Stakeholder Input Report for

# Cotopaxi Consolidated Schools Cotopaxi, Colorado

submitted by

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#### Cotopaxi Consolidated Schools Cotopaxi, Colorado Stakeholders Report, November 2023

#### **Executive Summary**

On November 1, 2023, consultant Dr. Henry C. Roman conducted meetings with the district stakeholders representing four different groups associated with Cotopaxi Consolidated Schools (CCS) to gather input regarding the selection of the new Superintendent. The consultant received input from the Interim Superintendent and his administrative team (three), six classified staff, seven certified staff members, and four parents/community members during the meetings.

Outlined below is an Executive Summary of the major themes expressed by the participants at these sessions. Following the Executive Summary is a compilation of all the input received from these groups and individuals in response to the four questions asked of each group and participants. The final section of the report consists of responses by individuals who completed the online survey.

#### 1. Tell us the good things about the Cotopaxi community:

- a. Great geography with beautiful mountains and weather
- b. Known as the banana belt with four seasons
- c. Year round recreation such as hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, etc.
- d. All services as close as 30 miles away
- e. Quiet, safe, tight knit community
- f. Small town, everyone knows everyone

#### 2. Tell us the good things about Cotopaxi Consolidated Schools:

- a. Small classes with great kids
- b. Few discipline problems including bullying
- c. Kids care for each other
- d. Staff gets to know kids from PreK to High School
- e. Good athletic programs
- f. Strong PreK program
- g. Four day week
- h. Experienced secondary staff
- i. Good technology with every kid having a Chromebook
- j. Good facilities

### **3.** What are the issues the incoming Superintendent should be aware of as he/she comes into the district?

- a. Low teacher salaries and state funding
- b. High turnover at the elementary level
- c. Maintenance of facilities and grounds needed
- d. Enrollment declining
- e. School community is spread out and divided
- f. Perceived lack of trust, transparency, and communication at all levels
- g. Low student achievement especially compared to years past

#### 4. What characteristics should the new Superintendent have to be successful?

- a. MA with teaching and administrator experience
- b. Knows rural living

c. Has a vision to improve student achievement and unite the community and strategies to implement that vision

e. Good communicator with all stakeholders, a "straight shooter" saying the same thing to all groups and individuals

- d. Able to build trust and transparency
- e. Track record of problem solving and doing what is right for kids
- f. Good decision maker seeking input first then willing to stand by decision
- g. Able to build relationships
- h. Knows instructional best practices
- i. Knowledge of school finance and of additional sources of school funding

#### Stakeholder Group Responses

#### Name of Stakeholder Group: Interim Superintendent and administrative team

#### 1. Tell us the good things about your community:

- This area is beautiful—surrounded by mountains—beautiful views
- Recreation year-round
- Often referred to as a banana belt, "Pueblo minus 10 degrees"
- All services as close as Salida or Cañon City
- Fall festivals bring many community members together
- Some generational support from the community
- Housing is expensive and hard to find
- Retirement or vocational rentals available
- Considered a prison community, many work in Cañon City
- Community tends to be conservative
- No charter schools, but many kids go to online schools
- There is some home schooling resulting in
  - $\circ$  1/3 graduate through home schooling
  - $\circ$  1/3 return to the school in 3 years
  - $\circ$  1/3 return in less than 1 year

#### 2. Tell us the good things about Cotopaxi Consolidated Schools:

- Small class sizes
- 8 students per class on average
- Four day school week
- Teachers have great flexibility often utilizing students from the upper grades
- Programs such as Reading Buddies
- Very caring staff
- Discipline is not an issue
- Experienced secondary level staff—little or no turnover
- Strong athletic programs
- PreK-12 has 165-170 students
- Trying to build a music and drama program
- Good technology—every student has a Chromebook
- Okay STEM program—needs beefing up
- Good facilities with some needs

### **3.** What are the issues the incoming Superintendent should be aware of as he/she comes into the district?

- Much turnover at the elementary level
- New staff—custodial staff, kitchen staff
- Maintenance of facilities and grounds needed

