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Parent: ‘Children shoved in like sardines’

By RACHEL COLEMAN

• Leader & Times

After months of planning for a possible bond issue with local team members, USD 480 took its needs to the public with meetings designed to gather input from the community.

Before people would talk about what’s next for Liberal schools, however, they had grievances to air.

“I know there’s needs out there,” admitted retired school teacher Sam Raff at the 9:30 a.m. meeting at Hutch’s convenience store. “But the last time we voted ‘no’ to a bond issue with a big football field, and what did the school board do? Slapped us in the face and built a new football

stadium.”



Parent Lisa Hatcher — one of the 40 members of the VISION team charged with examining the district’s needs and challenges — pointed out that the current school board is comprised of six new members. The only holdover from the previous bond issue is Tammy Sutherland-Abbott, who voted against her fellow board members on the football field question.

“We’ve got a brand-new board and administration,” Hatcher said.

“They’ve all still got the same attitude,” said coffee drinker Larry Creamer, whose wife retired from her teaching career early, he said, because of her frustration with changes in district policy. “You guys seem to spend money like big government.”

Bob Tillman said he felt it was unfair to ask property owners to pay for district expansions that were caused by the influx of Hispanic families and children in the community.

“Our school district is 94 percent Hispanic and most of them are employed at National Beef or Seaboard,” he said. “If those places of employment draw people in, causing the problem, why shouldn’t we ask them to help?”

In fact, the Hispanic student population in the district hovers around 72 percent. USD 480 does not keep track of where the parents of its students work. With National Beef in first place, the school district is the second largest employer in Liberal.

COMMUNITY VOICES:

Janet Willimon, Liberal City Commission: I think the biggest challenge is going to be getting people to come out and vote on a school bond issue. It's a sad but true thing that we face in this town: you get only 11 percent of our community to come out and vote.



WILLIMON

~~Some of the things that we've seen in the past is that when we've had a bond issue, we've had a very low turnout. I think it's important to have a bond issue that is well thought out and that we can all agree on. I think it's important to have a bond issue that is well thought out and that we can all agree on. I think it's important to have a bond issue that is well thought out and that we can all agree on.~~