Educating the Community

A Superintendent's Guide to Gaining Public Support for Facilities

FAIR

Fostering Accuracy, Involvement and Responsibility

www.FAIRIndiana.org

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FAIRIndiana.org

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Introduction

This publication is provided free of charge by FAIR Inc. (Fostering Accuracy, Involvement & Responsibility) to Indiana school superintendents and school boards.

FAIR is a non-profit statewide advocacy organization created to bring greater fairness to Indiana's public facility construction process. Our goal is to foster productive, positive conversations that will lead to sensible investments in the future of Indiana's communities – while preventing divisive battles that can leave long-lasting scars.

We believe that a referendum can provide a legitimate choice only when local voters receive accurate information from both sides. For that reason, FAIR is working to:

- Provide resources to local officials to help them be more effective in working with their communities,

- Enhance public awareness of the inequities in the present system, and

- Help state legislators recognize the need for refinement of the laws.

Our goal isn't to "sell" communities on specific building projects – it's to help local officials do a better job of working collaboratively with constituents so there is agreement on needs and best courses of action long before the referendum process begins.

FAIR's membership represents associations, professionals, companies, labor, educators, and others whose livelihood depends upon having a fair process for public review of building projects.

To learn more about how we can help you meet your community's needs, please contact us at **jholifield@fairindiana.org** or **317.650.2061**.

Networking

The Process of
Gaining Public Support

Phase I

Providing Quality Programs and Gaining Community Support

When considering facility needs, most superintendents now understand the need to involve the community in a comprehensive feasibility or facility study. School superintendents are also beginning to realize the need to "gear up" for the new mandates regarding referendums in order to secure the support of the patrons so that they show up at the polls to support the facility needs that have been identified. These two phases are the primary focus of the content in this "tool kit." However, an earlier phase is needed prior to any discussion with the community about program or facility needs, and that phase is best identified as providing quality programs to its youth. Those in the community, and not just parents, should feel good about the schools' academics, test scores, safety and security, the partnership with the community, and the arts and athletic programs. They should also have been receiving ongoing information about the successes the students and staff are experiencing. One Ohio superintendent stated that he spends about twenty-five percent of his time with activities relating to networking with the community. Experienced superintendents, school board members, and many in the business community will tell you that a significant part of a superintendent's job is networking with the community, with or without a proposed building program.

It has been said that twenty years ago superintendents focused their daily routine on the "B's": business, buses, and building maintenance. More recently it has been reported that the nature of the job requires the superintendents to focus more on the "C's": collaboration, curriculum, consensus, communication, coordination and conservation. Since Effective Schools Research emphasizes that quality schools must have principals who are curriculum leaders, superintendents should coach principals to become more involved in the instructional program, thus creating more time to focus on the communication and networking part of the job that is becoming critically important. Interestingly, the networking aspect of the job will likely add to the tenure of a superintendent in a particular community.

Networking activities vary a lot from school corporation to school corporation; however, some of the more successful initiatives are as follows:

1. A quality newsletter should be sent to the public routinely. The newsletter should report school successes and include pictures of students actively involved in school programs.

2. Regular meetings should be held with the leadership (key communicators) of the parent groups. One successful technique is to have an administrator or director at each meeting to discuss some particular program that tends to be a topic often discussed in the community, i.e., school lunch program, transportation, scholarships, athletics and athletic rules, safety and security, etc. Minutes should be sent to all of the officers of the parent groups and to all school administrators.

3. A partnership with the business community should be organized. Ask them to tutor, mentor, recognize students and teachers, etc. Also have local government, ministers, and Chamber leaders present at the meetings. Make sure they know the vitality of the community is impacted by the quality of the schools. Minutes should be sent to any business owner who has expressed interest in the Business-Education Steering Committee. Having ongoing minutes will really be valuable when you begin to discuss program and facility needs.

4. Become a member of a few community service groups. Just as important, let all the community groups know that you are available for presentations.

5. If funds permit, hire a writer to submit one or two articles each week to the local newspapers. These articles should not focus on athletics or school fundraisers, but should focus more on academics and school programs.

6. When someone is recognized by the newspaper in the community, clip the article and send them a brief congratulatory comment.

7. Become involved in community service activities.

8. Attend the Chamber of Commerce meetings.

9. Be highly visible at community and school events.

10. Assist a few groups like the United Way or community foundation.

11. Make sure the image of the schools and campuses is good. Make your staff aware of this importance and have them be "good will" ambassadors in the community.

12. Make sure the office staffs in all the schools are front line ambassadors for the school corporation. The classified and certified staffs represent significant internal publics and play a large part in fostering community support.

13. Become a part of the community. Network. You will likely be the best-know person in the community. Don't let your name be recognized, but not your face!

14. Create a quality website and provide lots of up-to-date relevant information.

15. Invite community leaders to meet once or twice a year at a luncheon to discuss school programs.

16. Schedule a luncheon each year for the local realtors. Since there are lots of rumors about student behavior in high schools, have the luncheon in the high school while students are present. Allow local builders to provide a brief presentation, as well as town government and chamber representatives.

17. Focus on activities for non-parents. For example, offer the school facilities for senior citizens to walk your hallways or indoor tracks during the winter and/or offer evening school classes relevant to this age level. Also provide free senior athletic passes.

18. Schedule an afternoon on a Saturday or Sunday for senior citizens, including those at assisted living facilities, to attend an ice cream social and have student art exhibits on display and several school choirs and bands performing.

19. Schedule "Superintendent Coffees" during the evening or at different times for those on non-traditional work schedules.

20. Have each civic group meet once in the schools to get a first-hand look at programs.

21. Prior to starting any building project, make sure all labor contracts have been settled. Labor peace will add support for the project and ensure a higher level of cooperation and collaboration.

22. Recognize veterans, grandparents, and retired teachers now so that they are more likely to support a campaign, or at least not actively oppose a project.