- General upkeep of facilities especially the roof
- Transportation okay with 3 routes but staffing is thin
- Funding is a big issue
- 4. What characteristics should the new Superintendent have to be successful?
  - MA with teaching experience
  - Must be accessible to all
  - Integrity
  - Follows through with goals
  - Makes sincere effort to follow through
  - Honesty
  - Says the same thing to all groups
  - Good communicator
  - With all stakeholders including administrators, staff, and parents
  - Open dialogue
  - Able to delegate
  - Follows chain of command
  - Refers issues back to the administrator involved
  - Able to build trust with the Board, the community and the staff
  - Able to build strong relationships at all levels
  - Strong decision maker

#### Name of Stakeholder Group: Classified Staff

#### 1. Tell us the good things about your community:

- The geography—the river, the beautiful mountains, etc.
- Recreation for everyone including young people—skiing, hiking, bicycling, etc.
- Definitely not the big city, but close enough to big cities
- Remote, rural living, safe and quiet
- Services available 30 minutes away including emergency services may take longer
- Great weather—banana belt reference
- Good cell phone service for AT&T and T-Mobile

#### 2. Tell us the good things about your Cotopaxi Consolidated Schools:

- Small classes
- One on one technology
- Few discipline problems
- Good internet service
- Student achievement was high at one time, low at elementary school now
- Much turnover in staff at elementary school, high school is stable
- Low socio-economic student population

### **3.** What are the issues the incoming Superintendent should be aware of as he/she comes into the district?

- Much parental apathy
- Losing enrollment even after the COVID decline
- Gone from 200 to 160 in two years
- Some loss to online schools
- Parents work elsewhere
- School Community is very spread out
- Housing is a challenge, high level housing may be available
- No restaurants
- With so much negativity in the past, there is now a lack of trust at all levels
- Perceived lack of transparency
- Lack of communication
- Big question is what is being done to retain teachers
- Need to keep younger staff
- Some cliques throughout, perhaps too much change too fast
- Teacher salaries is an issue, lowest paying district in the area

#### 4. What characteristics should the new Superintendent have to be successful?

- Able to bring money into the district—perhaps pass a bond
- Charismatic—not quiet
- Experienced—enough experience to bring back excellence to the district but not so much experience to retire in 3 years
- Experience in the classroom and as an administrator
- Must have a "heart" for our school
- Knowledge of school finance
- Empathetic
- Transparent
- Receptive to input but not just "appeasing"
- Problem Solver
- Relationship builder
- Sense of urgency—not "wishy washy"
- Able to improve student achievement
- Able to increase number of academic offerings (choices) in the school
- Able to recruit—staff and students

#### Name of Stakeholder Group: Certified Staff

#### 1. Tell us the good things about your community:

- Good weather
- All four seasons with fall and spring shorter
- Great recreation—biking, hunting, fishing, etc.

- The school is the community—all events are hosted by the school
- Living here is what you make of it with Salida, Cañon City just 30 minutes away for night life activities
- Medical services are available in these communities but sometime difficult to find doctors or dentists that will take you—some not taking new patients
- Emergency services may take a long time to get here
- Quiet community
- The community is "bigger" than Cotopaxi
- Tight knit community
- Many community members want Cotopaxi to be the same as it was in the past
- Many new young parents coming here

#### 2. Tell us the good things about your Cotopaxi Consolidated Schools:

- Small classes
- Great kids
- Clean school environment
- Few discipline problems
- Few bullying problems
- Kids care for each other
- Upper grade kids know the lower grade kids and help whenever possible
- Staff gets to see kids grow up from PreK to High School
- Good special ed program

## **3.** What are the issues the incoming Superintendent should be aware of as he/she comes into the district?

- Lack of trust all the way around—Community, Board, staff
- Community and staff need to believe in the school—some staff and Board members have taken their kids out of the school and send them elsewhere
- Some staff have a sense of "always being watched"
- Some staff don't feel that the school board and the administration "have their back"
- Sometimes too much communication, sometimes not enough or in a timely manner
- Need good communication sooner
- Sometimes instructional "best practices" are not readily accepted here
- Sometime advocating for kids is seen as "wrong"
- Some staff feel they are not well supported
- The school schedule is a big issue with two hours of practice during the school day at middle school being one example
- Starting the day with specials instead of academics was given as another example

