



**By Carolyn Lee**  
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When Charley Colton looks into the past, he sees not only history, but the future. We can learn how to handle the future by studying the past.

That explains why Colton is not only a member of the Chase County Historical Society, but has just completed 21 years as a school board member. The president of the Chase County Schools board will give up his seat in January. His last meeting was Dec. 11.

Colton, 50, began his service to education when he was asked to run for the District 66 school board in 1989. He and wife Carla had several children attending school there.

District 66 was the first of the last three rural schools in Chase County to consolidate with Imperial Grade School, in 1994.

“Our numbers were down and we had no town to be associated with,” he pointed out.

It was also tough to find teachers, he said, and the school had to contract the upper classes out to Lamar and Imperial schools.

If a school contracted students out for three years, it was automatically consolidated with a larger district, he said.

In 1996 Colton was elected to the Chase County High School board.

“I enjoyed the time at ‘66 so thought let’s try the high school. I’m not sure why I chose the high school over the grade school (board) but I’d done the K-8 thing.”

Colton said he didn’t go on the board with a list of things to do, with an agenda.

“I wanted to help the students and help education,” he stated.

He’s been president of the board for a total of about 10 years, from 1998 until Chase County High School, Imperial Grade School and Lamar Grade School consolidated on July 15, 2005, and from 2009 until the present.

He’s proud of the Chase County Schools’ graduation rate and ACT test scores.

“We always seem to end up with an exceptional end-product,” he said of students as they leave CCS.

“We’ve done an excellent job through the years with our kids. They are well rounded and we have an excellent curriculum.” Even as other schools have had to cut programs, CCS hasn’t, he noted.

“And, our community is fantastic with their support of the school,” he said.

Colton doesn’t see diminishing state aid as a big problem at CCS.

“We get very little now. They can take it all away and we’ll have a program,” he declared.

However, “Funding everything we have up there is going to be increasingly difficult. With increases in benefits for employees, that’s where it’s going to get tight with us.”

As with most schools, 70 percent of the budget is employee salaries and benefits.

“If they (government) cap that, we’re going to be in trouble,” he said.

Colton said he decided not to run again for his board seat because he’s on a number of other boards in the county.

He is on the Historical Society Board where “I’m the young kid.” He’s on the County Zoning Board and the Chase Cemetery Board.

Colton and Carla are co-presidents of the Foster Parents Association for the state, as well. “I can’t say I’m slowing down any,” he smiled.

Colton said the CCS board has younger board members coming on. He feels that a board member should have some connection with the school, either as a parent or grandparent.

He said veteran board members Sheila Stromberger, Tom Gaschler and Gregg Smith know how the program runs and will help guide the new members.

“I thought this would be a good time to go,” he said.

He has several younger children who are disappointed that he won’t be the one to sign their diplomas when they graduate, however. “The kids are bummed,” he smiled.