23. One impressive effort exists in the MSD of Decatur Township. Their "Systemic Transformational Process" has created a network that has reached out to all stakeholder groups. They have created Leadership Teams that are charged to involve the community in determining how learning should change in order to meet the needs of students in the 21st century. The team meets every third Tuesday from 4:00 – 6:30 p.m. and is involved in working groups that have assignments, reports, and a focus on data-driven decision making. Instead of voting on a particular initiative, the members of the group continue their data collection and reporting until they have reached a consensus. The membership is very supportive of the school corporation since they are involved in recommending changes. Teachers and school administrators are also a part of the leadership teams. While the leadership teams' purpose does not focus on school facility improvements, there are times when facility modifications are recommended to accommodate the new changes needed to meet the learning needs of the 21st century. It is no surprise that the superintendent and this group are very effective in being a trusted voice for the community and in being a driving force for program and facility improvements. As a result, their $85,000,000 high school program had strong community support. For example, no negative articles or letters to the editor appeared in the newspapers.

Feasibility/ Facility Study

Guiding the Community to Decide What it Wants

Phase II

Letting the Community Determine What It Wants

Community participation in a comprehensive feasibility or facility study is critical. FAIR is committed to helping local leaders foster and guide broad-based conversations to ensure collaborative decisions about public projects in Indiana communities. There should be a focus on accuracy, community involvement, and responsibility to the public. Local leaders should give those in the community what they want for their children.

All stakeholders should have an opportunity to be involved and informed as the feasibility or facility study progresses. A high level of integrity and transparency should occur throughout the process. Phase II involves the following:

1. Collecting Data
2. Engaging and Informing the Community
3. Data Review
4. Identifying Needs and Options
5. Community Review and Feedback
6. Formulating Recommendations
7. Submitting Recommendations to the School Board

There are a variety of ways observed in Indiana for engaging the community. The size and composition of committees do not seem to have a preferred pattern. "Broad representation," however, is a key. Most studies seem to focus on the collection of similar data. The membership of the Comprehensive Feasibility or facility Study Committee should include a broad representation from the community. The task force members should consist of some of the following:

1. Parents
2. Business Community
3. Major Business Taxpayer
4. Teaching Staff and other persons, if applicable
5. Chamber of Commerce Representative
6. Town/Township Representative
7. General Athletics/Booster Groups
8. Student Council
9. Retirees
10. Real Estate
11. Agriculture (if applicable)
12. Civic Groups

In Indiana, the business community and the agricultural community are key to the engagement process. If adequate representation does not occur from these two groups during the community engagement phase, then efforts need to be made to keep key leaders from each of the groups well informed and their input solicited along the way. They are the two groups where tax impact will likely be felt most significantly.

The size of the feasibility or facility study committees varies. Batesville Community School Corporation selected thirty-four in order to secure the broad representation that was needed. Plainfield Community School Corporation had thirteen on their Yellow Ribbon Task Force, and Southwest Dubois School Corporation has forty-two on its Facility Planning Committee. The MSD of Wayne Township had several on each of a variety of committees. Wayne Township had a committee with an elementary focus, a committee for a middle school focus, and another committee for a high school focus. As indicated by one of the inserts in this publication, they also had other committees for additional purposes. The key, as indicated above, is to make sure the committee has broad representation, make sure there are ways for other community members to secure information and provide feedback, and make sure the process is transparent and has a high degree of accuracy. It is important to continue the focus on accuracy, involvement, and responsibility.

The process in Indiana is also facilitated by a variety of sources, such as:

1. Architects
2. Construction Management
3. Educational Service Centers
4. Numerous consultants, both in-state and out-of-state
5. Community Leaders

It appears to be fairly common for an architectural firm to assist with the facilitation of the facility study to determine the scope and for a construction management firm to determine the costs if desired. Many superintendents will be relieved to learn that some architectural firms and construction management companies offer excellent resources relating to community engagement and PAC strategies.

The websites for Batesville Community School Corporation and Southwest Dubois School Corporation illustrate the type of reports and data provided to facility study committee members. It is common to provide reports about some of the following:

1. Demographics
2. Enrollment Trends
3. Facility Assessments
4. Building Capacity
5. Floor Plans
6. Program Needs
7. Facility Needs
8. Architectural, Electrical, Mechanical, and Site Surveys
9. Appraisal Guide (CEFPI)
10. ADA Facility Checklist
11. School Facility Guidelines
12. Sanitary Schoolhouse Rules Checklist
13. Property Tax Information
14. Other as Requested by the Facility Study Committee

It is recommended that opportunities be provided throughout the study for the general public to be informed of the process and to provide feedback. Surveys have been conducted in some communities. In one school corporation, the committee members were asked to provide the names of five individuals from the community who would be invited to a luncheon

to learn more about the work of the Feasibility Study Committee. It is also common for study committees to have two or three evening meetings for the public. Another approach is for the superintendent to send a letter to the leadership of every service organization to indicate that he or she is available to provide a presentation to the membership. One superintendent scheduled 4:30 p.m. meetings every Thursday during the latter part of the study for anyone who wanted additional information. While not many attended, the offer to meet provided the appropriate message. The internet can be used for simple surveys which is another way to secure community input.

The following paragraph was developed by the Southwest Dubois Facility Planning Committee and provides several reasons for keeping school facilities up-to-date:

> *Looking to the future, we recognize that increasing our student enrollment will lower tax rates. We also recognize that a reduction in student enrollment has the opposite effect. Therefore, the State of Indiana mandated a rule allowing students to choose any school within their county, sometimes referred to as 'dollars follow the scholars,' demands that we provide school facilities that will not only attract students, but also discourage existing students from moving to districts with more desirable facilities. A strong public school system is essential to a thriving community. It positively affects property values, develops an educated, employable workforce, and attracts families and businesses to our community. The overall security and comfort of the learning environment for both the student and staff are also an integral part of our recommendation.*

The theme of their report to the school board is "Strong Schools, Stronger Community!"

