necessarily see somebody understanding a formula or an equation. It takes time.

Boone: Can you take me through a typical class you would run? How did you run your classroom, from lessons to behavior? If I was taking a class, what could I expect going in?

Gray: Well, I enjoyed teaching geometry classes probably the most, because for me that was most visual. You could see shapes, you could build things and you could do things. I probably started out with some warm-ups, sponge-type activities, something that refreshes from the day before, gets the kids back in the mode of thinking about mathematics and gives me a chance to do the administrative things you need to do in a classroom, take your attendance and make sure that all your kids are there.

So we do some short warm-up, and then we get started with whatever that day's lesson was or we might do a review of whatever their homework assignment was and try to clear up—lots of times I like to put kids together in small groups so that they could talk about the problems and maybe go over the problems, whatever things that they're having trouble with. Then I'd ask kids to go up to the board and put it up on the board, demonstrate a little understanding.

Then we'd get started with the lectures, and I like to do a discovery approach, for example, discovering that the three angles of a triangle, no matter what triangle, add up to 180 degrees. So we start out with drawing some triangles and cutting them out and tearing off the angles, and then putting them together so that they could see how that arced over to 180 degrees.

Then we'd get down to exploring, "if we put this in an if-then format, what would that look like?" And obviously you have to guide them through the first few times, but you get to the point where they start to understand that, okay, if a polygon is a triangle, then the sum of the angles is 180 degrees. It wouldn't always sound exactly like that from student to student, but that's what they'd understand, that's what they get. You know, triangle, 180 degrees.

It would be those things where they would do the hands-on cutting some things out, and the little discovery, and that's what I really liked about teaching geometry. I had those opportunities.

Boone: What was your classroom management style, when you're dealing with the different students?

Gray: Well, I think it just starts out with early in the year talking about respect and role-modeling respect. When those situations come up where they're not being respectful, reteach it. They're kids and they'll learn. Some kids don't really know what that means. So it's part of that learning process. We're teachers, and I think probably the biggest thing is role modeling and treating them with respect. As long as you do that, I think most kids will respond in a pretty positive way.

Boone: What was your biggest strength as a teacher? What was something you felt like you could rely on in the classroom? What were some of the things that you felt comfortable, confident with in the classroom?

Gray: Well, I felt comfortable and confident with what I was teaching and how I was teaching it, and I felt comfortable in talking to kids and getting to know them, those things.

Boone: What was your biggest challenge as a teacher? What were some of the areas you really felt like you needed to improve in?

Gray: I was never one of those teachers who felt like this was the most important thing in their life, that my class was more important than somebody else's class. I respected the fact that they all had differences, and some kids just don't like math. My wife didn't like it and still isn't crazy about mathematics. In high school she hated it, and she was an incredible student. I mean, she'd kill herself to just get through a problem.

Boone: What was unique about Reed High School? If you had to explain to somebody what Reed High School was like during your time there, what were the students like, what were the teachers like, what was the school culture there, and did it change over time?

Gray: I think there was a lot of energy. It was primarily a middle-class white school when I started there, and it diversified over the years. It's a great school today; it was a great school then. I'm trying to really come up with some differences. It was big. It's always been one of the larger schools in the district, and it seemed like we were always bursting at the seams.

I think early on there was probably more school spirit, and I think that's what I see in all schools. It doesn't seem to be as much school spirit, and I think maybe in a sense that's good, because kids are finding things to do rather than going to games. I mean, they're being a part of clubs or they're being a part of other teams. There are so many more sports to play. They're involved in band or ROTC or they're involved in drama, in theater productions.

So maybe that's my perception of what school spirit is, going to the basketball games and packing the gym or going to the football game and having these big crowds, but I don't think you see as much of that as at one time. When I first started, there weren't as many sports then as there are now, and there are definitely more kids involved in a lot of different things. So a little bit of that school spirit is now spread into other activities and sports and clubs.

Boone: Just as a math teacher, what were some of the challenges with the students? How did students respond to math and how did you deal with that attitude?

