

SCENARIO: SILVERADO-KENO COUNTY

THE AREA

Silverado is a rapidly growing Sun Belt city with a booming resort and convention economy, supplemented in recent years by growth in financial services and software engineering.

The city has become a destination for young families thanks to its fine weather, reasonable housing prices and strong job market. Silverado's population has surged from roughly 280,000 in 1990 to 476,000 in 2000 to a 2004 estimate of 518,000.

Keno County, of which Silverado is the county seat, has an estimated population of 1.7 million, up from 465,000 in 1980 and 880,000 in 1990 – making it one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. The population is roughly 65 percent white/Anglo, 21 percent Latino, 9 percent black, 4 percent Asian and 1 percent Native American.

And it is a young population: 32 percent of households have school-age children.

The swiftest growth has occurred in sprawling suburbs to the north and west of the city; the east side of the city is bounded by a large lake, which has limited growth. The growth has been largely unplanned and developer-driven – hilly, gated subdivisions separated by busy connector roads lined with strip malls and power centers. Heavy freeway traffic, rare in the area 15 years ago, has become a staple of workplace laments. With traffic have come air quality problems; Keno County is an EPA non-attainment area for smog.

The focal point of Silverado's economy remains its casino resorts, hotels and convention center; 37 percent of Keno County residents work in the hospitality industry.

The military is also a major employer, with an Air Force base, Army base and a naval research center in Keno County.

THE SCHOOLS

The public schools are run by Keno County, which has a nine-member elected school board.

Keno County has catapulted in one decade from 18th to fifth in size among American public school districts. This has spurred a frenetic school building program, which has consumed district officials, strained taxpayers' patience and, in the eyes of some critics, set up a dog-chasing-its-tail syndrome of new schools spawning more outward sprawl, causing demand for new schools.

In the 2004-2005 school years, Keno County had 288 schools serving 281,075 students. The public school population has a significantly higher percentage of minorities than the county population at large: It is 46 percent white, 32 percent Hispanic, 14 percent black. Every year, the cohort of new students includes higher percentages of minorities, including students for whom English is a second language. Minority students tend to be clustered in the older schools inside Silverado proper - though *older* in this Sun Belt boom town tends to mean "built before 1980."

A \$3.5 billion school construction bond, passed in 1998 and funded through a hike in hotel, real estate transfer and property taxes, is just about exhausted. The bond issue had been advertised as paying for 72 new schools. Because of high returns on bond proceeds, high yields from the new taxes and efficient management, the district was able to build 90 schools.

But enrollment is projected to increase by 12,000 to 14,000 pupils every year for the rest of the decade. The district knows a new bond issue is needed, but is reluctant to go to voters for approval of an even larger bond issue so soon after the last one. Another obstacle is a 3 percent annual cap on residential property tax bills enacted by the state last year.

Unable to keep pace with enrollment despite the frenetic building program, the district has placed more than half of its schools on a 12-month school calendar.

Keno County's management of the capital program is widely praised; a citizen review commission was set up as a watchdog and adviser; district officials and the citizen panel created a cooperative relationship seen as contributing to the lack of waste and delay in building schools.

District officials in charge of the capital program believe one key to its success was their use of three prototype programs and designs for new schools – one for high schools, one for middle schools, one for elementaries. This uniformity saved on design fees and enabled contractors familiar with the prototype designs to build more cheaply.

The district standards were:

Elementary: Grades K-5 -725 students for a nine-month calendar; 925 for year-round. 62,500 square feet on a 12-acre site; one-story construction, Dryvit on steel studs, with a K-2 wing and and 3-5 wing spreading in opposite directions from a central area with foyer, offices and all-purpose room.

Middle school: grades 6-8, 1,700 students for a nine-month calendar; 2,080 students for yearround; 149,000 square feet on a 20-acre site; prefabricated, cement-based panels on steel frame; two-story design, with science labs, library, gym, auditorium and offices on one side of a central foyer, classrooms in the other wing.

High Schools: 2,700 students on a nine-month calendar; 292,000 square feet on a 40-acre site. Same construction materials and base design as the middle schools.

THE CHALLENGE

The district has a series of tough, cascading decisions to make in a short time. Despite praise for the efficiency of the capital program, a number of voices in the community have been raising concerns about its path.

Some civic leaders worried about the toll that sprawl growth at the desert edges of the metro areas is exacting on air quality, water supplies and traffic and point to research suggesting that school building can fuel sprawl.

Many parents are unhappy about year-round calendars, reminding the district that it promised that the building program begun in 1998 would end that practice. But some educators in the district are noting that schools with full-year calendars are showing better academic achievement than nine-month schools – particularly those that serve high minority populations in Silverado.

