LONGMONTTIMES-CALL • SUNDAY,OCTOBER 16,2011

*Why Prop 103 is needed*

s a community, we have a great deal to celebrate in the St.

A

Vrain Valley. The community has provided tremendous support to the school district and the district has produced results.

Despite $24 million in reduced state funding over the past t)lree years, St. Vrain has stayed true to the communi­ ty-supported vision for our schools

that was the basis for the 2008 mill­ levy override. Over the past few years, St. Vrain has:

• increased instruction time for stu­ dents at all academic levels including an additional30 half-days for those most in need;

• implemented focus school pro­ grams that emphasize science, tech­ nology, math, leadership and the arts;

•increased advanced course offer­

ings available to secondary students;

• made it possible for teachers to in­ tegrate technology into instruction through a districtwide wireless school

initiative;

• maintained relatively small class sizes, particularly at the elementary level;

• established partnerships with the business community to give students real-world learning experiences; and

• built schools to keep up with growth and improved existing schools to be safer for students and more en­ ergy-efficient.

The results have been significant.

More than one-third of St. Vrain schools are accredited with distinction based on Colorado performance mea­ sures. Importantly, the number of schools on improvements plans has been cut by more than half.

St. Vrain Valley schools have been recognized by the College Board, the U.S. Department of Education, the Colorado Department of Education and Bloomberg Businessweek, to

John Creighton

*St. Vrain Valley Voices*

name just a few organizations that have noted St. Vrain's excellence.

Most important, families and stu­ dents are choosing St. Vrain. Despite stagnant population growth in the re­ gion, student enrollment has in­ creased by more than 3,500 students over the past five years.

Yet, per pupil funding is lower than

it was five years ago. According to Col­

orado Department of Education fig­ ures, funding to St. Vrain has been re­ duced by $943 per student. State policymakers estimate that another

$200 to $300 per student will be cut next year.

How has St. Vrain stayed the course on its strategic priorities in the face of massive reductions in funds? The short answer is district employees -

with support from the community­

have stepped up to protect students'

learning experiences.

Under Don Haddad's leadership, · the district finance team has identified more than $11 million in permanent new revenues and savings. District staff has won more than $8 million in grants. Support staff and administra­ tors have been reduced to the point that more cuts would lead to diminish­ ing returns. District employees agreed

to a pay freeze and a soft hiring freeze,

while workloads to implement new in­ structional programs, meet account­ ability standards and pick up the slack of a reduced workforce have in­ creased.

St. Vrain administrator salaries are among the lowest in the metro area. There has been no increase in central

administrators despite a 20 percent growth in students since 2005.

Families and students have had to step up, too. Parent organizations are being asked to raise more money to fund school basics. Families are feel­ ing the pinch of instructional and ac­

tivity fees. The pressure on families will mount if there are more cuts in state funds.

Plans are in the works to garner more savings and new revenues in the coming years. The district will retire facilities too costly to maintain; in­

crease services to home-school fami­

lies; expand St. Vrain Online Global Academy; and move toward self­ funded health care as a way to provide better care, work with local providers and save money.

It will be difficult to stay the course in St. Vrain if the state continues to re­

duce education funding. A University

of Denver study suggests that K-12 ed­

ucation funding in Colorado will be cut by 19 percent for 13 of the next 14 years if there are no changes to state policy. There are not enough efficien­ cies and innovations to make up for cuts of this magnitude.

That is why the St. Vrain Valley school board endorsed Proposition

103, a temporary five-year increase in

the state sales and income tax to en­ sure no further cuts to education. This initiative would raise the sales tax

from 2.9 percent to 3 percent and the income tax from 4.63 percent to 5 per­

cent. The same as it was in 1999.

The state constitution requires vot­

ers to approve any increase in taxes at the ballot box. The St. Vrain Valley school board encourages all voters to make an informed decision.

*]olm Creighton is a Lot1gmopt resident and presidetlt of the St. Vrai11 Valley School District's Boatd o[Education.*