#### 4. What characteristics should the new Superintendent have to be successful?

- Experienced administrator
  - Elementary experience preferred
  - Special Education experience preferred
  - Voc Ed knowledge or experience preferred

- Good decision maker, willing to stand by decision
- Knows instructional best practices
- Able to instill consistency in the implementation of the curriculum and instruction and not allow some teachers to do whatever they want
- Able and willing to support teachers
- Able and willing to interact with community and staff—be visible
- Able to bring students back to the school
- Have a vision—especially how to bring kids back

#### Name of Stakeholder Group: Parent/Community

#### 1. Tell us the good things about your community:

- Strong and resilient
- Safe community
- Just like a big family
- No big city issues in the schools
- Small town, everyone knows everyone else
- Beautiful mountains
- School is the hub of the community
- Many are very engaged in the school others not so much
- In the past there was much parent involvement and engagement
- Now it is the same individuals having to do everything
- Generations of ranching families now fewer and fewer
- Now prison system employs many parents—about one third

#### 2. Tell us the good things about your Cotopaxi Consolidated Schools:

- Good sports teams—volleyball, baseball, track
- Many teachers have come out of retirement to help
- There are Ag classes at the high school
- There is some dual enrollment at the high school
- Some shop classes like automotives
- Good band program—required in the middle school
- Strong PreK program

## **3.** What are the issues the incoming Superintendent should be aware of as he/she comes into the district?

- Some special ed needs
- High turnover in teaching ranks—may be related to low salaries
- Prisons pay more
- Academics have dropped in the school
- Many have taken their kids to Salida
- Solid Board with best interest of the school in mind
- Much division in the community

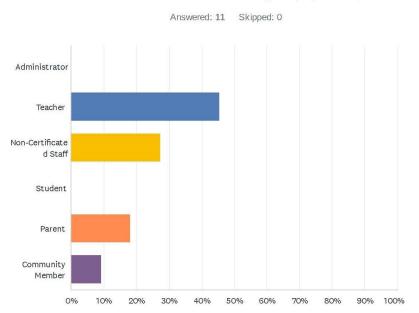
#### 4. What characteristics should the new Superintendent have to be successful?

- Someone who wants to live in the community
- Knows rural living
- Has a vision and strategies to implement that vision
- Hands on not a politician
- Straight shooter what he/she says is what he/she does
- Team builder
- Able to facilitate conflict
- Does what is right for kids
- Able to build trust
- Good listener
- Good decision-maker, seeks input first
- Able to build relationships with kids and parents

#### Survey Monkey Results for Cotopaxi Consolidated Schools November 2023

(NOTE—these responses have not been edited, they are printed as entered by the stakeholders)

11 responses



#### Please indicate the stakeholder group you represent:

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Administrator	0.00%	0
Teacher	45.45%	5
Non-Certificated Staff	27.27%	3
Student	0.00%	0
Parent	18.18%	2
Community Member	9.09%	1
TOTAL		11

# Q1 Tell us the good things about your community. (This information is used to help us recruit quality candidates.)

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Temperate climate in the 'banana belt region of Colorado. Mild winters and cool summers Boundless opportunities for outdoor recreation Community is welcoming to outsiders, provided there is a shared set of values, a willingness to be involved, and a lack of pretension about the rural way of life. Tight-knit community, once embedded, everyone knows everyone Although the commute may not be considered quick (~half hour to 1 hour commute to town for shopping, errands, half hour or less to commute from the furthest part of the district to the school), there is rarely ever traffic, much less traffic comparable to the bumper to bumper traffic during rush hour in a city or suburb. You're always moving and the scenery is much better than congested highways. Lack of 'real' crime or homelessness There is a lot of 'elbow- room' between neighbors, but neighbors are just as, if not more, neighborly and community orientated than in large cities. It is considered 'remote' and removed from the trappings of city/suburb life, but it is still a reasonable drive to town for groceries/errands, and 1-1.5 hours to a larger city (Col. Springs, Pueblo) for other shopping, occasions, or national airports. It is a reasonable drive (3 hours) to an international airport.	11/7/2023 3:31 PM
2	Peaceful, great outdoor recreation. Very neighborly.	11/7/2023 11:14 AM
3	Honestly, I can't think of anything. This community is very hard on outsiders and those who wish to bring change.	11/6/2023 9:06 AM
4	This community is a small populated community spread out over a lot of miles. It is one of the most beautiful places around. Outdoor activities are all around: Hunting, fishing, rafting, hiking, etc.	11/6/2023 8:31 AM
5	Beautiful setting with lots of outdoor opportunities and activities. Kind and caring folks.	11/5/2023 1:16 PM
6	We like the size of our community; it's small and the one's involved in the school community sincerely care about it. People tend to be respectful.	11/4/2023 10:24 AM
7	For the most part, we have a good group of supportive parents and family members. It's a beautiful place to live.	11/3/2023 2:07 PM
8	We have a good amount of well mannered, well natured and big hearted community members who care about the kids, school and community.	11/2/2023 6:41 PM
9	People are willing to help people.	11/2/2023 4:13 PM
10	Our community is beautiful to live in. We have lots of wildlife that our students and community gets to see. We have lots of recreation activities to do here such as rafting, skiing, hiking, and many more activities.	11/2/2023 3:08 PM
11	Most of us live in Salida, Westcliff, or Canon, but they are within thirty minutes of the school. Outdoors, and quiet.	11/2/2023 1:33 PM

