

Date: August 6, 2018

TO: Town of Rice Board of Trustees
FROM: Kari Distefano, Rico Town Manager
SUBJECT: Town Manager's Report

Rico Elementary School Closing Discussion

As you know, the Rico Elementary School will not be in operation this school year. According to a resolution approved by the Dolores County School District on March 7th, 2018, the Dolores County District Superintendent was directed by the School Board to develop “a plan for communicating in writing with parents, school staff, and community.” It also directed the Superintendent to create a plan and a timeline for reassigning students to other public schools “which must, to the fullest extent practicable, take into account parents’ choice concerning the public schools to which students are reassigned.”

The closure of Rico Elementary brings up the broader issue of what responsibility Dolores County School District has with respect to educating students that live in Rico considering the citizens of Rico pay taxes to the Dolores County District for that very purpose. Earlier this summer, I had a discussion with Mike Gass, the Telluride R1 Superintendent, and wrote the following regarding what I had heard the community express:

1. Transportation – The parents here would like assurance that if for some reason they can't take their kids to school, there is an alternative. This is also a matter of convenience. While many of the parents work in Telluride some don't and that circumstance necessitates two separate trips to Telluride. The Rico shuttle has picked up some of this slack but it is quickly becoming inadequate. The San Miguel Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) has been very helpful, but since Rico taxpayers don't contribute to that pool of money, there is likely a limit to what they are willing to sustain.
2. Continuity - The Telluride School system has been very generous in taking on Rico students. We do understand though, that Telluride is not obliged. While it is probably unlikely that the Telluride School will expand to the degree that they need to start tuning away out of district kids any time in the foreseeable future, the Telluride region continues to grow and the Rico parents would like assurance that if their kids start in the Telluride school system, they will be able to continue in that system.
3. Stewardship of the property – It is important to the Rico community that, whoever ends up with the buildings, maintains them to the degree that they do not become a blight on our main street. The old house next to the school building is not an endorsement of Dolores County

School District's ability to maintain their property and in fact is an attractive nuisance that probably should be torn down. While the Town of Rico would appreciate access to the school building for some community events, we are financially unable to take over the maintenance of those buildings.

As a matter of fairness, I believe that the Dolores County School District should contribute whatever amount is reasonable to achieve the items on the list from the portion of the school mill levy that comes from Rico taxpayers. Last year Rico's assessed valuation was \$5,432,252. The Dolores County School District mill levy is 18.562. $5,432,252 * 18.562 / 1000 = \100666.40 .

Subsequent to this email conversation, Mike Gass developed the following list of scenarios that would involve the Telluride School District:

Note: PPOR is the money that the state gives to school districts for individual students.

Assumptions:

The majority of the students want to attend TSD
The Town would like to be associated with TSD
The Town values the building and would like the school option in the future
TSD is fine with the current service model but is willing to help the Rico community if possible.
DCSD will need to provide services for high needs students, either contract, BOCES, etc.
The town feels their dollars should be implemented on behalf of their community in some capacity.

Models to start with-

Scenario A- Status Quo

Students wishing to attend TSD find their way to Telluride and will be admitted to the school.
Transportation – Families would be on their own to provide transportation to Telluride or San Bernardo
Funding- TSD would receive PPOR for students. DCSD would need to form an MOU with TSD for high needs students
Tax Dollars- Would remain with DCSD
Building/ Property- Would remain DCSD

Scenario B- Transportation funding

Students wishing to attend TSD find their way to Telluride and will be admitted to the school.
Transportation- SMART is looking at a larger vehicle for the route. They may have this in place by October. Parents or DCSD could buy a Student pass for the Rico route.
Funding - TSD would receive PPOR for students
Tax Dollars- Would go to DCSD
Building/ Property- Would remain DCSD

Scenario C

Students wishing to attend TSD find their way to Telluride and will be admitted to the school.
Transportation- SMART is looking at a larger vehicle for the route. They may have this in place by October. Parents or DCSD could buy a Student pass for the Rico route.
Funding - TSD would receive PPOR for students

Tax Dollars- The TSD/ Rico would receive a negotiated portion of the Rico tax generation to accommodate students and run the building.
Building/ Property- Would remain DCSD

Scenario D

Students wishing to attend TSD find their way to Telluride and will be admitted to the school.
Transportation- SMART is looking at a larger vehicle for the route. They may have this in place by October. Parents or DCSD could buy a Student pass for the Rico route.
Funding - TSD would receive PPOR for students
Tax Dollars- - The TSD/ Rico would receive a negotiated portion of the Rico tax generation to accommodate students and run the building.
Building/ Property- TSD would acquire the School and surrounding assets for a minimal sale price and DCSD would have first right of refusal for an agreed amount if the facility were to be liquidated.

Scenario A-E- Status Quo – with an election, interim agreement

Students wishing to attend TSD find their way to Telluride and will be admitted to the school.
Transportation – Families would be on their own to provide transportation to Telluride or San Bernardo
Funding- TSD would receive PPOR for students. DCSD would need to form an MOU with TSD for High needs students
Tax Dollars- Remain DCSD
Building/ Property- Would remain DCSD depending on outcome of election.

In all scenarios, the Town of Rico would lease and maintain the park.

Letters regarding this matter went out in the water bills and notice of the meeting is also on the Town of Rico website as well as being posted on the Rico Bulletin. At this point it is incumbent on us to give some direction to the Dolores County School District. I would like to take a straw poll at the end of the discussion to get some input on which, if any, scenario is preferable to the community. There is a copy of the resolution and the community letter from the Dolores County School District. It is worth noting that Mr. Hankins is no longer employed by the Dolores County School District.