

2018 COSPRA Communications Excellence Awards Program MEDALLION AWARD ENTRY

A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT: HISTORY OF MILL LEVY OVERRIDE IN GREELEY-EVANS DISTRICT 6



In 2009, a community group came alongside Greeley-Evans School District 6 in an effort to increase local funding for schools through a mill levy override. This was the District's first attempt to secure operating dollars through a property tax override. And it failed miserably, about 30 percent voting for and 60 percent voting against.

This election occurred just as the economy in Colorado and the nation was spiraling into one of the worst recessions in history. So, the idea of asking District 6 voters to invest in the operations of the school district fell by the wayside for many years.

As the state continued to pull back money during this time, District 6 struggled. The district fell to 168 out of 178 school districts in per pupil funding. Positions were cut, class sizes were increased, facility maintenance was put on hold, technology was not updated, curriculum was not updated, and other cuts and efficiencies were implemented.

In 2015, District 6 hired a new Superintendent, Dr. Deirdre Pilch. As Dr. Pilch began to dig into the finances of the district, it became clear that the significant work that needed to be done to improve student achievement, growth, equity and graduations rates. And more resources were needed to do that work.

In November 2015, the Board of Education directed Dr. Pilch to begin working toward placing a mill levy override on the November 2016 ballot. Polling was conducted, and the Board elected to move forward. A community-driven campaign committee was formed. And despite raising more than \$100,000 and running an aggressive campaign, the measure failed, this time by a narrow margin: 48.5 percent for the measure and 51.5 percent against.



Greeley-Evans
WELD COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT 6

Before the election had even been certified, Dr. Pilch and her board agreed that District 6 would turn around and run another Mill Levy Override Election in 2017. The lack of resources was simply too limiting, the lack of opportunities for students was too obvious, and the need was just too great.

But this time would be different.



Setting the Groundwork for the 2017 Mill Levy Override campaign

About a month after the disappointing 2016 MLO election defeat, a small team of District 6 cabinet-level administrators met and began planning the next election. It was decided that while a community-driven campaign was important, the district needed to have more influence over how the campaign was run.

Board of Education member Terri Pappas agreed to serve as co-chair of the committee, alongside former Greeley City Manager and small business owner Pete Morrell. The small group recruited other important school district leaders to serve on the committee, including a charter school leader, a teacher, the director of cultural proficiency, a school secretary, another Board member, the Chief Financial Officer and a parent. Many community members also served on the committee.

The superintendent also served on the campaign committee and Theresa Myers, the director of communications, took over the communications and marketing for the campaign committee. She recruited her communications coordinator, Casey Pearson, to do all the design work for the campaign. A community member agreed to take over securing all the paid advertising that would be designed internally.

Because of the Fair Campaign Practices Act, District 6 employees knew once the Board of Education voted to put the issue on the ballot, no District 6 resources could be used to promote the campaign. That would mean all the communications work would have to be done off-site, after hours. It was a big task, and the communications team was ready to take it on.

Greeley Tribune



DISTRICT 6 SUPERINTENDENT DEIRDRE PILCH talks with a 3A supporter during a watch party Tuesday night at Island Grove Regional Park.

No on 3A a mistake for Greeley

We understand reluctance to new taxes, but District 6 remains behind the 8-ball after MLO fails

Shame on you, Greeley.

You just said no to our children.

You just voted down Greeley-Evans School District 6's modest, reasonable and desperately needed mill-levy override.

Usually we'd take some line that we're disappointed with the results. But disappointed isn't strong enough.

This isn't just a vote against Greeley's children. It's a vote against Greeley's future.

The last time the district went for a mill-levy override, we were in the depths of a recession. The Great Recession, they called it. We didn't like the final result, but we understood it. People were hurting.

Now? Well, we're still Greeley, and the district is still filled with kids who need free or reduced lunches. But things are better. The oil and gas boom was good to us, even now, in a downturn. We're definitely not in a recession. And yet residents are saying they can't pay a couple hundred bucks to invest in our kids.