# Q2 Tell us the good things about your schools. (This information is used to help us recruit quality candidates.)

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Small class sizes, teacher/student ratio Knowledgeable long-standing staff committed to the students Everybody knows everybody at all grade levels and staff types. Staff is generally very involved with students, 'it takes a village' approach to student relations School leadership is very approachable and open to communicating with staff and students alike. Due to the small school organization, there is far less red tape to get through to implement an idea or change. Supportive of athletics	11/7/2023 3:31 PM
2	Small, close knit. Leadership is very accessable.	11/7/2023 11:14 AM
3	We have great kids.	11/6/2023 9:06 AM
4	The school has been established since 1882 in some form. Classes are small even when we had a larger population the classes were small. Overall discipline is minimal as compared to other schools. Students have received a great education by the dedicated teachers.	11/6/2023 8:31 AM
5	The staff is dedicated and works hard. Most of us wear multiple hats and go beyond the call of duty. The kids are incredibly interesting and more capable, in many instances, than most their age. Many have responsibilities beyond the usual and are able to see beyond themselves and their own interests and friends.	11/5/2023 1:16 PM
6	The remaining staff <b>truly</b> care about the kids and the school, as a whole. Love the class size and the closeness a lot of the kids benefit from their class being so small (in comparison to bigger schools).	11/4/2023 10:24 AM
7	It's like a family. Everyone is involved and cares about student learning. Many of us have/had children who attend/ed Cotopaxi.	11/3/2023 2:07 PM
8	Most of the staff seem to enjoy the kids. There are a good handful of compassionate employees. Our school continues to encourage families to engage. Teacher support for additional services for slow learners has been amazing. Title 1 has been improving and gaining more needed support in the last few years. No complaints there!	11/2/2023 6:41 PM
9	Class size is small so students can get more one on one help than is available in large school districts.	11/2/2023 4:13 PM
10	Our school is small, so there is more 1 on 1 with teachers. Smaller class sizes. Again, the wildlife that the students and staff get to see almost daily. Small enough to help each other out when needed. Being so small and knowing each other, we tend to treat each other and take care of each other like family.	11/2/2023 3:08 PM
11	We are a small school 150-200 students. The teachers know the students, and we have nice kids.	11/2/2023 1:33 PM

# Q3 What issues should the superintendent be aware of as he/she comes into the district? (This information is shared with the final candidates.)

