

Cassia's School Board meeting agenda on December 20 contained an item of consideration for a school bond election in 2019. A citizen's committee has been studying the major issue of growth for the last eighteen months.

As the last projects of the 2015 school bond took shape toward the latter end of 2017, a citizen's group led by DL Evans bank President and CEO, John Evans Jr., initiated a discussion with the School Board on how to address the significant growth in the county and schools. With a total enrollment over 5600 students at five high schools, nine elementary schools, one specialized preschool and one regional technical center, long range facility planning is an ongoing discussion. Consolidation makes the Cassia district the twelfth largest in the state. As such, school boards of the last 20 years have grappled with strategies to both maintain and construct schools.

This initial community conversation centered on solutions with projected enrollment at Burley High school over 1200 students in three years. This conversation expanded to include a comprehensive study of the impact of growth and how Cassia's technical center can help satisfy local work force needs. Committee Chairman, John Evans, sees the growth as an opportunity. "The population growth in Cassia County is causing the District to remodel, upgrade, and repair existing facilities to meet the needs of our students, teachers, and citizens."

This independent committee was tasked with a needs only assessment and culminated in a formal recommendation list presented to the board in July. The nearly year-long investigation utilized district and county data points, architectural expertise from two firms, current construction practices and associated costs and experience from the 2015 school bond.

The committee work began with a hearty discussion of what went wrong in 2015. Mistakes were not glossed over and committee discussions reviewed positive changes since problems were revealed. Among them, a policy that directs all future boards, who contemplate bonds, to abide by a detailed process of checks and balances.

Committee members toured schools, invited every faculty and staff member at every school in the district to speak with them and refined list after list. An intensive evaluation of how to satisfy local workforce needs produced a serious look at moving the technical center to a larger facility rather than expanding the current facility. Ultimately, this investigation confirmed that the most cost effective way to meet local industry needs and maintain a beneficial partnership with CSI was to stay put. The tech center was a standout feature of the overall recommendations. When the final recommendations were presented to the Board, Mr. Evans thanked the committee members "for their time, effort, and advice for improvements that are needed at our school facilities in Cassia County."

The Board then picked up the list and went to work on their own. Their review took 5 months. They had an independent analysis that added a thorough examination of potential tax impacts. Board members studied, inspected and scrutinized every item on the facility recommendation list. A Board list, with associated costs, was created and returned to the citizen's committee for their evaluation. The committee voted to support the list and urged the Board to take action to satisfy issues of growth, workforce needs, operational efficiencies and facility upgrades like air conditioning. These issues were discussed in a public setting as options are weighed for long term solutions in a growing school district. Ultimately, the Board concluded a school bond is warranted. Information is available on Cassia's website regarding the decision to call for an election on March 12, 2019.