



# Winning the Public Vote

Ideas and Resources for Developing a Successful Referendum, Bond, or Levy Campaign

## Resource in Brief

Use this toolkit to help develop your district's plan to successfully pass a referendum.

This toolkit is structured to help districts through each stage of the referendum process, from determining community support for the issue, to developing a campaign strategy, to executing next steps after the vote.

### 3 Ways to Use This Toolkit

- Determine community readiness to support a referendum initiative
- Develop a campaign timeline and communications strategy
- Think beyond the vote to sustain community engagement after the campaign ends

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# Executive Summary

## Winning the Public Vote Toolkit

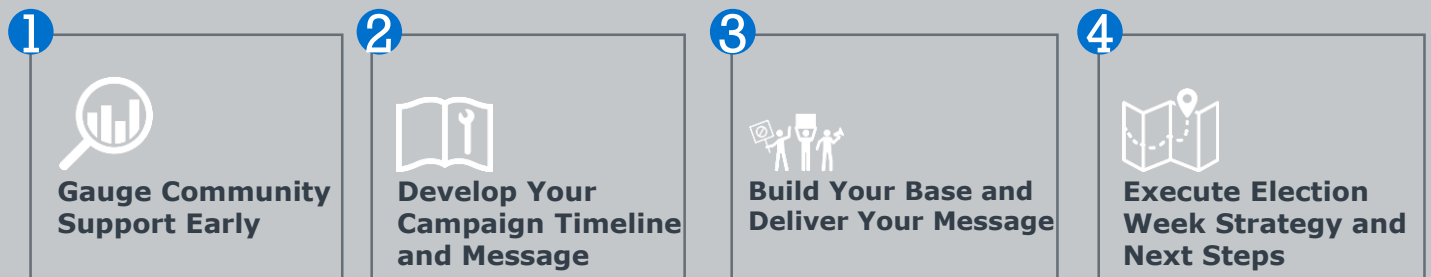
### Securing Public Support Is Imperative for Meeting District Needs

**This toolkit is designed to help district leaders prepare to win the public vote.** Districts face increasing pressure to ensure the safety and security of their schools and to provide modern learning spaces for students. However, districts can often only secure the necessary funds for these projects through bond or levy campaigns. Therefore, for districts, an effective campaign means the difference between getting the funding you need or having to delay improvements until other sources of funding are secured.

**A district's success hinges on understanding community support from the outset and engaging the community through resonant messages.** This toolkit will help district leaders plan for every step of the campaign process from gauging community support, to developing message content and delivery strategies, to updating the community on project work after a successful campaign. A well-articulated campaign plan will best position districts for successful referendums.<sup>1</sup>

**While every district and community is different, there are key elements to campaign success that apply across all contexts.** This toolkit provides a roadmap for districts to make sure they consider important campaign components and timelines while providing flexibility for districts to tailor message delivery to specific community needs and preferences.

### Guiding Framework for Running a Successful Referendum Campaign



### How to Use This Toolkit

There are many strategies districts should implement to increase the likelihood their referendum passes including developing a timeline for their campaign, developing a committee of district supporters, and implementing a social media strategy.

Although districts may already be implementing some of these ideas, our goal with this toolkit is to provide a wide variety of ideas and accompanying tools to help districts increase the likelihood that their bond, levy, or referendum passes.

1) The term referendum is used as an umbrella term for referendums, bonds, and levies. These terms will be used interchangeably throughout this toolkit and are defined on p. 5.

# 1 | Definitions

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**The goal of this toolkit is to provide districts with resources to run a successful campaign to pass a district initiative or secure supplemental funding.** Because different states use different terminology for these initiatives, establishing a common language to talk about these initiatives is challenging. Therefore, throughout the toolkit the terms referendum, bond, and levy are used interchangeably.

A broad definition for each term is provided below; consult your state's laws to determine which option to pursue given your district's needs.

## 1 Referendum

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**A referendum is a direct vote by the public on a particular issue.**

Referendums can be district initiatives that have no financial implications for voters such as the length of the school year. Most referendums, however, do have financial implications for the community. Some states also consider bonds and levies to be types of referendums.

## 2 Bond

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**A bond is a loan that allows a district to finance projects or activities.** A district will likely seek voter approval for a bond when the district wants to make a large expenditure, such as for new buildings or infrastructure repairs. Districts often pay the bond back through property taxes. Therefore, voting in favor of a bond may mean that property taxes increase on homes in the district. However, without the bond, a district is unlikely to have the capital to make necessary improvements.

## 3 Levy

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**A levy is a property tax.** A district will likely seek voter approval for a levy when the district needs supplemental funds to fill gaps in funding between what the state and federal government provide, and the actual cost of operating the school district. Levies can be used for materials and equipment, salaries and benefits, and utilities, among other approved uses.

## Section 1

# Gauge Community Support Early

### Goal

Use this audit to determine whether or not you have an accurate assessment of community support of, and attitudes toward, the district before proceeding with a referendum.

### Overview

Prior to launching a referendum campaign, districts should know how receptive their community is to a property tax increase if one is necessary. If early indications are that the community is not supportive, the district has the opportunity to reshape the referendum issue to be more appealing, or table the issue to prevent a failed referendum.