Despite those upbeat test scores in some schools inside Silverado, community activists in the city have begun to complain that some of the older schools there have been shortchanged on maintenance and technology so that new schools with better amenities can be built on the metro edge. The activists, noting the lack of recreational and civic spaces in some Silverado neighborhoods, complain that schools are too often closed and off-limits to their neighborhoods. Also, inside the city, a few cases have arisen of “sick” schools whose HVAC systems have been blamed for student illnesses and aggravation of asthmatic conditions. Teachers complain that some schools are sited so that the afternoon sun makes classroom temperatures intolerable, despite air conditioning.

And a report by professors at the state university in Silverado, sought and paid for by a local foundation, has raised serious concerns about the impact that the standard school designs used by Keno County for the last 10 years have on learning and teaching styles. The report, which made front page news, questioned the mandated school sizes, what it called the “factory-style” arrangement of traditional classrooms and a lack of spaces for independent and

collaborative learning in the high schools. A new superintendent, hired last year, says he agrees with many of the findings.

What's more, the state's cap on residential property taxes raises questions about whether new development and growth in tourism will throw off enough revenue to finance a bond issue of the size the district contemplates.

Still, the Keno County school district has no choice about finding some place to put the wave of new students arriving each year.

YOUR WORK TODAY

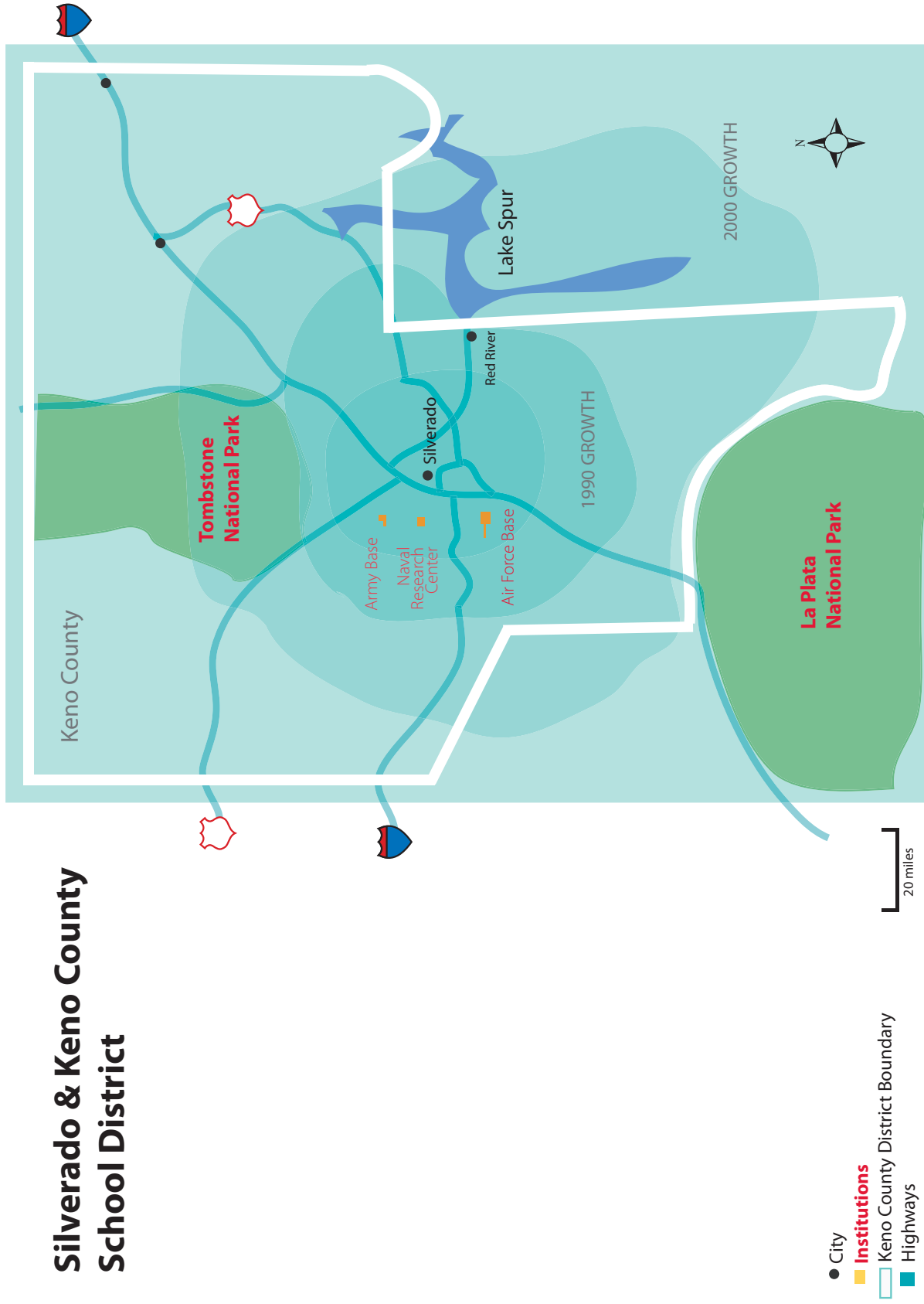
Imagine that you collectively are a Keno County citizen advisory commission, chosen for your expertise in education, planning, design, construction and finance, and your civic spirit. Here are some of the main challenges you need to work on; you may see others you'll want to add to the list:

- Given the concerns over Keno County's rising problems of sprawl, traffic, pollution and income segregation, should the school district adjust in any way its strategy for when and where to build new schools?
- Should any changes be made in the district's design prototype strategy, given the concerns raised over how design and materials in Keno County schools may be affecting educational outcomes?
- What could the school district do to address the equity concerns and community needs of residents in the urban core?
- What steps might Keno County schools take, in terms of public process, fiscal approach or alternative approaches to adding classroom space, to align its school facilities needs with taxpayers' willingness to pay?

For each of these challenges, you can suggest several possible strategies or solutions. Do not get hung up seeking the one perfect solution. With each suggested solution, be honest and clear about the tradeoffs it entails. And wherever possible, offer examples of real places where your ideas have been tried successfully.

Good luck. Have fun. Be creative. In talking through this scenario, please do not change any of its basic facts, but feel free to go beyond the stated situation to introduce ideas or players who could help bring about a good result – as long as the additions are realistic.

Silverado & Keno County School District



Keno County District Community Facts

	This District
Adult Education Levels	2004
Adults with a High School Diploma (%)	79.5
Adults with a Bachelor's Degree (%)	17.4
Household Characteristics	
Number of Households	512,253
Single-Parent Households with Children (%)	11.7
Income and Wealth (\$)	
Median Household Income	49,401
Income Per Person	23,574
Median Home Value	131,948
Household Income Distribution (%)	
Less than \$15,000	11.0
\$15,000-\$29,999	16.5
\$30,000-\$49,999	23.2
\$50,000-\$74,999	21.6
\$75,000-\$99,999	13.0
\$100,000-\$149,999	9.9
\$150,000 or More	4.8
Population	
Population	1,576,541
Population Density	173.9
Median Age	35
Population Distribution by Age (%)	
4 Years or Younger	7.6
5-19 Years	21.4
20-44 Years	36.7
45-64 Years	23.2
65 Years or Older	11.3
Ethnicity Facts	
White persons, percent	71.6%
Black or African American persons, percent	9.1%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent	0.8%
Asian persons, percent	5.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, percent	0.5%
Persons reporting some other race, percent	8.6%
Persons reporting two or more races, percent	4.2%
White persons, not of Hispanic/Latino origin, percent	60.2%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent	22.0%
Foreign born persons, percent	18.0%
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+	26.0%
Education Facts	
High school graduates, percent of persons age 25+	79.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher, pct of persons age 25+	17.3%

Keno County School District Facts

	District
Enrollment of Racial/Ethnic Groups	
White (%)	45.9
Black (%)	13.9
Hispanic (%)	31.8
Asian/Pacific Islander (%)	7.4
American Indian/Alaska Native (%)	0.8
Enrollment of Students with Special Needs	
Economically Disadvantaged (% receiving free lunch)	35.2
English Language Learners (%)	18.3
Enrollment Distribution by Gender	
Female (%)	48.7
Male (%)	51.3
Enrollment Distribution by Grade	
Pre-K (%)	0.6
Kindergarten (%)	7.6
Grade 1 (%)	8.1
Grade 2 (%)	8.3
Grade 3 (%)	8.3
Grade 4 (%)	8.3
Grade 5 (%)	8.3
Grade 6 (%)	8.5
Grade 7 (%)	8.2
Grade 8 (%)	7.8
Grade 9 (%)	8.6
Grade 10 (%)	7.1
Grade 11 (%)	5.3
Grade 12 (%)	4.7
Ungraded (%)	0.2
How Students Performed on State Reading Tests	
	2004
Grade 3 Reading Proficiency (%)	76.0
Grade 5 Reading Proficiency (%)	61.0
Grade 8 Reading Proficiency (%)	80.0
Grade 10 Reading Proficiency (%)	67.0
How Students Performed on State Math Tests	
Grade 3 Math Proficiency (%)	58.0
Grade 5 Math Proficiency (%)	69.0
Grade 8 Math Proficiency (%)	81.0
Grade 10 Math Proficiency (%)	87.0
How Students Performed on State Writing Tests	
Grade 4 Writing Proficiency (%)	78
Grade 6 Writing Proficiency (%)	80
Grade 8 Writing Proficiency (%)	80
Grade 10 Writing Proficiency (%)	90
School Statistics	
Number of Schools	312
Number of Students	267,894