Business leaders have talked, repeatedly, on how a bright economic future isn't possible without a strong school district. Employers believe a qualified and well-trained workforce is perhaps the most important factor to sustained growth and competitiveness. Attracting new businesses to our community is dependent on whether they can find qualified workers and a community in which their employees want to live.

Even the Board of Weld County Commissioners, a group of Republicans who value fiscal responsibility, know the value of an education. They're paying for college educations through the Bright Futures program. They want Weld to be better.

We know some voted against 3A because they hate higher taxes. They think the school district should succeed with the current level of tax revenue it collects per student.

But what kind of message does it send when we are one of only a handful of school districts across the state that won't bump up its local taxes to enhance per-student funding? Even conservative, anti-tax voters in Weld County communities such as Windsor and Keenesburg and Gilcrest-LaSalle-Platteville approved MLOs on Tuesday.

We'll tell you what kind of message it sends. We are saying we're OK with continuing to struggle with the cycle of poverty that's kept us in the shadow of Longmont and Fort Collins and Loveland.

The district was crystal clear as to where the projected \$12 million annually would go. It would update textbooks and technology, cover critical deferred maintenance and keep the excellent staff and class sizes we enjoy now. The district even agreed to a seven-year sunset on the MLO, an unusual move among school districts.

There's no opulence there. The district has demonstrated over and over that it's barely scraping by. It doesn't have the money to buy current textbooks.

Yes, there are success stories, wonderful examples of schools that are doing well despite the fact that there's no money. But here's the hard truth. It won't be this way forever.

Eventually, school buses that were built in the 1980s will break down. Eventually, textbooks that are 16 years old and are being held together by chewing gum won't stand the test of time. Eventually, all those teachers who continue to beat the odds will leave.

Eventually, disillusioned parents will leave, too. And Greeley's future will go with them.

We would try to convince them to stay. But today we can't do that. It's not that we don't want our city to have a future. It's just that, after this result, it doesn't seem like our residents want one.

— *The Tribune Editorial Board*

Strategies for a Winning Communications Plan

District 6 leaders learned much from the 2016 failed Mill Levy Override Election:

- Although there was an improvement from 2009, the results showed that people still did not trust Greeley-Evans School District 6 with their money.
- We had to come up with different messaging that would resonate with our voters, and that messaging would have to be differentiated based on geography and demographics.
- We had to get people to fall in love with District 6, with our students, our staff and our work.
- We needed to activate a wide-reaching, grassroots effort that would work to convince the swing vote that a positive vote really was an investment in children and the future of Greeley and Evans.

"We all need to work together to ensure everyone is at least given the chance to succeed. That's what the district did for me."
Sergio Estrada, Northridge High School Student

"The instructors teach you how to become a good human being; how to look at the world creatively, with an open heart and open arms, to people and ideas; how to be yourself; how to accept the world and who you are."
Maddie Frederick-Law, Chappelow K-8 Student

I'm District 6.



More information and videos?

www.greeleyschools.org/ImDistrict6

The communications team decided to invest time and money in what would turn out to be an intense, quick marketing and branding campaign for District 6. Because of the tight timeline, we enlisted the aid of an outside communications and marketing firm. What they devised for us was the "I'm District 6" campaign. The communications team took the idea and ran with it.

Using a professional local photographer and a District 6 videographer, we worked to tell the stories of six people connected with District 6: Three were students, one was a current employee, one was an alumni and business owner, and one was a retired District 6 principal who still volunteers every week in an elementary school.

- I'm a district employee.
- I'm a family man.
- I'm a champion drag racer.

I'm District 6.

- I'm a student.
- I'm a JROTC captain.
- I'm a committed hacky sacker.

I'm District 6.

- I'm a retired principal.
- I'm a serial volunteer.
- I ski every Thursday.

I'm District 6.

- I'm a student.
- I'm a soccer player.
- I'm going to be a pediatrician.

I'm District 6.

- I'm a District 6 alum.
- I'm a local employer.
- I'm a proud Purdue Boilermaker.

I'm District 6.