This section helps districts determine:

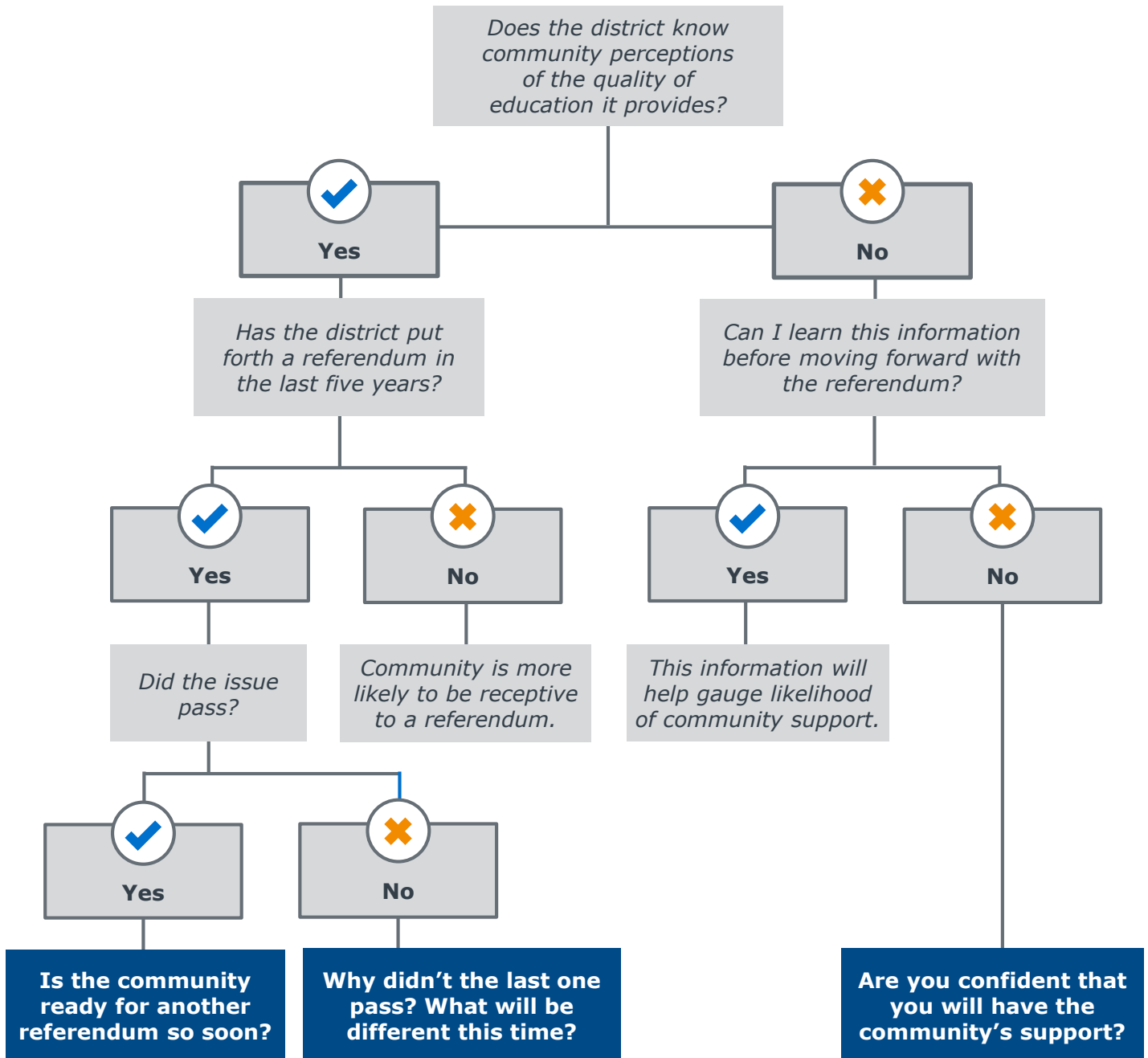
- 1 If they have a strong understanding of the community's perceptions of and attitudes toward the district before moving forward with a referendum.
- 2 If not, how to proceed to make sure the district understands community perceptions of the district before asking for referendum support.

# 1 | District Referendum Readiness Audit

Complete the following audit to help you **determine how well positioned your district is to ask the community to support a referendum.**

If you cannot answer the questions in the blue boxes, reconsider whether now is the right time to move forward without gaining additional understanding of past referendum experiences and the community’s attitudes toward the desired initiative.

## District Referendum Readiness Self-Assessment



See the next page for suggestions on how to answer the questions in the blue boxes to keep your campaign on a path to success.

## 2 | Complete Post-Audit Action Steps

Depending on the outcome of your district referendum readiness audit, **you may be ready to proceed with the issue or you may need to try to gather more information.** If more information is needed, answer the following questions that correspond to the blue boxes on the preceding page.

### ▶ Are you confident that you will have the community's support?

Districts should **know general levels of community support** for, and belief in, the quality of education the district provides. This will help district leaders understand whether a lack of referendum support comes from a broader concern about the district, or is related specifically to the current referendum question(s).

**Consider pursuing one of the two options below to gain this information.**



#### Conduct a Survey

**Ask parents to weigh in on basic questions about the district to broaden your understanding of whether parents support the district in general:**

- Are you satisfied with the quality of education your child is receiving?
- What changes would you like to see made in the district?
- What is going well in the district?
- Would you be willing to support a referendum that addresses [fill in primary issue] or [fill in secondary issue]? Why or why not?



#### Present Your Referendum to the Community

**Prepare a presentation about the proposed referendum. Invite parents, staff, and community members to attend the presentation and ask them for their feedback.**

- Would they vote in favor of a referendum that addresses the particular issues raised in the presentation? Why or why not?
- How could the referendum issues be changed to make it more palatable?
- What changes or improvements would they like to see in the district?



#### Next Steps

**Decide if any adjustments can be made to the referendum to better reflect community ideas.** If so, consider proceeding with the issue. If not, consider waiting until more support can be garnered prior to having a ballot initiative.



For information on how to improve your district's overall image, see EAB's **Creating an Effective District Communications Plan** toolkit.



## 2 | Complete Post-Audit Action Steps (cont.)

### ▶ Why didn't the last one pass? What will be different this time?

Districts should **understand why previous referendums failed** to prevent the same issues from occurring for a new referendum.