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

#### # RESPONSES

DATE

11/7/2023 3:31 PM

Many parents simply do not care, and see the school as little better than a day-care for their children. The baseline is getting their children to a passing grade, but beyond that they do not care, or have too much going on to care. Many families move to this area with big hopes and dreams about 'living the simple life' or homesteading and living a self-sufficient lifestyle. These families often move to the area after buying bare land with the plan to live out of a camper while they build a house. They are often naïve to the cost, time and skill commitment required to even get basic needs like water and septic taken care of, and the shelter of an RV often proves inadequate in the winter. Some of these families persist and continue to 'camp', but many will 'pull up stakes' and leave when the weather turns. As a result, there is a lot of 'through-traffic' of students. The ones who stay will live a hard life. The school is used by some families as a 'dumping ground' for problem students. It is not uncommon for students in a foster or temporary quardianship situation to be enrolled in the school as a 'fresh start'. Often these students were not doing well academically and/or behaviorally in their previous schools (usually from the Front Range), and families believe away from the influence of their previous social peer groups, or in a smaller school where the student is less likely to 'fall through the cracks' they may improve. However, these students often do not integrate well into the school and continue their previous habits and behaviors. Very often these students are involved with drugs. There is a divide, especially a socio-economic, between those that live in the communities along the river known as 'Pleasant Valley' (Howard, Coaldale, Central and North Cotopaxi) and those that live in the 'Gulch' area (Southeast Cotopaxi, near or along the thoroughfare of Copper Gulch Rd). The gulch hosts many older and modular homes, cheap vacant land, and is generally perceived as high crime, with domestic disturbances and drug related crimes being big issues. This area seems to be more socially connected to the community of Westcliffe rather than the Pleasant Valley, as for much of this area it is much closer to them, and it is hard to get families from this area to be involved or feel connected with the school community. This is an issue, as a majority of families in the District live in this area. The families that live closer to the river tend to be more involved with the school, however in recent years, this involvement has morphed into hostility toward the school, due to a perceived lack of transparency, communication, and accountability taken by school leadership and previous administrations. Some have expressed that the school has tried to scapegoat issues like lower student achievement, lack of parent involvement, poor attendance, lower enrollment, and staff shortages on COVID, and believe the District needs to critically examine itself to determine the root cause of these issues, and how to fix them. The Pleasant Valley Community also consists of many long-standing families that have lived in the area for generations, and can be very insular and cliquey and form rank against outsiders. The 'Good ol' Boys Club' is very real there. Housing is an issue, as there is very little new housing being built, and what is being built is usually at the behest of an owner. There is very little 'inbetween' housing, with most of the available selection being bare land, poor condition modular homes, or inaccessibly expensive houses meant to be sold to wealthy second home owners. Home availability is greater near Salida, Canon City and Westcliffe, but living there makes it easy for those people to work there for better pay instead of commuting to Cotopaxi. Housing issues combined with low-wages compared to the neighboring school districts make it hard to recruit and keep staff, especially younger staff. Staff turnover, especially in the elementary, has been high. Cotopaxi is seen as a 'backup' school district for those trying to get into neighboring districts, especially Salida. Once they obtain a position in their desired district, they will resign at Cotopaxi. The area is popular with retirees, and as a result we are able to recruit highly-skilled retirees who may not depend on the salary income as much as a younger staff member might. However, due to these circumstances they are not employees that are in it for the 'long haul'.

11/7/2023 11:14 AM

2

1

The community is only supportive as long as it's their way. As soon as someone tries to

There is a barrier of mistrust between the community and the school.

11/6/2023 9:06 AM

	change the "Cotopaxi way" and run a district as it should be run they will be attacked.	
4	Our community has become more transient in recent years thus bringing other concerns than what Cotopaxi is accustomed to. This includes behaviors, expectations, and less emphasis on education and accountability.	11/6/2023 8:31 AM
5	The staff is hugely underpaid and our facilities are in dire need of repairs. Keeping qualified staff is hard when this is the case. This affects continuity and stability.	11/5/2023 1:16 PM
6	That there's only a small amount of parents that actually get involved, so be ready for not all hands on deck. The lack of transparency and straightforwardness concerning facilities, maintenance, and finances needs to change. Maybe salaries should be more evenly distributed.	11/4/2023 10:24 AM
7	It's important that staff and faculty are allowed and given an opportunity to have a say in matters. This makes us feel valued and trusted. We work well as a team and feel that it's important to making our "family" work.	11/3/2023 2:07 PM
8	Impatience, local egotism, failure for parents to effectively communicate concerns in a progressive manner, our school also needs to improve communications with parents, this community has less local services for medical, mental health and security supports.	11/2/2023 6:41 PM
9	Because it's a small district past experiences are hard for some to let go of and because of the small number, that can color future interactions even with new staff.	11/2/2023 4:13 PM
10	The last couple of years we have had such a division between staff, between the school and some of the community. There are different "clicks" and "groups" that are either for or against the school. We have had numerous community members (parents and nonparents) that have continuously verbally attacked several staff members that have tried to do what is right for the students. Staff members have also verbally attacked one another. Staff members kids not going to school here, board members kids not going to school here. We need to get some of these students back in our school.	11/2/2023 3:08 PM
11	There is an unhealthy good old boy system here, we have some teachers who went to school here and have ONLY taught here, and they do not understand moving forward and not staying in the past. Some staff are unwilling to change and the administration does not hold them accountable this past year. This has caused a ripple. The previous admin DID hold us all accountable and these staff members teamed up with their friends in the community to attack them verbally. It started to be a healthy place to work and this past year it has gone back to being unhealthy.	11/2/2023 1:33 PM