- I'm a student.
- I'm a musician.
- I always eat my vegetables first.

I'm District 6.

The stories were compelling. We created a page on our website to feature the narrative, video and pictures of all those involved in the campaign. We released the first one in April 2017, and then every month released an additional story. We promoted these on social media, and started the hashtag #ImDistrict6. Casey Pearson developed a Facebook frame that we promoted throughout the District 6 community. We purchased “I’m District 6” buttons and gave them to every employee. Casey created posters for every school and the administration building. It was a very successful campaign, and gave us a foundation for messaging the MLO


When we shot the video for the I’m District 6 campaign, we also shot video asking the participants about resources and what an MLO could mean for local schools. We edited these, set them aside, and used them right before the campaign began to promote the need for additional resources.




The groundwork was set and we had a plan. We rolled up our sleeves and dove in.

Campaigning, Communications and Credibility

The name Growing Great Schools was selected for the campaign. The communications plan we developed was complex and multi-tiered. Here is a sample of the work we utilized in our “Yes On 3A” campaign:

 **Delay tactics:** One of the most important things we learned during the 2016 campaign was just how much the Fair Campaign Practices Act tied our hands when communicating with staff about the Mill Levy Override. And we knew we needed strong staff support to pass this ballot measure. So, we collectively decided to push back the Board of Education approval of the ballot language as late as possible to have the chance to talk with our staff directly about the issue when they returned to work in August. Superintendent Dr. Deirdre Pilch and Communications Director Theresa Myers scheduled time to meet with all teachers by level as they met to plan the school year. They also met with classified employee groups, including transportation, custodial, office managers and nutrition services. The plan for these meetings was to test the campaign messaging, provide information, create excitement and collect personal contact information that could be put in a database the campaign could use later to contact employees and solicit their participation in the campaign. After the campaign, we heard feedback that these meetings were very useful in gathering support and disseminating information early on that helped more staff members be involved in the effort.

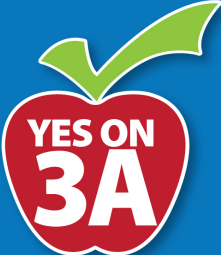
 **Back to the grassroots:** A large, knock-and-walk campaign was launched. Hundreds of walking packets were created, and hundreds of walkers were recruited through the growing database, website, email and social media. A walking kickoff was held, with Dr. Pilch rallying the troops and emphasizing the message of investing in children. Strategically, areas that voted against the 2016 MLO were targeted. The communications team created materials for walkers to give voters, as well as talking points and Q&A lists to assist them.

✓ **Website and social media campaign:** The campaign committee contracted with a local web developer, who used Nation Builder to create a website for Growing Great Schools. This was a robust site, easy to update and post events, as well as giving the communications team tools such as the ability to email those who signed up to volunteer with the campaign, collect donations to support the campaign and engage our voters. In 2016, the social media campaign for the MLO was not effective. The communications team transferred the old facebook page to Growing Great Schools, and immediately began boosting posts, having supporters invite their friends to the page, and using targeted advertising on Facebook. We posted daily on this page: events, pictures, videos supporting 3A and information about the MLO and how to register to vote. The page started with about 200 likes. When the campaign ended, the page had more than 1,600 likes. And, we have kept the page going to continue to engage our supporters.














✓ **Traditional campaigning:** Once the campaign committee agreed on a logo, created by Casey Pearson, we began to create materials for the campaign, including a tri-fold brochure in English and Spanish, yard signs in English and Spanish, one-page marketing materials, as well as nine different direct mailings that were sent during the campaign, and included different messages based on the area of the district, its predominant political party influence and demographics. We also created a page on District 6 website that we drove people to, and included factual information about the mill levy override election, as well as pros and cons as required by the Fair Campaign Practices Act.


Why Should You Vote YES?