Gray: I think a lot of students, because the answers are either right or wrong, feel like it's 100 percent right or it's 100 percent wrong, and they don't understand that they could be going through that process. This is what I tried to help them understand is look at how much of this you did right. You just made a simple mistake here. It's a multiplication error or you're adding a negative number and a positive number and came up with something very strange. But I tried to take them through the steps and help them understand that you do understand quite a bit of this, you just made a simple mistake.

I think the tendency, especially with students who don't like math, is when they get it wrong, they really don't like it, and it's helping them understand you did a lot of this right. You just made a simple error, and we fix that, you got it. You understand the concepts; you just made a simple mistake.

Boone: At Reed you shifted from the classroom to an administrative position. Did you still teach or did you go right to the administrative position?

Gray: I went from the classroom to, at that time, being freshmen Dean of Students, and the Dean of Students position is primarily a discipline position. You're dealing with the kids who have some discipline issues in the classroom or in the halls or somewhere on campus.

My position as the freshmen dean came as they discovered that the transition going from middle school to high school was difficult for some kids, and my position was more a position that looked at attendance, it looked at grades, I worked with counselors pretty closely, I did discipline. Then when they became real busy in the discipline office, the Student Relations Office, then I would help out sometimes with them. I might be dealing with a sophomore or a senior, but my position was primarily dealing with freshmen trying to transition into high school.

What happened was as the economy started to change, of course, the budget started to change for the Washoe County School District. We're still, have been, going through cuts and that was one of those positions that was more a luxury item than a necessity. When you're taking teachers out of the classroom, I think you've got to draw the line somewhere. So my position as the freshmen dean at Reed was cut, and that's when I went to Dilworth.

I had an opportunity to go to Dilworth and become a Dean of Students there. So now, instead of dealing with freshmen trying to transition into high school, I'm dealing with eighth-graders getting ready to transition into high school. So I think that I can tell them what they're about to encounter, what's coming, "This is what's ahead for you and these are the changes you're going to experience."

Boone: As a math teacher and the dean, how did you see the curriculum change over the years you've been at Reed? What are some of the biggest shifts or things you've seen in the curriculum?

Gray: Oh, I think the whole accountability piece, which is driving assessments and data, that has changed tremendously. There's more testing and more trying to interpret what the tests mean and trying to align the tests with the teaching, so getting to what is a common core. So that a math class at McQueen High School might look the same as a math class at Reed High School, trying to standardize that a little bit more so they're all taking the same tests at the end, the proficiencies in high school, the CRTs, the criterion reference tests, in middle schools, and all the schools are taking those tests so that they can look at the data and try to compare school to school how things are doing. I don't know. We'll see over time how that plays out.

Boone: When you first started teaching, you didn't have that alignment going on? You had a little more control over your own curriculum?

Gray: Yes. In fact, they could be different within the school in two geometry classes. It came down to a teacher's point of emphasis. We had more diversity within the types of

course offerings. There was a course that I did part of my student teaching in, called financial management, and the teacher pretty much had written his own material for it. He was doing things like present value and future value, and he was doing things like credit cards and how you pay down on credit cards, and, of course then you could do that whole thing on a spreadsheet on a computer within seconds, and he was doing it with handheld calculators, going through sixty payments to try to show what that looked like to a student who was paying the minimum on their credit card. A valuable class, but it didn't align with the math curriculum moving toward getting kids ready for college. That course is no longer offered and not offered in the math department. So it's changed. Some of it's for the good and for some, the jury is still out.

Boone: Tell me about the community, what was the relationship of Reed with the surrounding community it was serving and just maybe Sparks in general?

Gray: It's interesting because it opened in '74, and when it first opened, it seemed like it was way out in the middle of nowhere. There were no homes and it almost seemed like you took a dirt road to get to the school. My first experience at Reed was as a basketball player at Carson, and it seemed like it was so far out. By the time I started teaching, there were more homes, weren't too many businesses, and there weren't any businesses around the school. Things didn't much go past Sparks Boulevard. Then it just continued to grow, and now you go up past Vista and out into Spanish Springs.

I think that Reed High School was a well-respected academic and athletic school. I think it was a school that did well in everything and was competitive with some of the best schools in the state.

