



October 13, 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:

Budget Solutions

When speaking at the board meeting on October 12, 2010, I noticed there was enough tension in the room you could cut it with a knife. The Board was excited about the changes happening in the district and the citizens were upset, mainly those citizens who are concerned about the closure of our neighborhood schools.

I understand better now the issue that you deal with everyday when having to weigh the cost benefit ratio of closing one school, when its resources could be better utilized in another school. You are presented with an impossible task in its current form of, "How do we change the district for the better while utilizing district resources as efficiently as possible, while continuing to keep the level of education at past year's levels or above, without having to shut down a school. We only have X amount of money, but we have XXXXX number of expenses. How do we do it?" Essentially, the Board must determine how to do the same or better things year after year, but with fewer resources. This is an equation that may be easier to solve than we may think. I request that you consider the following.

The District has very limited resources, but has the Board considered **all** the options? I would ask that you look at the closure of any school very carefully, only proceeding if **all** other options have failed. I believe that the closure of a neighborhood school creates a domino effect causing a dip in home values. Residents of Fort Collins cannot afford another dip in home prices or the economic pinch PSD is feeling right now will only get worse. After all, a dip in home prices will only create and continue a never ending circle of declining property values,

translating into less tax revenue, and in turn causing PSD to continue cutting and slashing the bottom line. Teaching positions to be cut, schools to be closed, administrators lost and the education of our children at risk, results in our city's future at risk.

I offer the following idea for filling the massive deficit projected by PSD. The district should turn to private, local and even national businesses to find alternative sources of revenue to fill the gap left by the cuts in school funding from the State of Colorado. Last year, I mentioned at a board meeting that PSD should put signs on the side of school buses, have a business dedicated on signs to computer labs, and place banners up in cafeterias promoting agricultural and food related businesses. Essentially, advertise companies who could gain from the exposure. In turn, our schools would gain from monies earned via advertising of these companies. Imagine having Chiquita Bananas over the Cafeteria Line, along with Sam's Club by the vending machines. The district can help encourage people to drink more milk by talking to the National Association of Dairy Farmers to promote the sales of milk as they check out of the cafeteria. The possibilities are endless and could put a big dent in the lack of funding from public tax dollars that PSD is feeling right now.

As it turns out, districts and states across the country have had to turn to such methods and are now in the black or breaking even. Private businesses have made up for massive budget deficits in local and state budgets across the country. For example, State Farm Insurance is advertising with the Department of Transportation in Georgia in their HERO program. They pay \$1.7 million a year to put their name on state vehicles that travel along Highway 86. The program was designed to assist motorists who are stranded alongside Atlanta's main highway. When people need assistance on Highway 86, they see a state worker get out of a big yellow rescue truck, with Georgia emblems and slogans. The vehicle is obviously a state vehicle, but they also see "State Farm Insurance" and their slogan "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there." I know I would notice the insurance slogan and be thankful, thus making me want to use their services. It is a win-win for the State of Georgia and for State Farm Insurance. On a side note, the HERO program is relied upon by drivers but was at the risk of being cut by the State of Georgia facing HUGE budget deficits. It used to cost the State of Georgia money, but not anymore, thanks to private business and out of the box thinking.

I can think of several companies in town who would love to advertise in schools, on school buses and even on PSD service vehicles, and if asked, I'll bet they would jump at the opportunity. A simple pitch line to companies in Fort Collins and national companies could be as simple as: "Hello, I am from Poudre School District, and we need your business. How would you like to help keep schools open, athletic events continued, teachers employed and so much more, just by advertising with dollars you already were going to spend. Our school buses are seen by as many people if not more than Fort Collins' local municipal Transport buses and our service vehicles travel throughout Fort Collins on a daily basis. PSD can be a big push in a down economy for your business by helping you reach the clientele, all while you help us keep our children's future bright. We need the help, you need the customers, let's do business."

The business will benefit because their advertising with PSD can be considered a tax write-off or be just like any other advertising expense they get to choose. The catch, however, is that the business will know they are doing a good thing by helping kids, schools and a

community, while reaping the rewards of effective advertising. By reaching out to Otter Box, HP, State Farm, Intel, Verizon, Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, NFL, United Health Care, Realtors, Hair Salons, Wal-mart....along with other various companies, PSD presents them the opportunity to advertise effectively while having the ability to help our kids. PSD will have money flowing **into** the district versus out of the district, and everyone wins. Even though PSD is 13th in line for the lowest amount of money received from the State of Colorado, Colorado deficits would no longer severely affect the district if we think outside the box and consider options that only the private sector can offer. We would be able to support ourselves more than rely on the already over-extended State of Colorado.