The insert in the Appendices regarding a case study of the Plainfield Community School Corporation provides more specific information about the agenda for the feasibility study, timelines, a board goal, community involvement, etc. While the $103 million high school did not involve a referendum, the process prompted the Indianapolis Star to include the following quote on the front page: "Plainfield did it right. Plainfield is a model for involving people, giving them information and letting the community...make the decisions." Except for one article regarding land, no negative articles or letters to the editor ever appeared in the **Indianapolis Star** or the local newspaper during the study and construction process. The key was broad representation on the committee, accuracy of data, lots of involvement, and responsibility.

Tips From Several Superintendents

Representing Projects That Were Not Supported and Supported by Referendum

Projects That Were Not Supported

1. While we had a community committee that listened to our architects and our construction manager, the task committee was not broad enough.

2. We should have identified some of the gossips, naysayers, and complainers and included them ahead of time.

3. We tried to identify a community PAC but there was no one willing to give the time needed to lead the initiative.

4. It is important to involve people early, including those you anticipate will oppose the project.

5. Begin outlining the needs well in advance. Identify problem areas of facilities in newsletters, interviews with the media, school newsletters, etc.

6. Make sure you have 100% Board support. If not, spend time at a Board Retreat educating that board member. It is possible that a board member is not aware of all the preparation that has gone on for the last couple of years.

7. If we had it to do over, we probably would have taken smaller steps to accomplish our goals.

8. We should have taken the time necessary to cover all opposing arguments prior to the 1028 Hearing.

9. We would do a much more detailed description of the project and spend more time advertising the actual tax impact.

10. We should have been more conservative in predicting the actual cost at the 1028 Hearing. We built in too much for inflation and potential increases in interest rates.

11. We should have had a well-defined list of renovation items and a conceptual drawing of the proposed new building.

12. While it may appear you have no opposition, have a strategy in place in the event several negative letters to the editor are submitted a week prior to the voting process.

Projects That Were Supported

1. You need to contribute several years for planning.

2. You need to have the voting process during the general election, not a special election. (Note: In its short history in Indiana, it appears that it is best to have the voting process during the general election. However, the statistics in other states do not support the idea that a special election is necessarily a negative environment for running a referendum campaign.)

3. Be aware of debt going off the books to help offset the new costs. (Note: One school corporation recommended construction in two phases. The second phase was to begin as soon as the previous bond for an elementary school was paid off. Their campaign was succesful.)

4. Create a political action committee (PAC) to do grassroots activities relating to the referendum.

5. Work closely with the local auditor.

6. It was predicted that 25% of the public will vote against anything.

7. It was stated that some superintendents say they don't get involved in the political part in order to keep the voting clean. One superintendent felt that this is just an excuse not to do the extra work.

8. You need to focus on the people who don't feel passionate either way.

9. There is a need to treat the referendum as a political campaign. Analyze the votes.

10. Figure out, as best you can, who will be against the project. Meet with them individually. Don't challenge them publicly.

11. It was stated that only 20% of the public are connected to the schools.

12. In reality, many homeowners' taxes have now gone down.

13. Get the media on your side. Meet with the editor.

14. Shoot for 2012 timeline.

15. Begin meeting with community groups long before a need for a building program has been identified.

Suggestions For A Successful Referendum Process

Flat Rock-Hawcreek School Corporation
Philip Deardorff, Superintendent

The following steps start well before the decision to seek a referendum. Ignoring these early steps may cost you later.

1. Do not start off by talking building or renovating. This puts people on the defensive. Begin with a "Facilities Needs" Study. Speak with your administrators, teachers, and staff. Make sure you include your custodians and maintenance staff members.

2. Identify key community voices early. Invite them to be part of a study committee. Include those members who tend to be critics. If you do not invite them, they could become a strong force that you will have to deal with later.

3. Tour your buildings with the team members and take photographs. Share this information at Board meetings and invite teachers, parents, and community members to those Board meetings.

4. Get your community groups/clubs to offer their support for your study committee.

5. Have your committee meet in various locations in the community. Don't just use the Central Office meeting room. Some people feel more comfortable in a community center or library meeting room.

6. When the committee makes a recommendation to the School Board, highlight all of the positives first and list the "negatives" as "Needs."

7. Ask for public input on meeting the "Needs." You may want to start a subcommittee that will examine multiple ways to answer the needs of the schools/community. Also ask this group to help you by prioritizing the needs. Share this priority list with your staff and Board members. Ask for their input on how they would prioritize the list of "Needs." Make sure that you keep reasons tied to the needs. For example, if you have overcrowded conditions, ask your local fire marshal for a letter pointing to the dangers. If you have air quality issues, hire an independent company to monitor your air quality over time and publish those findings. These are reasons that tie to your needs.

8. Keep your notes. In fact, the better your minutes of the meetings, the better you will be able to answer the hard questions later.

9. Share the information of the "Needs" priority list. Ask for additional input and include this information in your local papers. Stress that the input to answer the "needs" are only ideas, not set plans. Start to "take the temperature" of the community. Ask your board members to talk with some of their own constituents to judge support levels for the various ideas that came from the two committees. Seek input from your teachers' association. They can be an excellent ally.

10. If the board does decide to move forward with the referendum, build your support team well in advance of the time that you announce the decision. This means that you will be on the phone and communicating with your board and team members.

11. Keep everything centered on the needs, not the wants. Develop your flyers, postcards, and newspaper stories that answer the needs of the students. Share the tax impact information and publish this regularly. Continue to build your support base even as you begin interviewing architects to join your team.

Planning Strategies at Kankakee Valley

Kankakee Valley School Corporation
Glenn Krueger, Superintendent

First of all we did not spend a penny of the school corporation's money to advance our referendum.   A copy of our referendum website is referenced below.

Second, I mapped out a comprehensive campaign very early. We executed that plan flawlessly. Essentially, we prepared a campaign for every possible contingency. I sought out a reporter who was favorable to the project for local news coverage. That was critical. I made sure that in the local media they referenced a website for additional information.