**Conduct an analysis of the last referendum to try to identify the root cause of failure. Questions to consider include:**

- Did we communicate enough about what the referendum would cover?
- Did we face heavy opposition from an organized group opposed to the referendum?
- Did we campaign for too long? Not long enough?
- Did we ask for too much?



#### Next Steps

Determine if you can figure out the root cause of the last referendum's failure and if you can mitigate those concerns through your campaign plan this year. **Proceed with the referendum issue only when you have planned how to win the support of the community this time.**

### ▶ Is the community ready for another referendum so soon?

Districts should **consider whether the new referendum is necessary now or if it can wait** until the community may be more amenable to it. Districts need to be clear why a new referendum is needed if one passed recently.



**Determine the answer to the following questions that will likely be raised by the community:**

- Why is another referendum needed already?
- Why did the last referendum not address the new issues as well?
- Are there financial implications for community members with this referendum? If so, how significant are they compared to the last one (if applicable)?
- Is the district asking too much of the community too soon? Why not?



#### Next Steps

If the referendum need is urgent, make sure the answers to the above questions are known before moving forward.

## 3 | Continue to Solicit Feedback Early

Even if administrators know that the community is supportive of the district and the quality of education it provides, the district must still engage the community early in the campaign. **Early community engagement allows the district to make adjustments to the components of the referendum based on feedback** and determine if the community is looking for any projects that the district could incorporate into the referendum.

### Engage the community early to identify:



## Section 2

# Develop Your Campaign Timeline and Message

### Goal

Develop a timeline to guide the campaign, identify crucial campaign milestones, and determine the appropriate sequencing of campaign events for the district.

### Overview

Running a successful referendum campaign requires planning. Once the decision has been made to move forward with a referendum and the issue has been approved by the board, the district must start creating a campaign plan. By developing a campaign plan early, districts can guarantee they build in enough time to develop and deploy the right resources to provide information about the referendum and rally support.

This section helps districts to:

- 1 Develop a campaign plan by thinking through event sequencing from board approval to election day
- 2 Articulate clearly the purpose and intended outcome of the referendum
- 3 Develop initial informational materials and FAQs as the foundation of the campaign
- 4 Demonstrate the impact of any funding on voters and simplify ballot language

# 1 | Sample Campaign Timeline

## As soon as the referendum is approved for a vote

- Develop initial collateral explaining what the referendum will do (see p. 14)
- Develop FAQ document and plan for updating throughout the campaign (see p. 18)
- Assemble a “Friends of the District” committee to campaign for the referendum (see p. 21)

## 3 months before the vote

- Develop a communications plan to execute over the coming months (see p. 25)  
Consider whether your campaign has the resources to develop the following:

- Campaign slogan and/or logo
- Campaign video
- Radio, television, or newspaper ads
- Yard signs
- Posters
- Mailers
- Social media presence (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)

A **successful campaign must include a social media strategy** as it is relatively easy, inexpensive, and high impact.

- Hold sessions to educate your staff about the referendum (see p. 20)
- If possible, develop a speakers bureau and train speakers about the referendum (see p. 22)
  - Schedule speakers to attend community meetings (see p. 26)

## 4-6 weeks before the vote

- Launch your communications strategy, which may include:

- Deploying yard signs
- Intensifying social media campaign
- Placing radio, television, and newspaper ads
- Placing posters
- Sending out mailers

**See p. 25-27** for additional guidance on engaging in these communications forms and how to fund your efforts.

## 1 week before the vote

- Ramp up social media campaign (see p. 25)

## Election day

- Remind people to go vote (see p. 29)

## Day after

- Thank the voters for their support, share next steps with them (see p. 30)

## 2 | Campaign Timeline Template

Use the template below to fill in the tasks you'll need to complete as part of your campaign plan. The first two rows are filled out with sample tasks and information, but as every campaign is different, the template is available for customization to tailor to your campaign needs.

| Task  | Owner                          | Action Steps  | Start Date                                     | Completion Date                 |
|---|--------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------|
| <i>Create campaign videos</i>                       | <i>Communications staff</i>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Write script</i></li> <li><i>Identify video participants</i></li> <li><i>Develop visuals as needed</i></li> </ul> | <i>As soon as referendum issue is approved</i> | <i>1 month after start date</i> |
| <i>Prepare employee and community presentations</i> | <i>District administration</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Identify key talking points and common questions</i></li> </ul>   | <i>2 months before the vote</i>                | <i>1 week after starting</i>    |
|   |                                |   |  |                                 |
|   |                                |   |  |                                 |
|   |                                |   |  |                                 |
|   |                                |   |  |                                 |
|   |                                |   |  |                                 |
|   |                                |   |  |                                 |
|   |                                |   |  |                                 |
|   |                                |   |  |                                 |

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

# 3 | Define What the Referendum Does and When



**Do** provide the community with details about how the referendum will benefit students to increase understanding of the issue's importance, and outline the anticipated completion date for projects to keep the community informed of progress.



**Don't** speak generally about district improvements without making impact on the student experience clear. Community members are more likely to be supportive when they think in terms of the student experience and understand how long it will take to see results.