FACTS *are* FACTS



Largest school districts in Colorado with additional funding from an MLO

						
Denver Public (Denver, CO) 91,132 Students	Jefferson County (Golden, CO) 86,347 Students	Douglas County (Castle Rock, CO) 67,470 Students	Cherry Creek (Greenwood Village, CO) 54,815 Students	Aurora Public (Aurora, CO) 41,797 Students	Adams 12 Five (Thornton, CO) 38,818 Students	St. Vrain (Longmont, CO) 32,171 Students
						
Boulder Valley (Boulder, CO) 31,189 Students	Poudre Schools (Ft. Collins, CO) 29,682 Students	Colorado Springs 11 (Colorado Springs, CO) 27,911 Students	Academy No. 20 (Colorado Springs, CO) 25,591 Students	Mesa County Valley (Grand Junction, CO) 22,105 Students	Greeley-Evans District 6 (Greeley-Evans, CO) 21,950 Students	

 District 6 is the 13th largest school district in the State of Colorado from 2016-2017, yet does **NOT benefit from any additional mill levy override** from the community.

 District 6 ranks **168th out of 178 school districts in the State of Colorado** in funding.

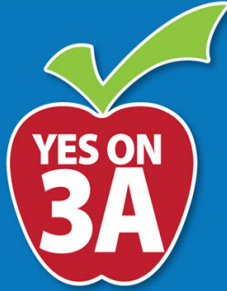
Greeley Tribune

SATURDAY OCTOBER 28, 2017

Serving Greeley, Evans and neighboring communities

GREELEY, COLORADO \$1.25 VOL. 146 NO. 361

What are our top community leaders saying about 3A?



Tom Norton
Mayor, City of Greeley

“District 6 has made great strides in student achievement. More of its schools than ever before have achieved the highest ranking for academic performance given by the state. And they can't do it alone. With a few more resources, our schools could do so much more for our kids. It is time to make a direct investment in our schools. **Vote YES on 3A!**”



John Morris
Mayor, City of Evans

“...if we continue on the funding path that we are on, we will undoubtedly see cuts so deep they may be unendable. Our children and what our youth and school district is asking us for is to invest in our future. **Invest in our children. Invest in our community.**”



Jeff Wenaas
President/CEO,
Hensel Phelps Construction

“The greatest investment that we can make to insure the continued prosperity of our community is to give our students the best education possible. By **Voting YES on 3A** we will give District 6 the necessary resources to provide for our students and insure for a healthy community in the future.”



Jean Morrell
Co-Owner Morrell & Associates;
former UNC Dean of Students

“When you look at the 178 school districts in the State of Colorado, District 6 ranks at 168 in funding. We need to improve that for our children in our schools. We are the only district in our entire county not to pass a mill levy override. Please **Vote YES on 3A!**”



Chalice Springfield
CEO/Managing Broker
Sears Real Estate

“Having a good education system and schools in our community is very important for people who are bringing jobs here or have a new workforce relocated within our community. **Supporting 3A** is extremely important to help our kids in the schools and new businesses in our community!”



Angel Flores
Founding/Lead Pastor
Mosaic Church

“Our students are the most valuable resource that we have and the only way they can be more successful is having the appropriate resources necessary for our district to continue to succeed. I encourage you to **vote YES on 3A!**”



Scott Ehrlich
President, Ehrlich Family
of Auto Dealerships

“As a business owner and a District 6 alumni, I strongly encourage you to **support 3A**. We need this for our community and more importantly for our kids. We need to give the school district more resources so they can do a better job of preparing our community for a brighter future.”



Melissa McDonald
Local State Farm Agent and
2016 Young Entrepreneur of the Year

“Our students are our next job force. We want students with great resources to be able to accomplish their job. **3A** will give them the proper tools to be successful. I invite you to **vote YES on 3A!**”



Scott Warner
Vice President, Sales
Connecting Point

“As a District 6 alumni and business operator, I ask for your **Support of 3A**. The school district is the backbone of our community and this measure will give proper funds to our students and teachers. I believe a strong school district is good for business, the community and an investment in our kids.”