Third, I established early, a website for information that the public could access. I used Blogspot.com because it was free. Go to www.kvinformation@blogspot.com to view the same site now being used to manage the construction. Notice I did not and do not permit comments on the website as they are too hard to control. I linked one table to the Blogspot site on taxes.

Fourth, a small group of supporters copied the information on the website and they, at their expense, distributed a flyer to the barber shops, beauty parlors, and the coffee shops in the community. Key communicators were identified in the community months in advance and our small group of supporters made sure they sat down one-on-one with those folks to be sure they knew the facts. We did not ask them to help, just be informed. Many did in fact quietly support our efforts. Business folks are careful not to offend anyone.

Fifth, we also were totally consistent in our message throughout the campaign.

Sixth, we enlisted the unions to help pass the referendum. They supported us because we would create many union jobs. They had folks at the voting sites supporting the referendum. The unions are now seeking written agreements to assist school corporations.

Seventh, **know your community and what they will or will not support**. Do not advance physical education, athletic sites, or auditoriums in a referendum. They are "red flags" for the public to rally around. It is best to have them as alternates if there is enough money left over or as miscellaneous projects that were not delineated.

Eighth, when the folks against us put out information, we corrected any factually incorrect information. However, we never attacked an individual.

Successful Sequence of Events Leading to School Construction

MSD Wayne Township
Tom Langdoc, Former Director of School/Community Services (Reported Information)
Dr. Terry Thompson, Superintendent

1. Process began with a feasibility study to determine facility and program needs for the next ten years (i.e., technology, special education, others).

2. A consultant from Ohio completed a facility analysis.

3. A demographics study was completed to predict future needs and trends.

4. Several public meetings were held in the community. The citizens had an opportunity to review the data, ask questions, voice opinions, etc.

5. Study committees were developed for each level (elementary, middle school, high school). Each committee, with broad-based representation, reviewed the data with the purpose of developing recommendations to the school board.

6. The committees were provided parameters to frame the discussions, such as consideration of tax impact, energy efficiency, long-term value, serving children in the future, program needs (i.e., federal requirements), and benefit to the community.

7. Each committee consisted of members who represented all segments of the community, (parents, secondary age students, non-parents, business owners, senior citizens, teachers, etc.). A chairperson was selected.

8. The committee members were provided detailed information about the feasibility study, including pictures of the interior of the schools, or they were provided tours.

9. There was also a core planning committee ("Project Team") that consisted of the superintendent, assistant superintendent, business manager, architects, financial adviser, and construction manager to ensure continuity and understanding.

10. There was also a communication committee that provided needed communication strategies. This committee consisted of key communicators in the community. A consultant was also utilized to provide information to the media. A PAC was not formed since this was prior to the referendum requirements restricting information from the school corporation to the public.

11. The school corporation developed a packet of information to the public (common messages). The information had tax charts to illustrate the tax impact and other relevant information, including frequently asked questions.

12. A telephone hot-line was provided. The public could call and leave a message anytime and an administrator would call them back with the needed information.

13. Administrators were available on Saturday mornings to help homeowners calculate the impact on their taxes.

14. Schematics of floor plans were provided to anyone interested in knowing more about the renovation/expansion components within any building.

15. During the process, reports were made to the school board at regular school board meetings as to the progress of the various committees.

16. Once the committees completed their work, the recommendations were presented to the school board during a regular meeting. Community members assisted with the presentations, not just staff members.

17. The board accepted the recommendations, reviewed the recommendations for a couple of meetings, and eventually approved them at a public board meeting.

18. Once the recommendations were board approved, they were widely disseminated and publicized, including presentations to various civic and service organizations.

Successful Referendum With Community Focus

Southwest Dubois County School Corporation
Terry P. Enlow, Superintendent

The following activities resulted in a successful referendum. Note the community involvement in the process.

1. The superintendent organized CARE (Community Academy to Reform Education) focus groups in 2006. All residents in the community were invited to attend the meetings.

2. During about the third meeting of one of the focus groups those in attendance toured the school facility.

3. Some of those on tour felt that security in the school could be improved and noticed other facility and program needs. They recommended that strategies be developed to improve the weaknesses identified.

4. The superintendent suggested that those in the focus groups meet additionally to discuss strategies. A Facilities Planning Committee was formed. Several CARE participants became the nucleus of this committee.

5. The Facilities Planning Committee provided a scope of work and recommended three architectural firms to the Board for their consideration. The architectural firm, once selected by the Board, led the group through community engagement activities and additional facility planning activities.

6. Due to the economic climate, the Board was aware that the timing was right since bids would be very competitive.

7. The Board assumed a supportive role, but the members were not on the Facilities Planning Committee.

8. The committee members were highly motivated and felt they had a very compelling story to tell the community regarding facility needs. This motivation carried over into the Political Action Committee. Because of their significant involvement and influence in the process, the members had strong ownership.

9. The committee recommendations were discussed at several focus or community input groups. At one of the meetings, a group of business leaders suggested the scope of the project be scaled back. To accommodate this request, it was agreed that part of the project would be delayed until 2018, the year an elementary school bond would be paid off. Those in attendance supported this strategy and agreed to support the completion of the scope of work when the elementary bond issue no longer existed.

10. Media coverage was very fair. All of the county superintendents meet regularly with the manager editor of the county newspaper. The general goal of the superintendents and the media is to strengthen the image and quality of life in the county.

11. The referendum passed. One reason is that the committee had invested so much effort in the recommendation that they were passionate about the proposed project.

Regarding networking or securing support in the community, the superintendent belongs to a couple of service groups, attends a local church, and participates in community service activities He reported that attending home ballgames is more or less an expectation and feels that attending away games provides a higher level of visibility to those in attendance. The superintendent feels that while technology is a great tool, new superintendents need to be aware that there should be more focus on face-to-face communications, both in the schools and in the community.