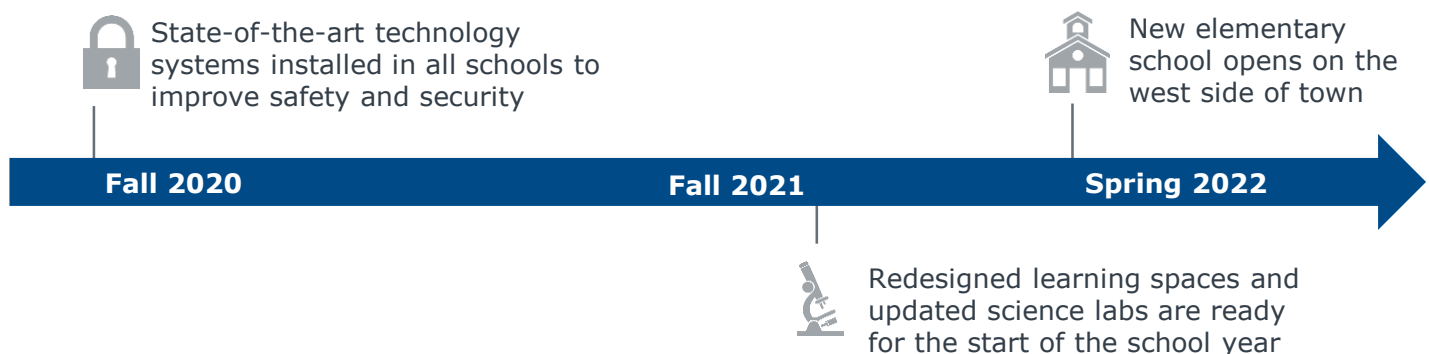
## Keep Project Descriptions Simple, but Specific, to Increase Understanding of Funding Use

Providing **details about, and the rationale for, projects helps make the referendum more tangible** for the community. If they can see the impact it will have on students, they are more likely to support the referendum.

| Rather Than This...   | ...Say This  | Why?  |
|---|--|---|
| Complete necessary repairs to older infrastructure              | Modernize the 3 older high school buildings including redesigned learning spaces and updated science labs              | <i>Provide the number of buildings impacted and what changes will be made to help the community understand the relationship between cost and outcomes</i> |
| Replace technology systems for improved district communications | Install updated technology systems in all schools to ensure effective district communication to promote student safety | <i>Reframe the project to reflect how students will benefit rather than keeping the language general and from the district perspective</i>                |
| Build one new elementary school                                 | Build one new elementary school to address district growth and prevent overcrowding in schools                         | <i>Explain why a new building is needed and relate that need to the student experience so community members understand the necessity of the project</i>   |

## Provide Anticipated Timelines for Project Completion

Design project phases to **allow tangible results to be seen early** and consistently.



# 4 | Prepare Initial Informational Materials

In the course of the campaign, there will be ample opportunity to explain the referendum in great detail. However, **initial documents should provide clear and concise information about why the referendum is needed and what it will accomplish.** Foundational documents should answer the following questions.

**Do your referendum materials answer the following questions:**

- Which buildings will be impacted?
- Will new schools be built? Where?
- What infrastructure changes will be made? Why?
- Are there phases to the project?
- What projects will be completed in each phase?
- How will any general operating funds be used to support the district?

**Sample One-Page Overview of Major Initiatives of a Referendum**

**REFERENDUM INFORMATION**

**New Construction and Expanded Facilities**  
 These projects will create additional student capacity and replace aging facilities in two phases.

Replacement of West Elementary School: \$30,000,000 (Phase Two)

- Construction of a new Pre-K-4 elementary school to replace existing West Elementary School on land already owned by the district. (Anticipated completion: spring 2024)

Repurposing of North Middle School as an Elementary School: \$2,000,000 (Phase Two)

- Renovations to repurpose the existing space to serve K-4, including increasing classroom sizes and adding facilities to meet state standards. (Anticipated completion: Fall 2022)

**District-Wide Upgrades**  
 All schools are receiving upgrades in safety and security, new and expanded technology, and general facility improvements.

Safety and Security: \$4,000,000 (Phase One)

- Upgrade security systems and increase exterior lighting on all campuses. (Anticipated completion: fall 2021)

Existing Facilities Upgrades and Improvements: \$9,000,000 (Phase One)  
 (Anticipated completion: fall 2020 for all projects)

- Replace fire alarm systems that have exceeded their life cycle.
- Upgrades and repairs to address building code and handicap accessibility deficiencies.
- Interior finish upgrades including new flooring, ceilings, and doors.

Answers how many project phases

Answers where new school(s) will be built

Answers which buildings are impacted

Answers what infrastructure changes are happening

Source: EAB interviews and analysis; <http://www.duncanvilleisdbond.org/bo-nd-information.html>.

# 5 | Show the Community How Funding Impacts Them



**Do** tell people what the cost of the bond or levy will be to them so they know the potential financial impact on their budget.



**Don't** equate the cost to something else (i.e., one cup of coffee per day) as this approach often irritates people and does not match how most people budget.

### Simple: Provide a Chart with Price Points and Costs

Districts should **provide voters with basic information on how their taxes will be impacted** by the bond or levy so voters have full knowledge of how the bond or levy will impact their budget.

| Taxable Home Value  | Estimated Monthly Tax Increase | Estimated Yearly Tax Increase |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| \$100,000 (average) | \$5.63                         | \$67.50                       |
| \$125,000           | \$7.50                         | \$90.00                       |
| \$175,000           | \$11.25                        | \$135.00                      |
| \$200,000           | \$13.13                        | \$157.50                      |

### Advanced: Provide an Online Calculator

Districts with more capacity and expertise can **build an online calculator** to help citizens determine how much the bond or levy will impact their income annually.

Estimated Tax Impact Calculator

Input the appraised value of your property and click Calculate.

Property value: \$

Projected monthly impact: \$  per month

Projected annual impact: \$  per year

Estimated tax rate increase of \$0.99 of assessed property value and applicable exemptions.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis; Duncanville Independent School District : <http://www.duncanvilleisd.org/bond-information.html>.