Boone: So you're at Dilworth now, and you started last year or this year, the beginning of the school year?

Gray: Right.

Boone: It's a STEM Academy. Can you tell us a little bit about what a STEM Academy is?

Gray: STEM Academy is science, technology, engineering, mathematics. So those are the focal points for the school. It's more project-based learning. So kids are actually doing things. They do them in nine-week increments. They work in small groups. They're given a project to work on.

This project that they're doing now is on ballooning, and they're going to be working in conjunction with engineering professors up here at UNR. They're going to be putting things together in a payload that'll be taken up in a balloon up to 100,000 feet so that they can see and experiment with different things and how they react to the temperatures and the air pressures and the radiation at that altitude. They get to design what their payloads will look like. Then they're going to get to send them up and see what that looks like at those altitudes. They can watch their experiment if they want to, or they could just watch the balloon rise into those heights. That's one of the projects that they're working on now.

They've done some different types of projects throughout the year. They're in cores. We do this on Wednesdays, and the whole day is built around their STEM projects on Wednesdays. Then on Monday, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays they go to more regular classes, where they would get their algebra or their eighth-grade math, and their ELA and P.E. and all the rest of those things. But on Wednesdays the day is built around that STEM project or that project-based learning.

Boone: Is this a Sparks-Reno School District program or is this a national program that you've adopted here?

Gray: It's a national project that is still in its early stages, so there's not really a template for it at this point. I think much like the project-based learning, we're doing a project-based learning with the whole STEM thing, so we learn as we go and make changes and modify and redefine. We're constantly assessing where we're at, what we're doing, and how does this fit into the overarching goal.

Boone: What's the educational philosophy behind the STEM movement? Is it this project-based learning?

Gray: I think it's more on a national level, too, but definitely within the community the feeling is that students need to work more in groups, which is what would be expected beyond graduation and college, as you work in groups, you become better problem-solvers and understand how to work collaboratively on projects. It's trying to get kids to work together. If I can boil it down to a real quick point, it's getting kids to work collaboratively together.

Boone: You mentioned your wife worked at Dilworth for quite a few years. Can you maybe give us an idea of what Dilworth is like in that community, how it's grown up over the years and what kind of school it's been?

Gray: She went there in 2000. She'd been Dean of Students at Reed High School, and she went to Dilworth as an assistant principal and did that for five years. Then she was the principal for three years at Dilworth, and then she went to Clayton for a year and retired.

Dilworth opened in 1960, so it's been open for fifty-two years, and like we were talking about Reno, the community has just continued to grow outward. So it's changed. The school, the demographics have changed over the years. Probably some of the more affordable housing is in the Dilworth area. We're a Title I school, which means we have a lot of free and reduced lunch students and we have a high percentage of minority students. That's what the school looks like from a demographic standpoint.

Boone: As a dean, what are some of the issues you've been dealing with this last year? Just generally, how have you been interacting with the student body?

Gray: Well, as a dean you deal with a lot of discipline issues, so those discipline issues are pretty much the same school to school. Some of the tougher ones are when you have kids who are bullying or being bullied. In middle school, it seems like the friendships and

friendship groups change fast, so it's like watching the sands blow. You never know exactly from day to day whose friends with whom, and why or why they're not.

We have, like every school, incidents where kids will have drugs. So we have to deal with that.

There are the fights. I can remember getting in a fight in middle school myself. So I'm not sure what I would've done with me in middle school. I wouldn't have done what the assistant principal did then, I know that.

Boone: Did he have a little more latitude in his punishment?

Gray: I think so. He called us in and gave us a nice lecture. I can't remember exactly what he said, but it was one of those "Don't do it again," deals, and we were back in school the next day. That's not the direction schools go today. I think it'd be hard to find a school where they had a fight and they just said, "Oh, you learned your lesson. See you tomorrow." There are usually suspensions that go with that. I think they're the same issues that we were dealing with at Reed.

Boone: What's been your approach as a dean at Reed and at Dilworth? I mean, how much latitude do you have? Are you pretty restricted by school policy now or is there a certain philosophy or approach you like to take with troubled students or students who are getting into trouble?

