



October 27, 2010

Poudre School District Board of Education Members  
2407 LaPorte Avenue, 80521  
Fort Collins CO 80521

RE: Opposition to Proposed Closure of Lopez Elementary School

Dear Board Members:

I believe that the sentiments expressed at the meeting last night made it clear to the school board that our community does not want any school closed and hopes that another option be placed on the table. Dr. Johnson's statement about the cost savings of \$375,000.00 per school closure, and that Poudre School District would not be able to save enough unless they shut down 15 schools, was a prophetic statement. On the other hand, the statement by Director Hayes seemed to echo a different tone. At the cost of sounding irreverent, I would like to state a point that seems to have eluded Director Hayes. Everyone in the country understands that the Great Global Recession has stemmed from inflated home prices and the reliance upon property taxes to pay for many state and local government activities. With the devaluation of property, a cycle has begun that requires cuts because the tax basis no longer exists. This includes Poudre School District along with every other school district in Colorado.

Director Hayes statement last night of "...I cannot be as concerned with property values as I am about families and their family's school. I wish I could be but I am not..." was a statement that seemed rather misinformed. At the very least, there were 4 out of 11 speakers last night who mentioned that they were concerned with losing value in their homes and neighborhoods as a whole due to the closure of their neighborhood's school. Of those individuals, the gentleman from Irish who was the first speaker of the evening quoted, "It has been shown that a closure of a neighborhood school could decrease the home values in the area by as much as 10 percent..." The statement that Director Hayes made last night seemed to show a disconnect between what the community experiences and what the Board of Education perceives to be factual. I believe that the choice to maintain property values, along with keeping our local neighborhood schools open and operating as is, is the only option and would address Director Hayes' concerns about families and their family schools.

Closure of a school should be done as a VERY LAST resort, but it seems to be high on the priority list for the Board's consideration. In my opinion, the loss of a school should only be realized if and when the community surrounding the school no longer needs a school there. (Example: you have a school in a retirement community that once used to be a thriving family neighborhood.) While the cost of keeping facilities/schools open is a large expense to the district, I would guess that the biggest expense the district has is in personnel. Furlough days were suggested last night by Dr. Johnson at a savings of \$700,000.00. The furlough days double the expected savings from a single facility closure, but I believe the savings are even greater when you consider the loss in value that will impact the community who loses its neighborhood school, thus impacting every child in the district due to the loss in the value of homes via the lost tax basis for Poudre School District as a whole.

As a community, I believe that multiple solutions will be found and school closure does not need to be realized. In the recent national rankings for best places to live in America, Fort Collins has dropped to #6 after being a 2 year recipient of # 1 and #2 places to live. The article stated that the reason for this was due to our decline in state school systems' funding ability. A slip from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> is significant when you consider the impact our schools have on our local economy. If you looked at the web of economic factors as to why a city does well or fails, at the heart would be the quality of education received. I am sure this point is nothing new to the board, thus the reason that tough decisions are called for to ensure that the quality of education continues to be at or above the state and national level.

That said if the board produces a battle plan that is straight forward and presented in simple numbers, the community will know exactly what type of battle it is facing. How much does Irish cost to stay afloat? How about Lopez, Putnam, Beattie... all the schools on the list must have a dollar amount in expenses that is not being met by the revenue received to keep the school afloat. This results in making fiscally responsible decisions with regard to its closure or its remaining open. The community could make an informed decision as to how to proceed and bear a portion of the burden that the Board now carries solely on its shoulders. Will this raise concerns as to the affluence of a neighborhood should one school raise enough money while another one does not? Yes. At the same time, if each school was behind X number of dollars and that translated into XX dollars per student that needs to be raised to ensure the continued existence of the school, it would help the residents understand the budget and your dilemma as a board. Simple numbers are hard to devise, but the benefit would be huge and this is one suggestion to ensure community support over community backlash to "poor" decision making.

With the information in the right hands, the schools' future could be placed squarely on the shoulders of the people who want their neighborhood school to remain open. Perhaps the figure is so large that there is no possible way a fundraiser could handle it, combined with a sponsorship from a local company(s), combined with donations received from all home closings, combined with mill-levy override, combined with the furlough days, combined with individual donations to PSD, etc., etc. To ensure that Fort Collins continues to progress forward, information in plain language that all concerned residents can understand is the only way to ensure that the community knows the true battle we all face with regard to education. If the total is 12 million dollars then that translates roughly to \$86.52 per person living within the City of Fort Collins to fill the gap. Compare that number with a loss of say 1000 homes in an area at a median price of \$225,000.00; losing 10 % value would translate in to a cumulative loss of \$22.5 million dollars in lost tax base, translated into mills of XX number of dollars after the passage of the mill-levy override.

Simply stated, the loss of a school will have bigger effects on the community as a whole, including the entire Poudre School District. The Board must be concerned with property values if they do not want to affect every child since the budget is devised from a tax basis. A focus away from property values will not only tear apart a community, thus hurting families, but will also create a cycle that will force a loss in tax revenue from all children who attend Poudre School District.

I urge the Board to remove school closure from the primary cost savings plan, and push to have simple, easy numbers distributed to the communities of all schools affected by closure. The board will soon create a self-fulfilling prophecy that will automatically shut down schools if parents believe that regardless of their input and concerns, their school is destined for closure. This idea is more powerful than any words that the Board can muster and it requires action to dictate that our schools are safe from the chopping block.

Thank you for your time and patience. Your service is not always recognized, but I appreciate the gravity with which you all listen to the community's heartfelt concerns and integrate those concerns into your policy.

Sincerely,



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