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Dear Corbett School Board,

Until the below issues are candidly and carefully addressed and resolved it does not feel like we will all be able to move forward in any meaningful or healthy way as a community in regards to CSD. The lack of trust between many in the community and the schools is a very real problem now. This stems from many different issues and depending on who you speak with there are also many different degrees of alarm. Below is a recap of some of what we feel are some of the most important and most mentioned areas of concern by people in regards to CSD.

### **IDENTITY**

So who are we? Where do we want to go? How are we going to get there? Who are we going to serve? I guess I would challenge that we need to have a clear idea and then be innovative AND inclusive to those hesitant to making changes or that need their concerns to be addressed.

If there is a sense of being left behind, left out, ignored ( or worse ) then progress is going to be a rough road for our schools and the community will end up suffering greater divides. I believe, to some extent, that is where we are today in Corbett and what is actively happening.

Are there going to be people in the extreme on either end? Sure. Absolutely. ( Some people will never believe CSD is going to do anything right and won't admit it when they do and there will be those that believe CSD could never do anything wrong, and won't admit when they do. ) The majority of us out here live somewhere in between those extremes.

I would say we are identity challenged. People's perception of what's happening ( not happening ) in Corbett at CSD varies. It would seem very appropriate for CSD to define where we are headed as a school district so that we can all either agree or agree to disagree or have that conversation at least before taking the next step.

This is ESPECIALLY true in the move to take out a large loan in the midst of funding crisis ( interest free or not ) and to move more students into our district and/or into the Springdale School. Changing the landscape of our community and swelling our school district by 600 out of district students is something that will be hard to undo once done.

### **SCHOOL BOARD**

It might have been appropriate for the board to campaign for the last levy if they truly believed in the need, but that didn't happen. Some of this was because, apparently, it was a surprise to at least some of them that we even needed a levy. ( To which many people wonder how they didn't know...though we did show a carry forward only a few months before the levy was put on the ballot. ) Even without the glitch, as Randy points out, we were going to be short. Very short it turns out. His information makes it clear they should have known it was coming. They just were holding out hope for a miracle I guess.

Some of the board's lack of motivation in pushing the levy, I am sure, was because board members knew they would have to face uncomfortable resistance to the idea of more taxes by long time friends and community members. ( Or believed it was a futile attempt so why put their neck out? ) Regardless, the levy failed and while I don't blame the school board for the failure, it is obvious to me that a school board could do better to help the community understand the issues. ( Of course if the school board doesn't truly understand the issues - but is only doing what someone else tells them is true, without getting fair and accurate information for the other side of the coin - then this is a sign of a larger problem. )

Going to board meetings is always recommended if you have a concern or question, and yet many that have put in their time and efforts by writing letters, going and trying to follow the dots have burned out before any resolution or answer is found. ( It is also now known that many of these concerns were never made as part of the formal record - because they didn't ask for those comments to be made part of the record. ) On the other hand positive comments and letters were added to the record in our board minutes. This is another area that doesn't help the trust issues.

As more parents and community members voice the same concerns and still no answers come, an *us vs. them*

mentality is bound to have sprung to life. Some are angry... some are shutting down and getting out of the conversation completely. The community as a whole has probably reached a tipping point with the reality of what these meetings actually provide them. Most people agree it is a spectator sport with a courtesy period to allow people 3 minutes of floor time.

In the end though, there is no meaningful dialogue and the consensus is that it has become a waste of time to go to board meetings because the board ( most of the board ) never addresses or responds to people or their questions. Randy can only do so much to help answer questions and the district can't afford a community relations director ( though could really use one... ) Maybe it is time for a Citizen advisory committee? At the least, each school board member should be very open and honest as to where they want to see the district in five years so the community can evaluate and consider if those goals align with or against their own given all of the information.

### **CHARTER**

We have a Charter School today in large part because we were told it was the only way to keep us financially stable and to make sure that kids that had always attended Corbett could continue to when the inter-district transfers were halted. Now there is an even bigger funding crisis and many feel suspicious of the talk about proceeding with even more out of district students, more "Charter" and possibly even taking out loans to fund old buildings to be used for more Charter. If the community feels forced ( rightly or wrongly ) into any one direction I think it will be a critical mis-step by CSD.

### **WHAT TO DO AND OUR BUDGET**

Hoping for the passage of a levy is probably futile in Corbett right now. Simply wanting the way schools are funded to change is not going to pay our bills either, although I do agree our national priorities need a reset. So we are left with options that all have their pros and cons and depending on who you talk to the enthusiasm is north to south on each idea.

To be clear, we have been deficit spending for a long time in the CSD. This funding crisis should not have been a surprise to those managing the money or paying attention. The former superintendent told our budget committee that they were only there because they were required by law to have a budget committee and that regardless of their recommendations, they ( the school & school board ) would do what it wanted. These statements were witnessed and confirmed to and this created obvious resentment and division over the years.

Our financials are concerning. Our audits point to a lack of internal controls and oversight over the years. There are more questions than answers today when it comes to how we spend money as a school district. The district office 'filing system' is a problem, there are very large line item dollars in our budget that can not be accounted for or not easily.

This all makes it hard for the community to think throwing money at a problem is actually going to solve things. ( Whether through levies, loans or charters etc. ) Money doesn't solve money problems and this will be a huge stumbling block for the district until appropriate resources and time is given to putting everything straight, forming a plan and then moving forward in a more open and transparent manner.

### **INDEPENDENT AUDIT**

Our school board should be responsible to our community and for accountability sake, we should have an independent investigation ( line by line ) into our past years budgets to find out where funds are going and how. ( There are too many open questions as to how CSD is spending or our relationship with the Charter School. ) We should be able to provide a very clear view of what the actual costs to our district are including those involved with the Charter School. There should not be a feeling that those asking these questions are somehow trying to cause problems or are being unreasonable. As we understand it, there are plenty of questions that seemingly can not be answered and that includes larger line item dollars that would make a huge difference in where we are today financially.

### **COMMUNICATION**

If nothing else, CSD has done a poor job sharing with the community the reality of cuts already absorbed over the years and the subsequent financial emergency we can no longer out run. We agree with Randy Trani on this 100%. Perhaps if this had been addressed in the newsletters sent home over the years it wouldn't seem like such a surprise to so many people that we needed a Charter to keep us afloat. ( And then when one Charter didn't do it, why the idea of asking for more Charters or bigger Charters or all Charters is not going to be met with open arms. )

Altruism can be an annoying concept to people, especially those that have had bad experiences with CSD. I am still hopeful though that we all, in essence, can agree we want the same things for not only our own children – but all the children in our community.

CSD is at a crossroads and we really want the next step to be one we take working together and not one that divides us further. Bruce and I think there are ideas out there that can move us to a more inclusive and productive place but it will take a clear vision of identity and effort by CSD and the school board to actually address and set policy on recurring problem issues as well as work WITH community members as to what they want and need from CSD.

If CSD's school board goes 'full steam ahead' into the Springdale School and adds more Charters etc. without addressing the above issues, this will just be another sign to many in the community that the schools are marching Corbett along to a private agenda and has no real regard for the changes more and more kids coming into our area will have.

Better utilizing the building(s) and assets we have already in the district or community for evening/weekend/even possibly year round schooling options seems more responsible vs. taking out loans to move in more out of district than district kids. ( I realize there is a 'killing two birds with one stone' frame of thought as to the Springdale School but personally I am just not sure when you are this far in debt...that taking on more debt is a responsible answer. ) I would like to see other options explored or at the very least a better definition of the plans for the School in Springdale and the future of CSD.

Thanks for your time.

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