Steve LaForest
Branch Manager,
FirstCal Mortgage Company

“There isn't anything more important than our children in the community of Greeley-Evans. By **Voting YES on 3A** you will help those children out tremendously! Come November get out and **Vote YES on 3A!**”

Now is the time to invest in our student's future!

www.D6GrowingGreatSchools.com

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Face-to-face: Early on, it was decided that Superintendent Pilch needed to be the face of the campaign. She is well liked, trusted, speaks eloquently, and has the educational expertise to field any question. We arranged for her to speak before different service club meetings, chamber boards, businesses, senior citizen groups and other groups and organizations throughout Greeley and Evans. In addition, a speaker's bureau was created and trained speakers spoke at dozens of campaign events, meetings and with various groups. Every "lay" speaker was paired with a District 6 employee who could answer specific questions about the measure and the district.



Superintendent Deirdre Pilch spoke at the many campaign rallies throughout the community.

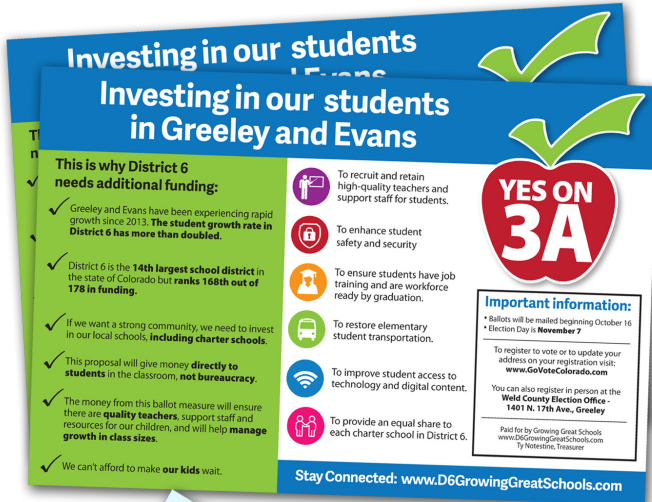


Over 100 community members attended the "Growing Great Schools" campaign kickoff event.



Communications Director Theresa Myers accepting a check and endorsement from the Greeley Area Realtors Association. Many local businesses and organizations endorsed the campaign.

Marketing & Promotional Materials



Campaign Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/d6greatschools>



Campaign Twitter

<https://www.twitter.com/d6greatschools>



Community Videos

<https://goo.gl/kymmT5>



JOSHUA POLSON/jpolson@greeleytribune.com

DEIRDRE PILCH, DISTRICT 6 superintendent, cheers as results come in during the watch party for the Ballot Measure 3A on Tuesday at the Kress Cinema & Lounge in downtown Greeley.

RULE OF 3

3rd time's the charm for District 6 mill levy override ballot measure

Photo courtesy of the Greeley Tribune, November 8th, 2017

Victory

Election night was tense, but there was hope in the air. We knew we had run a great campaign. We knew we had worked tirelessly to convince the voters in Greeley and Evans that investing in District 6 students was an investment in the future of our communities.

Thanks to the all-mail-in election, we were put out of our misery soon after the polls closed. When the first results were posted, it was clear victory was likely. By the end of the night, the 2017 District 6 Mill Levy Override had passed, 59 percent to 41 percent.

This was not only a win, it was a big win.

Accountability in the Aftermath

To continue to garner trust with our voting public, communications are continuing to tell our voters how the money they are giving District 6 is being spent in the way that was promised in the ballot measure. The communications team has created a page on the District 6 website that has a timeline and plan for expenditures by year, as well as a constantly updated page that relates when the money is spent, on what and when the items purchased will be put into use, or new programs put in place.

Superintendent Pilch and Communications Director Myers are also going on another speaking tour, talking with groups about how MLO dollars are being spent, answering questions and promoting transparency. Dr. Pilch is also meeting with every school staff and employee group to make sure they are updated as well.