# 6 | Simplify Complicated Ballot Language



**Do** help voters interpret ballot language so they can be informed voters.



**Don't** assume the ballot language will help voters understand what they are voting for or against.

## Alpine School District Ballot Language Translation

Districts should provide voters with an interpretation of the ballot language so voters **understand how the ballot translates to action for the district**. This side-by-side comparison provides the district with an opportunity to clearly translate and explain the financial implications of the bond or levy without complicating the conversation with how the funds will be used.

| WHAT DOES THE BALLOT LANGUAGE MEAN?  | HOW DOES IT READ ON THE BALLOT?   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>BELOW IS A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF WHAT THE OFFICIAL BALLOT LANGUAGE MEANS</b></p> <p>The Board expects to issue the bonds over a period of four years. The tax rate impact from Alpine District will have <b>NO INCREASE</b> on a residence or business. Therefore, the total cumulative impact is projected to be <b>\$0.00</b>.</p> <p>Alpine District is rapidly paying off existing bonds that were issued in the past. If these new bonds are not issued, the taxes needed to payoff existing bonds will continue to decrease. For the same cost as what you are currently paying, this proposal will maintain your tax effort at current levels in order to meet the needs and growth of the district.</p> <p><b>How can Alpine District's tax rate remain the same or possibly decrease with the 2016 bond?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1 Accelerated growth in our assessed value due to new residences and businesses</b></li> <li><b>2 Aggressive pay-off of previous 20-year bonds in approximately 15 years</b></li> <li><b>3 Structuring new bonds in layers keeps our debt ratio low and reduces the impact on taxpayers</b></li> <li><b>4 Impact of low borrowing rates due to our AAA rating is comparable to a personal credit score of 850 (FICO)</b></li> </ol> | <p><b>BELOW IS THE BALLOT LANGUAGE THAT WILL APPEAR ON THE OFFICIAL BALLOT AS REQUIRED BY UTAH STATE LAW</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">November 8, 2016</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>PROPOSITION #1</b></p> <p>Shall the Board of Education (the "Board") of Alpine School District, Utah (the "District"), be authorized to issue General Obligation Bonds (the "Bonds") in a principal amount not to exceed Three Hundred Eighty Seven Million Dollars (\$387,000,000) for the purpose of paying all or a portion of the costs to acquire land; acquiring, constructing, furnishing and equipping new school facilities; improving or rebuilding existing facilities; and the authorization and issuance of the Bonds due and payable with a term not to exceed twenty (20) years from the date or dates of issuance of the Bonds?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>PROPERTY TAX COST OF BONDS</b></p> <p>The District has other outstanding bonds for which a tax decrease would occur upon the retirement of such bonds, which may not occur if the Bonds are issued. However, these outstanding bonds reduce over time such that it is expected that <b>there will be no (\$0.00) incremental property tax increase</b> on residences and businesses within the District from current annual levels after the Bonds are issued.</p> <p>If the Bonds are issued as planned, without regard to the existing taxes currently paid for existing bonds that will reduce over time, a property tax sufficient to pay debt service on the Bonds will be required over a period of twenty (20) years in the estimated amount of \$195.05 per year on a \$275,000 primary residence and in the estimated amount of \$354.64 per year on a business or secondary residence having the same value.</p> <p>The foregoing information is only an estimate and is not a limit on the amount of taxes that the District may be required to levy to pay debt service on the Bonds. The District is obligated to levy taxes to the extent provided by law in order to pay the Bonds. The amounts are based on various assumptions and estimates, including estimated debt service on the Bonds and taxable values of property in the District.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> FOR THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> AGAINST THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS</p> </div> |

Explain the cost implications for the community

Explain how the tax rate is impacted

Source: EAB interviews and analysis; Alpine School District [https://alpineschools.org/bond2016/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1532430997.8041338920593261718750#ballot](https://alpineschools.org/bond2016/?doing_wp_cron=1532430997.8041338920593261718750#ballot)

# 7 | Develop Initial FAQs and Build Upon Them



**Do** invest time in developing a thorough but concise FAQ document for clear and consistent answers to common questions.



**Don't** assume that people will figure out the answer to questions on their own or spend more than 1-2 minutes looking for an answer.

Make sure your Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document is well organized so that the community can quickly find answers to their questions. The **FAQ document should evolve throughout the campaign** to address issues as they arise.

## Essential FAQ Questions



### Financial

- What is the total amount of the referendum?
- How will this referendum impact my property tax rate?
- How was the amount of the referendum determined?



### Projects

- What kind of projects are included?
- Which schools benefit from the referendum and how?
- Why aren't some schools benefiting from the referendum?
- Where can I find more information about projects specific to my school(s)?
- How was the list of projects determined?



### Timeline

- When will construction begin on the projects?
- When will all projects be completed?
- Can the projects or their timelines change?
- Are there phases to the projects?

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

## Section 3

# Build Your Base and Deliver Your Message

### Goal

Identify your key supporters and messengers and develop your message dissemination strategy across multiple media platforms.

### Overview

Use the resources in this section to identify your base of supporters (e.g., friends of the district, staff) who will serve as your primary messengers, and to determine how and when they will deliver the campaign message.

The resources in this section will help district leaders:

- 1 Identify community segments for outreach and public support
- 2 Prepare teachers, principals, and school staff to answer questions
- 3 Assemble a “Friends of the District” committee
- 4 Develop a speakers bureau to give presentations and to attend events
- 5 Plan your communications strategy across mediums and timeframes

# 1 | Prepare to Disseminate Your Message



**Do** communicate with all voters in your district and not just those you think are likely supporters of the referendum.



**Don't** try to win over the support of your staunchest opposition, but do recognize them and hear their concerns.

The campaign should **identify a strategy for broad community engagement**, acknowledging where support is likely to already exist and where the campaign should expend effort building knowledge to win eventual support.