We need to use out of the box thinking right now to ensure that our children and our city continue to be the best it can be. By doing this we, as a community, will be able to flourish in a very difficult economic environment. I don't know if I am preaching to the choir here, but I have not heard of any of these or better ideas being tossed around or considered. I would hope that we as a community would think outside the box for solutions to our budget crises, before we look in the box to see where we should cut, slash and destroy in our children's educational futures. If we turn to the immediate and simple answers of closing a school to save money, then we have all have failed. I would hope that you as an individual and as a Board could stand before the community and say "we did everything we could think of, but now we are out of options, we must close a school." I can see a bright future for PSD and if we look to our community for support, utilizing government monies effectively but also including private businesses to assist in covering expenses. PSD could excel in more areas and make our children's future that much brighter. To do this, you must think outside the box and doing so will allow everyone to win, most importantly our children.

Issues with Transparency

Mr. Skutchan, who is the Executive Vice President of the Fort Collins Board of Realtors, brought to light the heart of the issue when he mentioned transparency at the October 12, 2010 district board meeting. I know that the Coloradoan ran an article on the front page about a month ago about the budget deficit and the potential for school closures throughout PSD. The cover story created the initial murmurs making my phone ring with questions about why Lopez was once again on the chopping block. I have to say, I was a bit dumbfounded. I tried to calm people's fears with logic and explanations, but to no avail.

If PSD continues to target Lopez, placing the school on the short list for closure, PSD will get its way and Lopez will close. As of right now, it appears at first glance that there are ulterior motives afoot, because for the second year in a row, Lopez is perhaps closing. Whether that is because PSD and Dr. Wilson want a STEM High School still, or they plan on repurposing Lopez for some other experiment, we as a community don't want our perfectly good school to close.

At the center of the controversy, the community that surrounds Lopez Elementary School is losing its faith in the Board of Education, our Superintendent and PSD as a governing body. This all is due to the apparent continued targeting of Lopez for closure year after year. We

understand that there are other schools on the short list for closure, but the huge disparity between the districts 2005 projection numbers and the numbers the district currently has for the next three years concerning active enrollment, makes us as a community believe that there is a bulls-eye on our school. When you consider the facts, 21% of students choose to not attend Lopez, while 24% of students from other areas in Fort Collins choose Lopez as their elementary school. Lopez also has an average enrollment of 373 students for the last 2 years, coupled with an average of 480 students the three years prior, Lopez is ahead in the main areas of attendance and school of choice decisions that the small school study considers.

Looking at the number of kids who live within the active enrollment boundary that encompasses Lopez, we have **365** students for this year, next year and the year after that. This number is provided by PSD numbers pertaining to active enrollment and demographics of the neighborhoods surrounding Lopez. However, according to published PSD numbers from the 2005 study they state that Lopez will have **125 less** students than that. Which number is true? From a community perspective, we see two very different numbers and what appears to be a conscious decision by PSD to select the lower of two numbers to justify closure of an above average school. I would request that the Board supply the Save Lopez Community Action Group the **real** statistics that are being used so our statistician may review the data sets and refute the claims stated by the 2005 study to prove to the Board that the number of students who currently attend Lopez will not decrease by 125 students in two years. That said I believe that the 2005 study should be thrown out entirely and the district's enrollment numbers should be utilized in determining the real number of students for Lopez's future along with all other schools targeted for closure. The survey seems to have some severe issues; after all, it is six years old. Where were you six years ago? I know for myself, if I were to use six year old data, I would be poor, single and just getting out of High School. The point is six years is a long time to study demographics and social ebb and flow in a neighborhood that is 40% to 50% rentals. From my experience, the students have originated from all over our nation. Fort Collins is attracting people and in large part that is thanks to the excellence the PSD has demonstrated year after year. I personally believe that a clerical error has been made by placing Lopez on the school closure list and not a conspiracy theory about how Dr. Wilson and the Board of Education want to shut down Lopez. With the idea in mind that an error has been made, I cannot sit back and watch Lopez lose another 25 students to the massive rumor mill that is naturally created by what appears to be the specific targeting of Lopez by PSD. I request a statement be sent to the Principal of Lopez explaining that the school is no longer considered a "Small School" and has been removed from the small school closure list. He in turn will send letters home to parents calming their fears and preventing the loss of a single student.

After all, last year's loss of 25 students and this year's gain of 33 students offset one another, but imagine if we had not lost a single student last year because of PSD's STEM High School proposal. Lopez would have been 400+ students by now. I don't think it would have mattered though because PSD is basing the decision to close Lopez on a study in 2005. We could be at a 1000 students, and the study would still say we are only going to be around 250 or so. This example only demonstrates further why this study from 2005 should not be used to determine the fate of Lopez or any other school targeted for closure.

I hope that you and the Board will write a letter to the public stating that Lopez is no longer on the list of possible closure and the district has reviewed **current**, factual data to determine if a school is in fact underutilized. At that point, I hope PSD allows Lopez to do business as usual (usual being excellence) and you will see a medium sized school grow into a better, larger school. Lopez should be allowed to grow and flourish without the threat of yearly closure by the District.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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