# Q4 What skills, qualities or characteristics should the new superintendent possess to be successful here? (This information is used as we screen potential candidates.)

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	A willingness to wear many hats Must be knowledgeable or willing to expand their knowledge in many different areas of school administration (teaching, transportation, maintenance, food service etc.) Must be willing to be 'boots on the ground and get their hands dirty to problem-solve instead of simply delegating from an ivory tower Able to delegate authority appropriately while maintaining accountability. Charismatic, must be able to win over apathetic and hostile stakeholders Willingness to defend and justify their decisions and staff publicly Straight-shooter. The community is wary of those who dance around a point and talk like a politician. Receptive to community input, but will not bend over backwards to appease every whim, and willing to say 'no' to unreasonable demands Desire to promote a school and work environment that encourages mutual respect, support and trust in the district Open to new and radical changes to improve outcomes Willingness to be flexible and understanding, and will not hide behind strict adherence to rules and policies over what is reasonable and empathetic. Approachable and willing to listen and discuss with all levels of stakeholders Clear and concise about their goals and objectives and able to consistently represent and communicate that vision to all stakeholders Cares not only about student achievement, but about the work environment of the staff as well as their happiness. Good at listening, responding to people in the moment, and having a real conversation, instead of mechanically diverting people to an 'official response' or policy language. Passionate about the community and/or education, and is willing to stay long enough to affect permanent culture change on the District.	11/7/2023 3:31 PM
2	Honest, Charismatic, Transparent, Problem Solver, Consitstant and willing to back any of their decisions with staff and community.	11/7/2023 11:14 AM
3	Integrity to do what is right and the strength to stand up to those who try to tear the district down.	11/6/2023 9:06 AM
4	The superintendent needs to understand that this position is not only a leader of the school but also a leader in the community. This person must be vested in both to be successful and make the school thrive.	11/6/2023 8:31 AM
5	Kindness and thoughtfulness, being a student and staff advocate. Foresight in maintaining our facilities and our faculty. Addressing the woefully inadequate health coverage and finding funding at national, state and local levels to help us survive. Listening to all of us involved in the school.	11/5/2023 1:16 PM
6	Someone who has had experience with a struggling school system. Someone honest and straightforward; someone articulate and not afraid to address core issues. We need someone with a male or female.	11/4/2023 10:24 AM
7	Someone who will listen. Someone who doesn't come in and try to change the culture of Cotopaxi. Someone who is personable and outgoing. Someone who understands the financial aspects of small schools	11/3/2023 2:07 PM
8	Compassionate, efficient, a good and positive communicator, a good listener, relaxed and unbiased. Be willing to work with all community members with concerns facing our kids needs in and out of the school setting. Who can be a positive leader and ensure that our kids rights are equally defended. Accountable and transparent in their actions in regards to the responsibilities they've been tasked with. Someone who is dedicated to the kids and not it's culture/social/financial stature.	11/2/2023 6:41 PM
9	Knowledge, flexibility, directly having experienced teaching in some manner.	11/2/2023 4:13 PM
10	Fair and consistent with staff, students, parents, and community. Have a backbone but not come in and be so hard on everyone. Not make a lot of changes right away, have patience. Be	11/2/2023 3:08 PM

visible around the school and not just stay in their office.

11 A STRONG backbone. Integrity, Willingness to see all sides and not just the loudest person in the room. Help staff and the community with moving us forward with what is best for kids not just " The Cotopaxi Way. "