Political Action Committee

Campaign Leaders Getting Every Identifed "YES" Voter to the Polls

Phase III

Political Action Committee

If the networking (Phase I) and the feasibility or facility study process (Phase II) are done effectively, getting responsible, supportive, and passionate members on the Political Action Committee will become easier. As indicated by the following pages, the size and strategies of PACs vary. This section focuses primarily on what Political Action Committees have been doing in Indiana and, in one situation, Ohio. It is common for a PAC to be formed to attempt to influence the outcome of a project since superintendents are restricted from promoting the project after the preliminary determination resolution. The group forming the PAC will need to file the required reports, including the reporting of contributions.

Every community is unique, every PAC is unique, and the issues that will make or break a campaign are unique. Experience is irreplaceable and, unfortunately, each community gets very few opportunities to gain the necessary experience to learn strategies to guide them through the campaign. Everyone involved in the campaign needs to be supportive, passionate, and determined to go the distance. Also, it takes far more involvement than those who serve on and attend committee meetings to make the campaign successful. Those involved will be soliciting help from many segments of their communities.

A PAC with broad representation is needed to prepare for the voting process. Not all members need to have served on the Feasibility or Facility Study Committee. Each PAC will do things differently since the members are the ones who best know the community. One well-organized Indiana PAC had twelve members. The members had a variety of skills that proved to be very beneficial. The technology skills on the committee proved to be significant for data management purposes, including mailing labels, voting lists, and the storing of project data. Some members had fund-raising and leadership skills, while others had valuable media contacts, speaking skills, writing skills and legal skills. Many were well known in the community. All of them would have been valuable in the community when involved in face-to-face communications with key communicators in the community. Each meeting had an agenda, and the first item on the agenda was to report what the members were hearing in the community about the proposed project. The members were very task-oriented. Their focus was on the voters who would likely favor the project. Another focus was on the unregistered voters, including college students who still lived in the community.

This publication does not describe the legalities of PACs or specific rules during the referendum, since that information is available from large legal firms that are known to represent school corporations on a frequent basis. One law firm will send superintendents a copy of their interpretation of the rules for conducting a referendum as well as a document that discusses PACs. It is advisable to have legal counsel available at the first PAC meeting to discuss the limitations placed on the school corporation during the referendum and the role of a PAC. It is a Class A infraction for violating the statute relating to a referendum.

As stated above, School superintendents cannot promote the project after the adoption of the preliminary determination resolution. It is important, therefore, to develop a website and publications prior to the resolution, since there are no limitations on what can be done in advance. One attorney claims that as long as the website is factual, and not

promotional, the information can remain during the referendum. Sending information out by the school corporation in advance is also advisable. FAIR's website contains samples of a publication in a Q & A format that would be beneficial for a school corporation to send out prior to the referendum. The purpose would be to educate the community and also to have factual information out in the community in the event there is opposition to the project and the opposition's data are not accurate or truthful. If the data are also on the website, the community, as well as the PAC members, will have a source for accurate data. Some architecture firms will develop the information for the website. It is extremely important to always report accurate data.

Regardless of the information provided, it is significant to keep in mind what superintendent Dr. David Hutton stated in the "Superintendents Speak" section in this publication: "It has been found that the success of any referendum must be case sensitive to actual school needs, costs, resources and measures of self-interest. The results for the tax, maintenance and capital outlay indicate that community/school history plays an extremely important role in the likelihood of a successful referendum passage. Early communications among and between the stakeholders play a critical role in the success of any referendum." While PACs can accomplish a lot, their responsibilities become less overwhelming when the superintendent has been networking with the community and the feasibility or facility study process has been a collaborative approach by involving the community in determining what it wants for the children.

Procedures Utilized By a Well-Organized PAC

Batesville Community School Corporation
James Roberts, Superintendent

1. There were twelve members serving on the PAC. Two were selected as co-chairs.

2. The PAC members were community volunteers with many of them serving on the 34-member Facility Study Committee.

3. The twelve were selected based upon their skills and passion for the proposed construction.

4. Meetings were held at 7:00 p.m. every Monday beginning in July.

5. A meeting room was located in a vacated office in town. The accommodations remained in place.

6. Voter data were secured. Names of those in each precinct were obtained. The lists of the fifteen precincts were taped to the walls.

7. Volunteers from the community were recruited to organize telephone caller teams to those included on the precinct lists. It should be expected that some changes will occur and additional recruiting will be necessary. A script was developed for the callers. Those who either supported or did not support the project were identified.

8. An agenda was always provided. The first item on the agenda was to report any concerns or rumors being heard in the community.

9. Due to the three presentations to the community by the Facility Study Committee, the PAC members had a fairly good idea what the community supported. For example, during the Power Point presentation, those in attendance were asked to "click" their support or lack of support for each item presented during the presentation.

10. A website was created that included a tax calculator. The school corporation's website included lots of information resulting from the feasibility study, including the final recommendations to the board.

11. The PAC members met on a Saturday to address envelopes for non-registered voters. The packet included a cover letter, an explanation of the bond issue, and a voter registration form. Follow-up activities occurred.

12. "Yes" handouts were provided at several places where larger groups were meeting, i.e., Applefest.

13. The superintendent was not able to promote the project after the 1028 Hearing. This restricted the ability to inform the community of the needs of the children.

14. An attorney with experience in school law met with the PAC members during their first meeting to explain the restrictions placed on a school corporation during the referendum.

15. Certain members of PAC were identified as those who were to make presentations to community groups.

16. Some of the members had a valuable knowledge of technology. This became more valuable as "yes" voters were identified and mailing labels needed to be modified.

17. Mass mailings were not done.

18. Following the campaign, it was felt that focus groups would have been benefical for some of the community members who did not attend the community input sessions.

19. Had any letters from non-supporters been sent to the local newspaper, the PAC was prepared to counter this effort with a larger number.

20. School corporation and PAC members preferred having the referendum during a special election versus a general election.

21. The PAC members discussed how good schools improve the community and attract higher quality businesses and families that value education.