## Identify Segments of Your Community for Outreach

Beyond current district staff and families, make sure your **campaign outreach does not ignore constituencies who could derail your efforts**. Make sure you reach out to:



- Community organizations
- Religious organizations
- Retirement communities
- Neighborhood associations
- Traditionally oppositional groups

Hear their concerns but do not try to persuade them



## Engage Teachers and Principals to Become Your Earliest Supporters

### Ensure District Buy-In

Districts must **meet with schools not benefiting from the referendum** to ensure their buy-in. Opposition from within the district can doom a campaign.



### Test Early Messaging

**Test proposed messaging with a supportive audience** to determine resonance and potential adjustments based on feedback and questions raised.

### Establish Credible Message Carriers

**Parents are most likely to ask their child's teacher or principal about the referendum.** By gaining early support from schools, the odds of spreading positive information about the referendum and its chances of success increase.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

## 2 | Organize Your Strongest Supporters



**Do** identify your strongest supporters to become champions and active advocates for the referendum.



**Don't** take a narrow view of who your supporters are—reach out broadly to the community.



### Assemble a “Friends of the District” Committee

While the district can take full responsibility for developing and sharing factual collateral for a referendum, most state laws prohibit districts from advocating for passage or using district resources for the referendum. **Therefore, districts should assemble a committee who can advocate for the referendum and fundraise.**

| Description  | Responsibilities   | Potential Participants  |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>“Friends of the District” Committee</b></p> <p>20-30 representatives</p> | <p>The committee will spearhead campaign endeavors including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Message development</li> <li>• Speaking at community service events</li> <li>• Answering community questions</li> <li>• Supporting collateral development and distribution</li> </ul> <p>In the final weeks of the campaign, <b>committee members should be able to commit 10-20 hours of support per week.</b></p> | <p>Consider including the following people on your committee <b>to ensure diversity of experiences and insights.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Interested district staff and administration</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Members of pre-existing committees (e.g., advisory boards or citizens’ councils)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Members of the PTA/PTO</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Religious leaders</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Business leaders</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Community leaders</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Parents</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> School board members</li> </ul> |

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

## 2 | Organize Your Strongest Supporters (cont.)



### Seek Endorsements

Beyond the “Friends of the District” committee, the campaign will need additional support to be successful. **Seeking the endorsement of key community members is a good strategy for increasing support for the referendum.**

Consider asking for endorsement from:



- Religious leaders
- Teachers unions
- Local government officials
- Community organization leaders
- School board members
- Local advocacy groups



### Develop a Speakers Bureau

If possible, identify members of the committee who would be willing and have the time to **attend community events to present on the referendum** and answer questions.

Consider committee members who:

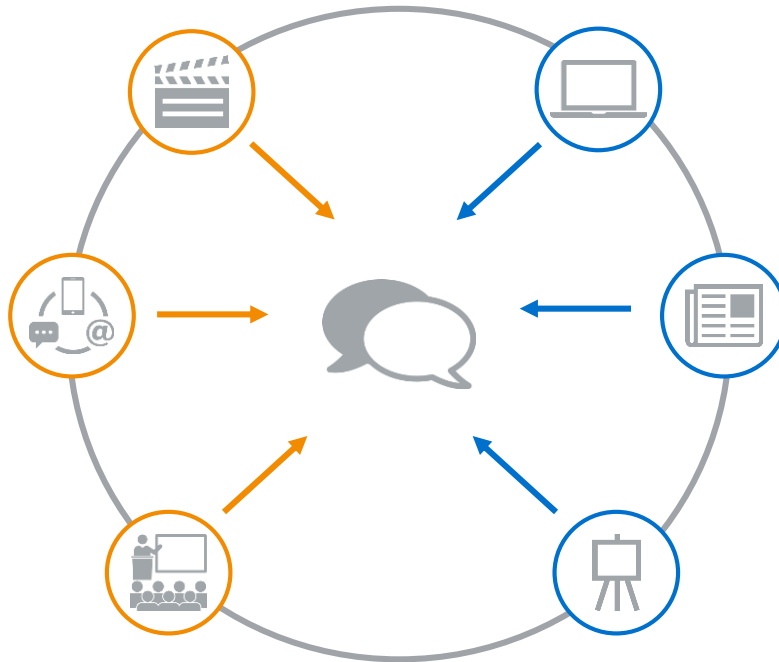
- 1 Would be **strong messengers** for different constituencies
- 2 Are comfortable with **public speaking**
- 3 Are able to **respond to challenging questions**
- 4 Have the time to **speak at multiple meetings**

Speakers should be **trained by the district on the details** of the referendum and on answers to common questions.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

# 3 | Fund Your Message

Getting your message out to the community likely will require funding. **While districts cannot use their funds to promote a referendum, there are other sources of potential funding** for a campaign as well as multiple sources of free media.



### Free Media



*Referendum Video*  
1-3 minute video providing referendum highlights



*Social Media*  
Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter posts



*In-Person Meetings*  
Door-to-door campaigns and community meetings

### Paid Media



*Television and Radio Ads*  
Placed at times of day with greatest audience



*Print Communications*  
Newspaper or magazine ad placement and mailers



*Signs*  
Posters placed at schools or yard signs around the community

### Identifying Sources of Funding

Consult your state’s laws around district involvement in campaigning and fundraising. Often districts cannot use district funds or collect money to support a referendum. Generally, a Friends of the District committee (see p. 21) or other supporters, including district staff, on their own time and without using district resources, can **provide financial support for the campaign through donations or solicitation for donations.**

## 4 | Spread Your Message



**Do** recognize that different segments of the community access news differently. Communicating your message across multiple mediums (i.e., social media, print, and radio) is imperative to make sure everyone hears the message.



**Don't** inundate the community's communication channels with more than two messages per day, and don't start regular communications more than six weeks before the vote to prevent community members from tiring of the message.