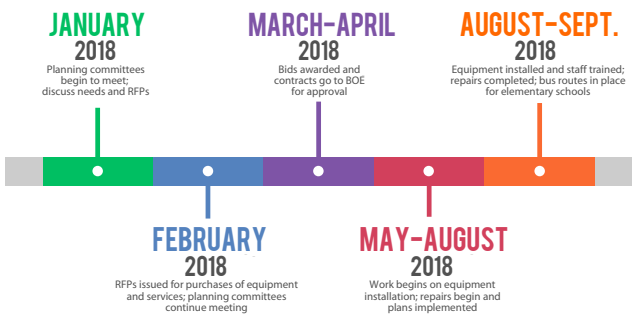
We intend to keep this web page going as long as we are spending this additional revenue. And we plan to explore new lines of communication that will keep our stakeholders and community members engaged in Greeley-Evans School District 6.

Spending Priorities for 2018

Greeley-Evans School District 6
2017 Mill Levy Override

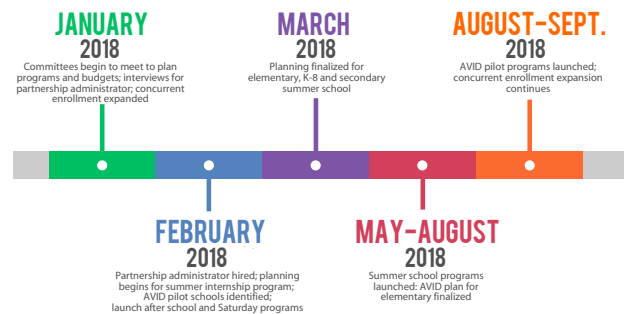
SAFETY AND SECURITY

- Install security cameras at Northridge, Greeley West, Greeley Central and Jefferson high schools
- Roof repairs prioritized by urgency
- Automatic locking systems at all sites; badging system for staff
- Improve phones and communication radios district-wide
- Snow removal equipment to replace failing plows
- Begin work to reinstate transportation at elementary level



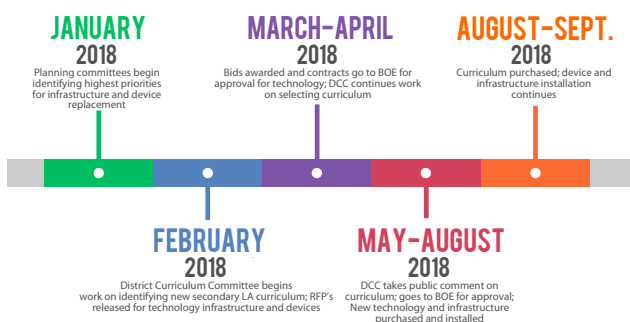
ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

- Expand summer and after-school programs for elementary and K-8 students
- Expand summer school programs for secondary students, begin Saturday school
- Increase concurrent enrollment with Aims and UNC for high school students
- Create position for Business and Community Partnership Administrator
- Implement AVID at elementary schools



UPDATING LEARNING MATERIALS/DEVICES

- Implement 5-year replacement cycle for technology infrastructure
- Replace technology devices at schools; implement 5-year replacement cycle
- Initiate replacement of outdated secondary language arts and mathematics curriculum



OTHER 2018 SPENDING PRIORITIES

- Attracting and Retaining Qualified Workforce
Wages adjusted to be closer to market for all hourly employees, January 2018
- Allocate Mill Levy Override Revenues to Charter Schools:
Based on October 2017 student count, monthly wire transfers to charter schools begin at the end of January 2018; public reporting plan finalized with charter schools

NEXT STEPS

- Implementation of priorities for 2017-18
- Review first-year spending; programs evaluated and adjustments made if necessary
- Reporting to the communities of Greeley and Evans on spending and priorities for coming years
- Spending priorities for 2018-19 identified
- Teams begin to implement plans for 2018-19 school year

OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

October 2017: Applications accepted for committee members
November 2017: Applications closed
December 2017: Business Advisory Committee and District Accountability Committee name members to be on selection committee; committee bylaws are reviewed and finalized
January 2018: Selection Committee reviews applications; selects members of Citizens' Oversight Committee
March 2018: Citizens' Oversight Committee begins meeting; selects leadership and plans quarterly review of spending and implement public reporting procedures