Gray: It depends on the nature of what they've done, because there are things that are outlined in school district policy as far as how you can deal with that. There is some consistency with what Swope may be doing with their student and what we're doing with our student, depending on the issue. But there's some latitude in some of the more minor behaviors.

I think you have to start with helping them understand what they did and why it was wrong, and then move to what could you have done differently. "If you had a chance to do this differently this time so that you didn't have this outcome, what would you do differently?" Trying to get them to help understand that there are options, and selecting appropriate options. That's the direction that I go with most of it, and try to get them to talk a little bit about what it is that they're doing, why they did it, and how they could've done it differently.

Boone: Is that similar to your coaching and education experience, where you figure out where everybody's at and try to find the best solution?

Gray: Well, try to treat them as an individual. Try not to just rubber-stamp and send it through. I try to take a little extra time. My hope is that if I take a little extra time, that down the road it saves time and that we don't have to deal with necessarily that same problem again, that they learn something from it.

Boone: As a son of an educator and a student and basketball player and college student, then as a teacher and administrator, what are some of the education issues you think have been pretty consistent over the years or have changed over the years? I mean, you've

been around education pretty much your whole life. What are some of the key things you think would be important for somebody to know about education from mid-century until now?

Gray: I think that the people who get into it and stay in it have to have a passion for being an educator. It's not something that you take as a job; you take it on because it's really important to you in your life to try to make a difference in kids' lives. So I think that's been consistent. I think that of the people who get into education, there are people who get into it and realize, "Whoa, this is a lot of work and this is not necessarily the direction I wanted to go." And they end up getting out of it and going some other direction. But the people who go into it and stay in it have got that passion, and they want to make a difference in kids' lives.

I think there's a lot of internal gratification to that. Not a lot of financial gratification, but a lot of internal gratification. The exciting moments are not so much inside the classroom at that particular time. It's when the kids go on and they come back and they say, "You know, Mr. Gray...."

Not too long ago I had this B.E.S.T. [Business Education Skills Training] Kids dinner. All the middle schools had twenty-five kids that went to this B.E.S.T. Kids that's sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, and I'm there with our Dilworth kids and with our principal. I had an adult come up to me and say, "Mr. Gray, I had you when I was taking math." He said, "You really helped me understand it." He said, "I'm taking a college class now and it's an algebra class." He said, "It's not real hard, but I'm not understanding it as well." He said, "Can I come by and get some help?"

I said, "Sure." So those moments you hang onto. I'll be telling that story forever. [Laughter]

Boone: Let me give you a little hypothetical here. You've been around schools most of your life. Say if you got to be in charge of the Reno, Nevada, school districts and you could pretty much do whatever you want. What programs and policies would you really want to see implemented, and could you do it yourself?

Gray: I think it'd be a simple philosophy like I had in basketball. It would be to help kids find what they're good at and help them try to find what they love and try to do their best at it. I think if everybody who was out there working found something they loved and tried to be the best they could at it, we'd have a nice society. People wouldn't be as stressed out.

I've heard it put by different people, if you find what you love; you never work a day in your life. I think that I'd like to see schools spend more time helping kids find what they love, what they're passionate about, and encourage them to become the best they can be at it. I think we've gotten to a point where we're feeling like, for example, we don't have enough engineers in our own country to fill the engineering positions, and we're hiring people from other countries. So we're trying to force-feed the system to get more people out into the engineering profession. That's just one example.

I think in the meantime, we might be sacrificing a few kids who don't want to follow that. They're not the kids who necessarily love math or they love English. They might be passionate about theater or passionate about band or passionate about art. They

have things that they're passionate about.

It seems like the focus in education is narrowing, and that's concerning to me. I'd like to see us get back to the intentions of going to charter schools and smaller schools. Those are good intentions, but I think some of those kids are missing out on opportunities that large comprehensive high schools have.

Sometimes I do believe that high schools can become too large, kids can get lost in them. They become just a number. But I also think that the opportunities that present themselves, the diversified curriculum that is available in the larger school that you can't have necessarily in a small charter school, I think the intentions were good, but I'm not sure that it's working out the way it was intended, at least from some of the literature I've read. The design of the charter school is not necessarily the reality of the charter school.