22. Some of the members were responsible for raising funds for PAC.

23. The PAC was officially registered prior to their first meeting.

24. There was no formal opposition to the proposed project.

25. The public had many opportunities to provide input during the lengthy process. The local media appeared to support the project. The referendum, however, did not pass. The addition of a new pool and the remodeling of the auditiorium likely created some of the opposition. Obviously, the economy in 2009 was a factor for some in the community. The last minute action of a highly influential person in the community to place a paid ad in the newspaper that cited many reasons to vote against the project could certainly have been a factor. The Facility Planning Committee and the PAC members appeared to have made an exceptional effort. Several community input sessions were provided. One key problem might have been the failure to engage those in the community who never attended any of the meetings and who simply found it easier to vote "no" than to learn about the needs of the children in the school corporation.

Strategies Utilized by a Successful PAC

Indiana School Corporation – Anonymity Requested
Successfully Passed Referendum

Presented in outline form, below are the strategies used by a successful Indiana PAC.

1. Organize a PAC committee of perhaps twelve members.

2. Include several business leaders on the committee.

3. Identify a highly respected person in the community to facilitate the process.

4. Select a chairperson and a treasurer for the PAC.

5. Meet one day a week at 7:30 a.m. for one hour (To accommodate the business members and others on the committee.)

6. Begin meeting in August to prepare for November voting.

7. Consider bringing in a consultant to discuss the process.

8. Run a positive campaign. Don't attack those who are being negative.

9. Keep the message succinct.

10. Report often the actual tax increase for a home valued at $100,000.
    Don't start the campaign until you know the actual amount.

11. Emphasize to business owners that good schools bring additional business to the community. Good families who want good schools are attracted to the community.

12. Contact and encourage the support and participation of retired teachers, current and past band parents, booster groups, and especially the parents of the students in the grade level that will be the first students to use the new or remodeled school. Ask them to volunteer (also get their email addresses).

13. As funds are needed, ask the business leaders who are on the PAC to raise the funds.

14. Keep your contacts away from the schools when legally required to do so.

15. Use adults, not students, at the polls.

16. Need budget of at least $6,000 for signs, ads, post card campaign.

Nuts And Bolts

1. Secure the commitment of a large number of individuals to assist with a post card campaign. (Note: Another school corporation's PAC made phone calls instead of mailing post cards.)

2. Have each volunteer agree to address a minimum of 25 post cards that PAC will supply. Some will do lots more. It should be optional as to whether they add postage. Keep track of those who are writing the cards.

3. The post card should have a simple message and a space for the sender to write a brief note requesting support. The cards, once addressed, are to be returned to PAC so they can be sent ten days prior to the election. Someone needs to organize the cards. Duplicate cards should be sent out one day later.

4. The cards should be addressed to friends, neighbors, classmates, church members, booster group members, etc. who live in your community.

5. Run a few ads in the paper around ten days prior to the voting process. Place yard signs at strategic, highly visible locations.

6. PAC members should be accessible to civic groups. Actually, this should be an ongoing activity as soon as the PAC has been organized. Obviously, the superintendent will have been a previous presenter at most or all of the civic/community groups.

7. Determine which voting locations have the largest participation. Assign priority to those locations.

8. The volunteers at the polls should have a simple statement, such as please vote to improve our schools. Don't underestimate the value of poll workers.

9. Some of the PAC members or the facilitator might consider phone calls and some door-to-door campaigning.

10. Don't assume that just because your community members are very supportive of its schools that they will automatically vote.

Referendum Activities at Huber Heights, Ohio

Huber Heights City School District
Dr. William Kirby, Superintendent (Former Indiana Superintendent)

Most of the following activities were led by community volunteers and resulted in the successful passage of an $82,000,000 bond levy project.

Activity	Brief Description
Alumni Letter	Sent to local alumni and college students with a local address. The focus was to get the absentee ballot.
Bear Stickers	Worn by community supporters
Billboard	Was paid by a local person
Business Signs	Signs around at businesses that stated, "Support Huber Heights City Schools." Intentionally did not make reference to a bond issue (or vote).
Door Hangers	Volunteers, including lots of staff, placed these on door knobs in many neighborhoods.
DVD	A professional DVD was made and distributed.
Email Bullets	Many volunteers sent notes to those on their email lists.
Football Game Announcements	Self-explanatory
Huber Rental Letter	Letter sent to residents of Huber Rentals after the company had sent a negative letter against the levy a week before the elections.
Letters to the Editor	Provided boiler plate and volunteers sent letters of support.
Main Brochure	Presented in a Q & A format. Superintendent kept a file of frequently asked questions for this brochure.
Marquee Messages	A different message each week for six weeks. All of the schools displayed the same message each week. Not allowed to say, Vote For . . .
Meet the Candidate Night	School officials also attended these meeting to provide information.
Newspaper Articles	"Ads" were placed in the paper - paid for by the volunteers.

Phone Calls	A phone tree was developed. The staff made lots of calls after work. Focused on areas where it was felt they could get the votes.
Prospectus	Sent the last month of the campaign to answer questions and issues that had come up.
Response To Vote By Mail	Sent letters offering assistance for absentee voting.
School Newsletters	Self-explanatory
School TV	Self-explanatory
Picture Card	Picture post card of local well known staff person to announce support of project.
Stickers for Students	Encouraged students to go to the polls with their parents to observe as much as possible. Those who went were given a cookie at school. This encouraged students to encourage their parents to vote.
Student Council Signs	Made posters. Student driven.
Teacher Notes	Each teacher was encouraged to send five notes to voters.
Principal Letters	Self-Explanatory
Tri-Fold	Brochure explaining project and encouraging support
T-shirts	Done by the parent volunteers. They wore the shirt to activities.
Volunteer Sign-Up	Kept readily available to secure volunteers for placement of yard signs and for placing items on doors knobs.
Voter Registration by Mail	A variety of efforts were made to get people registered to vote. These individuals were generally thankful and supportive.
Website	A lot of information was posted in Question and Answer format.
Yard signs	Lots of signs were distributed by the many volunteers.
Superintendent Letter	A weekly letter from the superintendent was published in the local newspaper
Focus Groups	Thirteen focus groups were held, i.e., senior citizens, governmental groups, and community leaders.

