

Address to SVVSD BOE August 8, 2012

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SVVEA Support for a Mill Levy Override

I am speaking for our Association's support for this mill levy override that is essential to address the unprecedented draconian cuts in state's funding of public education. We look forward to rallying our organization's resources and collaborating with others, such as Chair Ken Scheutz and the Campaign Committee, which includes the active citizens Grassroots St.Vrain, to pass this ballot measure. This mill levy override is critical to maintaining the vitality of our schools and community.

Much of the progress made since the 2008 mill levy override has already been undermined and will be threatened even further without the support of our community.

As this Board has articulated on numerous occasions, when it comes to generating high academic results for St. Vrain's diverse student population, this is a great school district. And that is at risk.

There are four critical needs areas in which this mill levy override would invest. Maintaining class sizes; early childhood education; continued investment in instruction; and recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers. Without a mill levy override, these are all at risk.

First, we have already been experiencing increasing class sizes. Because of a formula which includes support staff other than classroom teachers, an increase of just one student in the student/teacher ratio in reality means potentially several more students in a classroom. Every additional student in the classroom means less personal time for the others. It becomes far more difficult for a teacher to connect with students, and those relationships are essential to understanding and addressing individual students' needs, whether academic, such as time spent to analyze students' writing for critical thinking, or meeting their social and emotional needs. Our kids are at risk. Without a mill levy override; class sizes will continue to increase.

Second, there is no substitute for early childhood education. Pre-school and kindergarten programs provide a boost for most kids, or help level the playing field and provide opportunities that may not be present in the homes of at-risk kids. This is an absolutely crucial time of brain development. Opportunities missed at this early age mean instead many years of efforts to "close the education gap." Not only is early childhood education a cost-effective investment, it's the right thing to do. As a community, let's not put our kids at risk.

Third, technology is advancing by leaps and bounds. In education we must keep pace with its continuous advances to create 21st Century teaching and learning. This too requires substantial investment. However, a variety of rigorous programs, and not just those such as STEM or IB, but also, among others: foreign languages, art, music, physical education, and sports; they all have proven value to developing the whole potential of our children. They all help provide multiple pathways to achievement. These too are at risk without a mill levy override.

And last, but not least, we must recruit and retain the highest quality teachers for St. Vrain to remain competitive. We cannot continue on what this Board has already described as an unsustainable path. Experience steps have not been granted for the third year in a row. For example, a teacher new to the profession who started in St. Vrain four years ago, now poised to be entering their prime as a result of teaching experience, is currently paid the same amount as an incoming teacher with no experience. Here, perhaps, we could take a page from the book of the competition, specifically Boulder Valley Schools and their supportive community. Even with our mill levy override we cannot match what they have accomplished with their most recent one: \$40,000 starting salary with a bachelor's degree, \$50,000 with a masters, and a maximum salary almost \$20,000 higher than our own. This allows them to recruit from among the best. As for retaining our best teachers, Boulder and other districts give credit for experience as we have not. They will - in fact they have already begun - to siphon off some of our best teachers.

We - the School Board and Association - have committed to finding a shared vision for how to structure salary to attract and retain the best, but we cannot continue down the same path when our competition offers a far more desirable alternative. There are not efficiencies left to be found among staff that do not involve the likelihood of even larger classes - and layoffs. Let's not risk further loss to our ability to attract and retain the highest quality staff.

In closing, we ask our community: Do we want to invest for the best schools and the best teachers for our students? The students are our future. As our region of Colorado seeks to attract prospective businesses, large and small, do we want them looking along the Turnpike toward Boulder, Lafayette and Louisville, or do we want them locating up the Diagonal towards St. Vrain: to Niwot and Longmont and Lyons, and out to Mead, the Tri-Towns, and Erie?

We turn to our community for the answers. Please support this mill levy override.