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Town Hall Recap

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BOE Recap of Town Hall Meeting

To Parents/Guardians, Staff, and Community Members

The Elizabeth School Board hosted a Town Hall Meeting on May 12 here are the highlights.

Approximately 65 community members participated in The Elizabeth Schools Town Hall meeting on the Financial State of the District. The panel of presenters and for the Q&A included Vice President of the Board Chip Swan, Assistant Secretary/Treasurer of the Board Dee Lindsey, Superintendent Douglas Bissonette, and Chief Financial Officer Ron Patera. Other panelists included Andrea Hei Co-Chair & Founder of the Citizen Impact Committee who provided a parent perspective, Marilyn Travis a 25-year district employee provided a teacher perspective, and Gav Houston EHS student and member of the track and wrestling team provided a student perspective. Deb Spenceley, Board President, facilitated the meeting. Board members Chris Richardson and Carol Hinds were also present and engaged with the participants at various stages of the Town Hall.

All presenters shared information about the financial state of the district, the budget challenges, the significant reduction of state funding, and the impact on staff and students.

The Elizabeth School District's state funding was decreased by \$3.1 million this year and \$10 million over the past four years. Elizabeth Schools is the second to lowest funded district in Colorado – 177 out of 178 – when local, state and federal funding sources are calculated together. Additionally, Colorado ranks 45 out of 50 in education spending.

Due to these state decreases in funding the school district has made painful budget cuts, while trying to minimize the impact in the classrooms as much as possible. Staff and teachers were under a salary freeze for three years and the district has been spending down reserves. Due to the budget cuts the district had to defer maintenance and facilities improvement, and investments in technology.

The district went to voters twice in the past 12 years for a mill levy override, and both initiatives failed, and in the last election the district once again went to voters for a bond measure to address the critical and urgent infrastructure needs, and this ballot measure also failed.

The top financial challenges of the district include retaining quality teachers, addressing the critical infrastructure needs, and equipping classrooms with updated and necessary technology.

Last year teacher turnover was approximately 30%. Teacher turnover is not only detrimental to the school district due to financial reasons but it is also detrimental to students and fellow teachers. Gav Houston commented, that students build relationships with their teachers, teachers become mentors, and when they leave it is very difficult on the students. He also commented that students in the High School are using text books that are over a decade old and are falling apart. The issues with the EHS track and pole vault have also had a negative impact on him and his fellow track team mates.

Maintaining the district buildings and facilities has been challenging. Both roofs at SHE and EHS need to be replaced, as well does several school buses that are aging in terms of mileage and parts that are obsolete. Elizabeth school students deserve to learn in the safest environment possible and with the necessary tools and technology.

The school board members are all engaged with state legislature and have spent a cumulative 45 days at the state capital testifying and speaking with legislators about Common Core, the performance-based PARCC assessment tests, numerous and questionable requests for data, unfunded mandates, the "negative factor" in school finance and the need to return revenues that should have gone to schools as a result of Amendment 23.

A majority of the attendees felt the district is moving in the right direction. The majority also indicated that they were willing to support a tax increase to pay for a bond to address critical infrastructure needs.

The audience was also asked to write their comments and or questions on index cards to be presented to the panel for answers. The Board of Education extends its apologies for the short time that was allocated for Questions and Answers with the panel. The audience's comments and their questions along with the answers are posted to the [BOE Blog](#) and to the [District Website](#).

Several committees had tables at the Town Hall to share with community members their efforts to support the district. EHS Track Initiative is collecting donations to resurface the EHS Track. Their goal is to collect \$100,000 by July 1. The Elizabeth Education Foundation is raising money to support teachers with grants that will make a direct impact on students in the classrooms. The Citizen Impact Committee and the PTSO/PTCO had tables and were sharing information of some of their efforts with the schools and our district. Members from ESD101 were also at the Town Hall Meeting.

We would like to thank Emmi Lindsey, Alec Saville, and Gianna Arko who are students from EHS that assisted during the meeting.

On behalf of the Board of Education, the Superintendent, and the Chief Financial Officer we would to thank those who attended the Town Hall meeting and to thank everyone for your continued support for our schools.

Regards,
Michele McCarron
Elizabeth Schools