Notes: The budget was approximately $50,000. The funds were raised from the vendors, PAC asked for contributions, Staff payroll deductions for those interested and in-kind contributions.

Summary

Summary

Indiana is discovering a new process. Superintendents must now go to their communities and build consensus and support to achieve what was simpler for them in the past. Bill Kirby, a former Indiana superintendent and currently a superintendent in Ohio, a state well known for referendums, is not using his work hours inappropriately by allocating about twenty-five percent of his time networking with the community. With so much negative press relating to education, superintendents must work hard to provide quality programs and facilities for the communities youth. A significant effort must also be directed to communications and networking. To make sure the community supports the mission of the schools, networking should be a significant part of a superintendent's job description. Being heavily involved in the community will also be advantageous when the superintendent and board members are selecting members for a feasibility or facility study and political advisory committees.

Several years of planning and networking are required prior to suggesting to a community that a facility study is needed. Community participation in the facility study is critical. There should be a focus on accuracy, community involvement, and responsibility. All stakeholders should have an opportunity to be involved and informed. There are multiple ways to engage the community, to gather data, and to facilitate the process. Some of the architectural firms, for example, can assist greatly with this process. Transparency, thoughtful planning, and broad representation should result in giving a community what it wants for the children and stakeholders.

Community and state leaders should be reminded often that a strong public school system is essential to a thriving community. Facilities are sound, sensible investments in the economic future of the community. A quality school corporation positively affects property values and attracts families and businesses that value education. A strong school system can have an impact on the quality of life in a community.

There's no question that schools belong to the community. As stewards of those schools, superintendents and school board members are responsible for keeping the public apprised of needs and educating them about challenges. When school leaders make the community an active partner in determining priorities and identifying the steps to take, everyone benefits. The community receives the many advantages of high quality facilities, and school leaders earn a reputation for genuine collaboration and cooperation.

Superintendents Speak

Essential Ingredients for a Successful Referendum

Dr. Philip M. Ehrhardt
Benjamin District 25, Illinois Superintendent
Former Ohio Superintendent and Indiana Deputy Superintendent

Ongoing Preparation

The Boy Scouts' motto of "Be Prepared" needs to be heeded by superintendents when considering a referendum. Establishing fiscally responsible business practices, communicating the results of the practices, and providing easily understood and accurate financial information are critical in order to achieve credibility with constituents. Waiting until shortly before a referendum is needed prior to putting in place the above strategies is likely to decrease the chance of having a successful referendum.

By using these strategies, there should be no surprises to the public when the need for a referendum is being considered. Specific examples of components for each of these strategies are listed below.

Establishing Fiscally Responsible Business Practices

1. Create and publicize a list of cost-savings measures such as refinancing bonds, reducing furniture replacement purchases and decreasing life insurance premium costs that have been or are being implemented.

2. Develop other sources of revenue to increase funding that has been or is being implemented.

3. Form a finance advisory group consisting of stakeholders in the community to seek their ideas to identify sound business practices.

4. Seek suggestions from staff on how to trim costs.

Communicating the Results of the Business Practices

1. Highlight the results through reports at board meetings, community meetings, and in newsletters, websites, annual report, etc.

2. Meet with individuals and groups to share the results and seek feedback.

Providing Easily Understood and Accurate Financial Information

1. Continually communicate financial information in simple terms using graphs, charts and pictographs so the stakeholders better understand the complex data. This approach also strengthens trust with the public.

2. Utilize a finance advisory group to share the information with the public to provide an objective view of the school district's financial picture.

Planning to Plan

Determining the need for a referendum must be carefully planned. The timing is critical to identify *when* a referendum is necessary in order to continue to provide an effective educational program for students. Prematurely identifying the need can make the public wary of how real the financial problem is. Waiting too long so the district's finances are extremely dire can impact the outcome of a referendum and affect the quality of education. Again, there should be no surprises to the public that a referendum is warranted.

Involving a finance advisory group in helping to determine the necessity of a referendum enables a third-party perspective to be utilized. Selecting a cross section of group members with a variety of experiences, interests, and backgrounds solidifies the credibility of their work. Persons who have been "fence straddlers" on previous financial issues are important to include. Sound and defensible rationale must be used to convince the stakeholders that it is in their best interests to pass a referendum.

Conducting A Referendum

Organizing a task force to conduct the referendum should be the first step. School district officials must follow the rules and regulations of conducting a referendum and educate those who will be involved. A core group of residents who are willing to serve as key coordinators for the referendum must prepare an execution plan addressing the following issues:

1. What is the desired outcome of the referendum? (Be specific!)

2. How will each of the stakeholders (students, parents, staff, business, and community) benefit from the referendum? (Keep in mind that typically the majority of the taxpayers do not have children in school.)

3. What will be the theme of the campaign? (Targeting students is a key!)

4. What groups will be supportive, undecided, or adamantly against a referendum? (Be realistic!)

5. What strategies can be established to involve the supportive individuals and groups to participate in the referendum? (Ownership and commitment are critical.)

6. What ways can we educate and convince the undecided individuals and groups to support or at least not oppose the referendum? (For example: Create a marketing plan to visit senior citizen centers and retirement homes to help them understand the need for the referendum, the process and how they can benefit directly and indirectly from the referendum.)

7. How can the financial impact on persons with fixed incomes be minimized? (Publicize the existing tax credits for senior citizens, disabled and others; help organize groups that are adversely impacted to seek legislative changes to tax credits to benefit them.)

8. What individuals or groups will be staunchly opposed to a referendum? (Don't invest valuable time and resources in attempting to change their minds. However, meet face-to-face with individuals and groups to ensure both sides understand each other. Hopefully, some of the opposition can be neutralized so they won't actively oppose it.)

9. What methods of communication will be the most effective? (The ever-changing technology communication tools such as Web 2.0: Twitter, Wiki, blogs, and podcasting can be invaluable along with using other traditional communication modes.)

