

History of Paraprofessional Funding at Niwot Elementary School

For many years the PTAC raised funds in excess of those required to meet the needs of the approved PTAC budget. Prior to 2007, these excess funds were often rolled forward to the next year without a clear plan, resulting in a cumulative buildup of funds. In 2007-2008, PTAC moved to spend these monies, keeping only the required reserve (\$5,000). Throughout the 2007-2008 school year, there were many discussions within the parent group about new ways the PTAC could support learning at NES in anticipation of yet another PTAC surplus at the end of the year. A common thread in every discussion was class size and the need for additional teachers.

At that time, St. Vrain Valley School District (SVVSD) was one of only three front range school districts who had never passed a mill levy override and was therefore solely dependent on per pupil funding caps determined by the state. The NES PTAC board signed a [resolution in support of placing a mill levy override on the November 2008 ballot](#), but it was entirely unknown whether the override would be passed. The budget situation in our district was becoming dire. SVVSD laid off 85 certified teachers that spring.

So, in the spring of 2008, the NES PTAC submitted a proposal to the SVVSD Board of Education asking them to change [board policy KH](#) and allow parent groups to raise funds to pay for additional staffing in schools, specifically in the form of classified staff (a.k.a. paraprofessionals). The Board of Education (BOE) approved the proposal and changed board policy KH, allowing parent groups to raise funds for paraprofessionals. One of the big concerns in discussions with the BOE and the Superintendent was that if the PTAC provided funds for paraprofessionals, the parents would think they had a say in how the paraprofessionals were used. It was made clear by the BOE that any funding from parent groups would be considered a gift to the school and the parent group would not have any say in how the staff was allocated in the building.

The mill levy override (MLO) and bond issue were placed on the November 2008 ballot and both were successful, providing an additional \$16.5 million to the school district annually in the form of a mill levy override and a \$189 million bond to build additional schools and maintain those already in existence. It was determined in May of 2009 that funds from the successful MLO would be sufficient to cover the same level of paraprofessional support in the building as the PTAC had provided in 2008-2009, therefore there was not a need for the PTAC to raise funds for paras in 2009-2010. There was no need for the PTAC to support Paraprofessional funding during the 2010-2011 school year either. This was again covered by the district through the NES staffing plan.

Then, in April 2011, in anticipation of cuts from the state due to the financial crisis of that time, the District reduced every school's building budget by 25% for the following year. In addition, every school had to return 25% of their building budget from the current year. The district staffing plan went from student / teacher ratios of 23.5:1 to 24.5:1, AND the district took a conservative approach to staffing, anticipating additional state cuts and only staffed each school at 98%

instead of 100%. As a result, NES would no longer be able to fund their paraprofessionals using district funds, but the PTAC would need to raise the funds if they would like to see paras in the building the following year.

The PTAC voted to use the 2010-2011 line item surplus to backfill the building budget cuts from the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years. This amounted to approximately \$13,000. Additionally, based on the history of the past four years, in May 2011, the 2011-2012 budget was modified to reflect the consistent priorities of the staff in the areas of paraprofessional support, technology and differentiation. These three line items were added to the budget based on the argument that if these things were consistently at the top of the wish list for teachers, they should be reflected in the budget as a priority and not just rely on surplus votes to fund them.

So, the paraprofessional line item in the budget for 2012-2013 was increased significantly from \$5,500 to \$39,000. This was continued in 2013-2014, budgeting \$47,800, and again for this year, 2014-2015, with a budgeted amount of \$49,234 for paraprofessionals. The budgeted amount increased in the last two years based on salary rate increases by the district as well as our school's need to provide benefits for some of the paraprofessional personnel.