

PUTNAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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September 13, 2021

Norman Seney, Mayor
Putnam Municipal Complex
200 School St.
Putnam, CT 06260

Dear Mr. Seney,

I am writing to thank you for considering my request for a special allocation from the town's American Rescue Plan money to support additional paraprofessionals at Putnam Elementary School. I am disappointed to hear that you were unable to gain the support of the selectman on this issue. I believe that both our kindergarten and third grade students would have benefited.

As we discussed, when the district assembled our staff for the 2021-22 academic year, we only had 77 students scheduled for kindergarten and assigned 4 teachers to that grade.

In early July, kindergarten classes began to approach the low 20's so the district used stimulus money to hire an additional paraprofessional to support kindergarten teachers and students. By the start of school, we had 111 students enrolled in kindergarten for the fall which would result in an average class size of 27.5 students if we didn't add a fifth teacher. Unfortunately, the only way for us to add a teacher in kindergarten was to reduce staffing in another area. With that in mind, we shifted one of our third-grade teachers to kindergarten meaning both grades have an average class size of approximately 22. Our goal like most districts is to maintain an average class sizes of approximately 20 students in all primary grades.

It is my hope that the Board of Selectman and Board of Finance understand the impact of the pandemic on our students, particularly in a community where many of our students were already below grade level. The financial constraints posed by minimal budget increases in recent years has made it more challenging to maintain optimal class sizes and to maintain the specialized supports many students need. I am extremely concerned about where things are headed in the coming budget cycles and welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further.

Sincerely,

Daniel P. Sullivan, III
Superintendent of Schools

Dear Mayor Seney and Board of Selectmen

We are contacting you regarding hiring two paraprofessionals for our elementary school. The learning loss is substantial after 18 months of remote and hybrid instruction. It is our understanding that at a recent Board of Selectmen meeting, it was noted that the town has some additional American Relief funding and that they are accepting proposals for those funds.

The recent unexpected increase of 30 students certainly impacts student learning and will be detrimental to student outcomes without additional support in the classrooms. Research has shown that the paraprofessional role, especially in the primary grades is immeasurable. Some of the many ways they can improve the student experience is as follows:

- Students who need additional instruction and require extra attention for understanding the concept taught. Without this extra support, some students will fall behind
- Manage student behavior, often avoiding disruption of their peers
- Assisting in group work with students for better understanding
- Provides an extra set of hands for teachers, especially in lower level grades
- Performing clerical tasks
- Another adult in the room that students can connect to emotionally
- Offers more flexibility to the teacher to keep the focus on the lesson being taught which can help to improve future test scores

Paraprofessionals are a vital part of the classroom and provide an important connection between students and teachers. The outcome of students reaching success depends on the additional support in the classroom. Now is the time to reinforce our classrooms after a year and a half of academic instability.

We are proposing that you allot \$120,000 to employ two paraprofessionals for the remainder of this school year and for the 2022-2023 school year. That is a only \$30,000 per individual but a priceless component to those classrooms of children.

Looking forward to hearing back regarding this proposal.

Respectfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jill Zanzger".