I would like to see getting back to more comprehensive high schools that offer real diversified curriculum, and we're trying to reach out to kids in all areas and help them find what it is that they love and what they're passionate about. If we could do that and weave in a little algebra and weave in a little English along the way, all the better.

Boone: You mentioned when you started talking about education, that some people get into it and never realize how much work it is. Can you give us an example what your typical workday as a teacher was and what your typical workday as a dean is, and, how much work there is in it?

Gray: Well, there's the preparation time with teaching, getting the lessons ready, reviewing them, and then actually going out and having the lesson through the day. The eight o'clock bell that starts that first class, or seven-thirty, whatever that time is, until the bell rings at two-thirty or when the school day ends, you're pretty much on stage. It's go time. You're presenting or you're helping guide or you're there with the kids, and it's a lot of energy.

Then there's after school, taking care of the papers, whatever that looks like. It could be reading them in English or correcting them in the math classes or whatever that looks like. Do the assessments and then reevaluating, okay, did they get it, and do I need to go back and try it a different way or try it again or weave it back in somehow? So there is that out-of-school time that I don't think a lot of people see, and that could be on weekends.

With my dean position, I don't know exactly. There's no planning or preparation that really goes into it. It's reacting. I don't know what's going to happen that particular day. I'll start out my day, I'll get there somewhere around seven and take a look at the emails to see if there's something that happened, a teacher had sent something in, or if there's something that I need to be aware of going forward into that day.

Then it's being out and being around in the halls and seeing how things are going, just being a presence and connecting with some of the kids. You try to connect with as many as you can.

Then once the school day starts, it's just whatever rolls into the office until the school day ends, and for us it's at three-thirty and it's cleaning up the paperwork until four or five o'clock. So that's where my day goes, and it could range from simple things like today I was trying to help a student find his backpack, to more complicated things where it might involve school police. You just don't know.

Boone: Could you describe some of the traffic patterns for staff and students in Dilworth? For example, do a lot of the students walk, is there bike riding, pedestrians, the car drop-off? What are the general traffic patterns of a school day?

Gray: We have quite a few students who do walk. We have three buses that come to the school. So when you consider a population, that's not a lot of the student population. We don't have a lot of kids who are coming in on buses. It varies a little bit in the wintertime. We'll see more cars dropping kids off in the wintertime, but quite a few kids walk.

What's a little bit different than Reed is we probably see more kids arriving at school earlier. We do offer a breakfast in the morning, and there are quite a few kids who come and have breakfast. Prater's a busy road, and there are quite a few busy large roads that kids have to cross. They have to cross McCarran. Some kids will cross McCarran, some kids will cross Pyramid. Those are two major roads in the Sparks area, with Prater being an intersecting road that's a major road going east-west.

Boone: From talking to parents or staff members and kids, what are some of the biggest safety issues or concerns in the area?

Gray: When my wife was the principal at Dilworth they had a student who was hit and killed on Pyramid. I think that some of those safety concerns come with the kids crossing some of those major roads.

When we get into the wintertime, the sun is coming up a little later and it's darker or going down earlier and it's dark when kids are leaving school—we have an extended day, ninth period. The normal school day ends at two-thirty and our extended day ends at three-twenty. So if you have kids who are leaving school at three-twenty in the wintertime, it's starting to get a little bit darker. Those are concerns.

Boone: What are some of the big needs in that area for traffic or transportation?

Gray: They've done a nice job with the school zone itself, and I think they've addressed on Pyramid some of the problems with getting across the street there, trying to discourage kids from crossing at other than places that have lights. You don't see that on McCarran much because it's the nature of the way McCarran is laid out between Victorian and Prater, even all the way up to Greenbrae. You pretty much cross on McCarran at the lights, but Pyramid isn't so much that way. There are some of the smaller side streets that kids could be coming out of, and I think more of the kids are using the lights now.

Boone: Do you think any arrangements of lanes for cars or buses should be modified in any way? For example, should there be a simple bike lane—or do you even have buses running down that street?