### General Communications Guidance

As you prepare your neutral district communications about the referendum, and as your "Friends of the District" committee prepares their advocacy materials, **consider the following general communications guidelines.**

- 1 Keep messaging succinct** and tell people where to go for more details
- 2 Diversify your messengers and include teacher and student voices when possible** to explain the benefits of the referendum or current issues that the referendum will address
- 3 Determine points of greatest impact** for communications such as where print communications will have maximum visibility and when people most frequently check social media

### Convene a Rapid Response Team

The responsibilities of the team include:



**Respond immediately to any false statements or rumors** about the referendum on multiple communications platforms



**Answer any questions that arise** over social media quickly, especially in the final weeks of the campaign



Develop strategies to **negate any messaging from groups opposed to the referendum**

### Create Your Campaign Motto

Developing a logo or motto can increase the profile of your referendum and unify future messaging. The logo or motto should encapsulate the major projects or themes of the referendum.





## 4 | Spread Your Message (cont.)

### Communicate Enough, but Not Too Much

The campaign's budget will determine the feasibility of different forms of communication. Below are **considerations for each potential form of communication** the district may use to spread their message.

#### Referendum Video



**Make a video 1-3 minutes in length** that clearly explains the need for the referendum, the projects the funding will support, and the timeline that can serve as the cornerstone communications of your campaign.



#### Considerations

**Strive for diversity** of voices in the video, including principals, teachers, staff, students, and any community leaders who endorsed the referendum.



#### Video Examples

[Grand Prairie Independent School District](#) and [Alpine School District](#) produced videos that can be viewed using the hyperlinked text above.

#### Social Media



Consider using Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as they appeal to different audiences. **Messaging should be tailored to each platform** and posts should appear consistently across all three.



#### Considerations

**Don't post too often.** The social media campaign should intensify in the 2-3 weeks leading up to the vote with one post every few days. In the final week of the campaign, target 1-2 posts per day.



#### Additional Campaign Supports

For district-level exemplars of bond/finance campaigns visit the [National School Public Relations Association's website](#) for Gold Medallion winners.

## 4 | Spread Your Message (cont.)

### In-Person Meetings



#### Door-to-Door Campaigns

Make sure that any door knocking **volunteers are well trained in the campaign messaging** and can also direct people to additional information or the FAQs for answers to questions.



#### Community Meetings

Community meetings **may take a variety of forms** depending on your community and the availability of speakers. Districts can determine their capacity to host many small group meetings or to host a handful of large events.

#### Considerations

- **Have someone attend who can provide the facts** (district administrator or speakers bureau member) **and someone who can advocate** for passage (member of the “Friends of the District” committee).
- When possible, **ask principals to discuss the referendum with the community** as they are often the most recognizable face of the district or school.
- **Keep the messaging consistent** across meetings and provide people the opportunity to ask questions.
- **Tailor presentations** to the amount of time a meeting host is willing and able to provide.

#### How to Keep Open Question Sessions Productive and On Topic

- Ask attendees to **submit questions in writing in advance of the meeting** and answer them during the meeting or follow up individually afterwards
- Hold a **small group Q&A session after the main presentation** so one attendee cannot monopolize the floor
- Provide an **email address or website where participants can submit questions**, and commit to responding to their questions in a timely manner
- **Share information in advance** to allow people to process the bulk of the content prior to arrival

## 4 | Spread Your Message (cont.)

### Television and Radio Ads



Consider whether paid television and radio ads make sense for your district, your budget, and your referendum. **These ads can be time intensive and costly to produce**, but may be a worthwhile investment if you are facing strong opposition.

#### Considerations

**Place ads when the viewing or listening audience is largest.** For radio, consider placement during morning and evening rush hour. For television, consider placement during the morning and evening news.

**If possible, run several different ads with varied messaging to reduce fatigue of hearing the same ad.**

### Print Communications



#### Newspaper or Magazine Ads

- Place **succinct ads** on the front page and above the fold for maximum visibility
- Consider placement in **neighborhood newsletters and other local publications**

#### Posters



- Place posters in **high traffic areas** in schools
- **Tailor the poster** to the audience  
*Example: If poster is placed on school doors for parents to see, customize the poster to reflect the impact of the referendum on that building*



#### Mailers

- **Keep the information short and simple.** People will only glance quickly, so make your message clear
- Provide a **link to additional resources** for more information

#### Yard Signs



- Keep the message simple and **keep the signs basic**
- Distribute yard signs **one month before** the vote

#### Maximize the Impact of Paid Media

- **Don't pay for advertising more than 3 weeks before** the vote. People are not paying attention because the vote is too far away.
- **Devote air time to reminding people to vote.** People are busy and may forget—reminders in the week leading up to the vote are helpful.

## Section 4

# Execute Election Week Strategy and Next Steps

### Goal

Develop specific final week activities to turn out supporters to vote and prepare for next steps after the vote.

### Overview

Use the resources in this section to refocus the final week of your campaign plan on efforts to get out the vote for the referendum.

The recommendations and ideas in this section help districts to:

- 1 Prioritize communications in the final days of the campaign
- 2 Develop thank you messages for the community regardless of outcome
- 3 Identify strategy for continued community engagement after the campaign

# 1 | Election Week Outreach Checklist



**Do** change your messaging in the last week to remind people that the election is imminent rather than focusing solely on advocacy efforts.



**Don't** assume people have been paying attention to the campaign prior to the week of the vote or remember when Election Day is.

The following checklist helps **guide you through the last week of your campaign** as you shift from campaigning for the referendum to reminding people on which day, at what time, and where to vote.



**Send an email reminder to parents and staff** reminding them to vote, including when to vote and how to find out where.



Shift the social media campaign from one focused only on encouraging people to vote "yes" to one **reminding people on which day to vote**.



