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Educator moving on to new job

By Sean Whaley
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Theron L. Swainston has a framed quote in his office that says, "In our business, the bottom line is student achievement." Next to the words is a picture of a boy.

The saying is by Swainston, a reminder to himself that students are the most important part of his job as deputy superintendent of the Clark County School District.

Swainston will be leaving the district by April, on his way to a new job in Saudi Arabia as director of education for the Arabian American Oil Co. He will oversee schools for the children of employees of the oil company.

He and his wife, Lorna, will live in Dhahran, a city on the Persian Gulf. The Swainstons' youngest daughter, Heather, is still in high school and will stay with relatives in Las Vegas.

Swainston said it will be difficult leaving 29 years' worth of friends and family in Las Vegas.

"(And) I will miss my association with my colleagues, colleagues that I have come to respect," he said. "It will be like leaving a large group of friends."

Swainston, 55, began with the school district as a seventh-grade

teacher at John C. Fremont Junior High School in August 1956.

"When you look back over 30 years, you tend to forget the little problems," he said. "I've enjoyed my work and the people I've worked with. I can say I have no regrets about becoming a teacher and getting involved in education."

The Clark County School District was formed in 1955 when all school districts in the state were consolidated. Swainston started work at the district the next year.

"I never really thought of myself as an old-timer," he said. "But then I look around and ask, 'Who's been here longer?'"

Swainston has held several administrative positions in the district, starting as assistant principal at Western High School in 1963. He was principal of Western and then spent 14 years as the head of the elementary education department. He was appointed deputy superintendent, a new position, in 1984.

Swainston said he has mixed emotions about retiring from the district.

"I must have counseled hundreds of people as they retired, talking about the retirement system and how it isn't so bad," he said. "It's a little different signing my name on the

papers."

Swainston said his biggest influence in the district was in elementary education. During his tenure, the curriculum was standardized, so teachers knew what was required of students in each subject and at each grade level. His department also developed testing to determine if the goals had been met.

In the past 18 months, Swainston has been working to computerize information so teachers can use computers for testing and other purposes.

"We've used computers for some time in payroll and other departments, but I thought it was time to apply them to instruction," he said.

In other areas, Swainston said the district faces a problem with the student dropout rate and the number of school days many students miss. Students are allowed to miss 18 days a semester, approximately one day a week, without penalty.

"I am still amazed at parents who allow their students to miss almost the maximum number of days," Swainston said.

Seeing abused or neglected children, or children who have their opportunities narrowed because of selfish parents, is an aspect of education that bothers Swainston.

And seeing educators who do not work toward improving education for children also bothers Swainston.

"Teachers, administrators and others who work closely with children seem to develop a close relationship with them," he said. "They become defensive, protective of children. Seeing someone working in the other direction is disturbing."

Nevertheless, Swainston said he is proud of the district.

"The Clark County School District can hold its head high with any other school district in the country," he said.

A major reason for that, Swainston said, is the educators working for the district.

To educate students to their maximum potential, he said, the best teachers in the country are needed. And, he said, the best principals are needed to run the schools and motivate those teachers.

Swainston said he did not plan to work in Saudi Arabia when he made his plans to retire.

"I had planned to retire from the district, but I thought I was too young to quit work," he said. "I figured something would come along. This offer just came along at the right time."



Jim Laurie/Review-Journal

FINAL DAYS - After 29 years with the Clark County School District, Theron Swainston will be leaving family and friends in April to begin a new job in Saudi Arabia.

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