Gray: We have a bus that goes from Van Meter, which is over by Reed, that comes out of Van Meter and comes down Prater coming from the east going westbound. Then we have a bus that picks up over in the Sparks High School area, and that comes down Prater the other direction. So those are primary busing routes.

Boone: Do you think those routes service students and staff fairly well in the community?

Gray: I think so. As far as I know. Having been my first year there, I haven't spent a whole lot of time looking at the bus routes.

Boone: How about parking in the area? Are there any changes you see that would be beneficial there or is it a pretty good parking situation?

Gray: Parking for the school?

Boone: The school or maybe the surrounding area, too.

Gray: Around the school on Prater there isn't any parking on the street, which is good because you don't have the kids who are going to be darting out behind cars and things like that. I think as far as obstructing cars on Prater and their vision of the students, I think it's pretty visible; kids are pretty visible.

I can't really think of anything offhand that would make it better or easier. We don't really have a street that you can turn off of Prater that connects into another street. There is a street right by the school, but it goes into a cul-de-sac, so cars have to go in and turn around and come back out onto Prater. It would be nice if that went all the way through, but those are homes.

Boone: The RTC [Regional Transportation Commission] study is looking at the whole Fourth Street corridor, but do you spend much time down there? They're looking at car and bus lanes and maybe bike lanes arrangements. What would you like to see in that area? What do you think would be a good arrangement down there like for parking? If you got to make that corridor, especially as you get towards downtown, over again with the new bus station, the Aces games and stuff, what would you like to see done on that part?

Gray: On Fourth Street I don't ride my bike as much as I used to, but I used to ride it quite a bit, and I'd stay off Fourth Street on a bike. There's really not a bike lane and not room for a bike. I think what they've done over on Arlington, condensing that down to one lane in each direction and putting in the bike lane...of course, you're still talking about a road that goes from Reno to Sparks. I don't think it's a highly traveled road where the traffic would be hard to get through or it'd slow people down a whole lot. It'd be nice to see condensing it down and putting a bike lane in there so that more people could bike.

There's not a whole lot of reasons to park on Fourth Street. There are some older motels that are down there, a few businesses, not a lot, but they all have their own parking, so there's not any reason to park on the street itself, but I think a bike lane would be nice in each direction.

Boone: How about the buses that go up and down Fourth Street? Is there anything you'd like to see changed with that or any bus transportation or public transportation issues you

think need to be addressed?

Gray: I like what they've done with the RAPID and putting in fewer stops that are specifically for people that are traveling longer distances, and it'd be nice if they had a few bus lines like that. I don't know how that would work out with the schedule, but it'd be nice if you could get on a bus—at one time you could; I don't know if it's still available—you could get on it at the Nugget and it went out on the freeway and came downtown, so there wasn't a stop.

I have on occasion ridden the buses. It's always eye-opening to see some of either the Reed students or Dilworth students who are bus riders, and where they're going to. We had a Reed student who was going over to Sutro, and that's how he got to Reed and that's how he got to his home; he rode the bus. It's a pretty long way from Reed to Sutro.

We have a student who comes from Sun Valley, and he rides the bus to the downtown station, and then from the downtown station to the Sparks station, and then catches a bus that goes over to Dilworth. I think the first bus he catches is somewhere shortly after six out of Sun Valley. I can't imagine getting on a bus, spending an hour and a half on a bus to get to school. But as far as your question, it'd be nice if there were fewer stops.

Boone: So maybe a RAPID system that goes down Fourth Street like the one that goes down Virginia?

Gray: Right. Since that is a corridor, it'd be nice if they had some light rail or something like that, I guess if we're throwing around money. It all comes down to dollars. It would definitely be nice if they had something like that. Phoenix is a very large area and, of course, San Francisco and those places are very large areas, but there are times when we go to those cities we use not so much their bus system, but their light rail, the Metro trains, or whatever they want to call them, and it's a nice way to get around.

Boone: Is there anything you'd like to add, anything about transportation or education, like I said, or anything?

Gray: No, I think we covered a wide range of things. I hope that I gave you an interesting perspective.

Boone: Very much so. Very much so. Thank you very much.

Gray: Thank you.