**Provide teachers with schedule flexibility** so they have time to vote.



If possible, **launch a get-out-the-vote door knocking campaign** to remind supporters to vote.



**Prepare a thank you message** for if the referendum passes and one for if the referendum fails.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

## 2 | Thank Your Supporters Regardless of Outcome



**Do** thank your supporters and begin a next phase conversation about how the district will provide updates to the community as work funded by the referendum begins.



**Don't** stop communicating with the community because Election Day is over or because the referendum failed; strive to keep the community engaged to win their support next time.

### Successful Referendum “Community Thank You Note”

Thank you messages can take the form of a **simple letter posted to the district website** and on social media.

*Dear Parents, Staff, and Community Members,*

*I want to thank you and the voters for the remarkable support we received for this referendum on Election Day and in the days and months leading up to the vote. This vote shows what an amazing community we live in and how supportive the community is of our kids and their futures.*

Thank voters for supporting students

*With this referendum, we'll be able to ensure that kids have the proper facilities and tools they need to succeed. We're so excited to get to work on these projects to make our schools stronger and better learning environments for students, teachers, and staff every day.*

Reaffirm how the funds will be used

*We look forward to sharing with you our progress on these projects. We will continue to ask for your support and feedback as we begin to build new schools and update infrastructure. We couldn't do this important work without you and we want you to see the exciting progress as it unfolds. We'll be sharing updates regularly with the community and you can always find additional information at our website.*

Commit to sharing project updates and continued engagement

*Thanks again for your continued support of our schools and our students!*

## 2 | Thank Your Supporters Regardless of Outcome

### Successful Referendum “Community Thank You Video”

A thank you video brings to life the teachers, students, and staff that the referendum will benefit.

#### Grand Rapids Public Schools Thank You Video



If you make a video, consider:

- How quickly can I make the video?
- Can it be made in advance of election day?
- How else will I thank voters the day of and day after the vote if my video is not ready?

### Failed Referendum “Community Thank You Note”

If the district’s referendum is defeated, the district should still thank the community for its support and **reaffirm the district’s commitment to providing the highest quality educational experience for children** in the community.

*Dear Parents, Staff, and Community Members,*

*I want to thank you and the voters for your support for this referendum. While we are disappointed with the outcome, we will continue to provide our students with the highest quality educational experiences in our district.*

*We look forward to engaging with the community in the coming months to learn more about the community’s vision for the school district and how we can work together to achieve that vision and support our students in reaching their highest potential.*

*Thanks you for your continued support of our schools and our students!*

Thank voters for their support

Preview next steps the district is going to take

#### Identifying the Root Cause of a Failed Referendum

For failed referendums, consider conducting a root cause analysis of what happened using the **audit tool on p. 7**.

# 3 | Update the Community on Progress



**Do** provide voters regular project updates through a centralized website to keep them engaged with the district and show them the progress being made on projects.



**Don't** provide sporadic or no updates on project work. This inaction will likely cause community disengagement and frustration, making it difficult for the district to garner support in the future.



## WELCOME TO THE DUNCANVILLE ISD BOND DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION WEBSITE

### Promises Made, Promises Kept

When voters overwhelmingly approved a \$102.545 million bond in November, we made a promise: that we will build what we said we would and that the process will be transparent. To keep everyone up to speed, Duncanville ISD is launching this website that is dedicated to keeping you informed on our progress. Here you'll find project updates, tax information and minutes from quarterly meetings of the Community Bond Oversight Team.

**The Community Bond Oversight Team** is made up of a diverse group of about 25 people from our community. They come from all walks of life, but they have one thing in common. They're passionate about ensuring the best use of our funds for the benefit of the children. They'll meet every quarter and the public is welcome to attend. Duncanville ISD Superintendent Dr. Alfred Ray said, "It's important that the school district lives up to its promises to the taxpayers. What better way to do so than to have a group of citizens to oversee how the bond is executed."

It's an exciting journey we're beginning – updating and improving Duncanville ISD. The purpose of this website is to inform our community about the design and construction status of the November 2014 Bond Program.

If you have any questions about the bond program, please contact the DISD Administration Office at 972-708-2000.

### PROJECT UPDATES



**Grand Prairie Independent School District (TX)** developed a bond project website to provide updates on each project, including building renderings and photos of completed construction

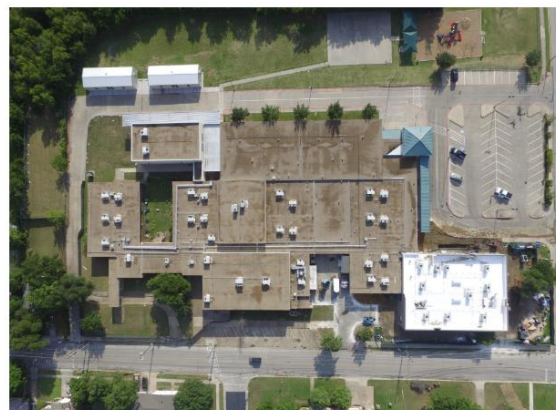
**Duncanville Independent School District (TX)** developed a construction website to provide updates on progress as well as provide the background of the bond and continued community engagement in the process

Austin Elementary School Addition - Phase 1 and Phase 2 Design Presentation

Kindergarten wing (white roof in the bottom right corner) is completed.



Additional Austin Elementary Bond Construction Photos



Source: EAB interviews and analysis; Duncanville ISD <http://www.duncanvilleisd.org/>; Grand Prairie ISD <https://www.gpisd.org/Page/34195>.

By sharing project updates you not only celebrate improvements across the district, but also provide accountability—proof to the public that the money is being used to complete the intended projects. **Additionally, by keeping voters engaged with the district through project updates, you are more likely to maintain them as supporters for any future referendum campaigns.**





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