10. What sub-committees (marketing, public relations, campaign workers, fundraising, etc.) need to be formed and how will these interact with each other? (The quality and quantity of each group's work will make or break the referendum.)

11. How can school officials indirectly assist without violating the rules and regulations for referendum? (Have legal counsel review how school officials can legally assist.)

12. What individuals and groups will endorse the referendum campaign? (Garnering endorsements will strengthen the power of the campaign.)

13. What approach (hard sell, soft sell, or in between) will work best in our community? (Know your community!)

14. How will rumors and misinformation be dealt with in a positive manner? (Being proactive without becoming defensive is important.)

15. How can the high school and college students who can vote be identified to be directly or indirectly involved in the campaign? (This group is typically very supportive.)

16. Who are the formal and informal leaders, including politicians, in the community who need to be approached? (This needs to occur very early in the campaign.)

17. How will the campaign be monitored and adjustments made to ensure it remains effective? (Many referendums are lost because there is no flexibility in modifying the plan.)

18. What can be learned from other districts that have conducted successful referendums? (Learn from others' experiences on what to do and not do.)

19. If the first referendum was not passed, what different strategies can be used? (Doing the same thing again and expecting a different outcome will not work!)

20. How will we communicate that the revenue generated from the referendum will be spent prudently and effectively? (Be realistic and specific.)

Reuniting the Community

Regardless of the outcome of the referendum, the group and the school district that campaigned for the referendum must strategically reach out to the opposing side to reunite the community. Throughout the campaign it is essential to avoid the issues becoming personalized. Upon the completion of the campaign, being attuned to the other side's interests and concerns will enhance the healing process. I liken the referendum campaign to an athletic event—both sides try to win, and how the winners and losers conduct themselves speaks volumes about their character and integrity. After all, the campaign's ultimate outcome is to win the referendum and to collaborate with all parties to ensure a sound education for all students.

Communications, Networking, and Timing
The Keys to Successful School Referenda

Dr. David Hutton,
Former Superintendent in Michigan and Lebanon, Indiana

Currently Indiana, along with other Great Lake states, is feeling the effects of a depressed economy, declining enrollments and a population which is aging. Citizens are also becoming more opposed to any sort of tax increases whatsoever and it appears that a tax rebellion is on the horizon. Demographic characteristics and changes can influence many areas of public policy and particularly the arena of public school finance. It can be readily seen that these demographic changes may directly impact the success and passage of increased tax levies. It is incumbent upon the local school superintendent and board of education to clearly understand community demographics and the political environment before embarking on any school building program. School leaders must have a thorough understanding of the keys necessary to pass a successful school referendum.

Key 1 – Communications

In a local school community the leadership must determine and assess qualifications and influence of the local key communicators and stakeholders. These voters may be parents, educators, community leaders, advocates, policy makers and possibly students. It is imperative that before the superintendent facilitates the formation of a Political Action Committee, that these stakeholders understand all aspects of why a building program or project is needed. With the current technology available in school corporations, it is very easy to communicate the facts of need to the stakeholder audiences utilizing school websites. Simple polls can be conducted on these websites to assess perceived community needs and feelings regarding the future of school construction. Good communications prior to rolling out detailed plans will definitely improve the chances to garner positive community support. Once citizens understand the potential educational needs of the facility program, then the leadership can begin putting together the Political Action Committee, who will design and implement the framework for the referendum campaign. It has been found that the success of any referenda must be case sensitive to actual school needs, costs, resources and measures of self-interest. The results for the tax, maintenance and capital outlay indicate that community/school history plays an extremely important role in the likelihood of a successful referendum passage. Early communications among and between the stakeholders play a critical role in the success of any school referendum.

Key II - Networking

Perhaps the most important part of ensuring that a ballot initiative passes is in the design of the measure and education of the general public to the measure through a well-defined networking process as carried out by the Political Action Committee. It must be pointed out that during this phase of planning the superintendent must become more political and persuasive in his or her role of providing the mission of the corporation for quality education facilities, and this message must be heard loud and clear by all voters. The Administration and Board of Education need to be as clear as possible regarding the costs of the project and the financial

tax impact on individual property owners in the school community. Once the feasibility study has been completed, then the Political Action Committee or PAC can begin a highly sequenced plan of networking to provide all the necessary correct information regarding the project or program. A grassroot networking process will provide face-to-face dialogue with citizens in the community to make sure everyone understands the needs which must be addressed for both children and community alike. A sound networking program will definitely enhance the success of the referenda measure.

Key III - Timing

Good communications and networking are integral to passing a referendum in any school community today. Through a cooperative, collaborative process which is undertaken by the Political Action Committee, timing is crucial in moving a building project to the ballot initiative. If a defined timetable is not provided by the architect, administration and board of education, then too much opportunity may be provided to those who may oppose the building project. If information is piecemeal from the onset of the project, fragmentation and misinformation will get into the community allowing for the rumor mill to progress, thus creating a negative atmosphere prior to the vote. Timing of information and facts must be utilized properly in order to ensure that a foundation of trust is maintained and sustained during the initial stages of the referendum. Once passed, the same trust among all constituents must be maintained as the project moves into the construction phase, creating a positive community initiative.

Conclusions

When embarking on any school referenda, the planning process must be extremely detailed, allowing for appropriate communications, networking and timing. Technology should be utilized for information and polling in order to provide sound two-way communications to and from taxpayers. As much as possible, key leaders must conduct a campaign of face-to-face communications with key communicators in the community. The work of the Political Action Committee or PAC must follow all state laws in order to guarantee successful referenda. Those who may be opposed to a building program will be extremely well organized and financed; therefore, the school administration and board members must have a coordinated, timely, and professional strategy to market their message to the voters. Today, we must not forget that about 70% of the school population do not have children in school and they feel that education funding and taxation has been sufficiently addressed. Finally, school corporations must continue school facility referenda campaigns after the election is complete to build trust for the next election that is sure to be needed in the years ahead.

Appendices

Case Study

Plainfield Community School Corporation

One of Plainfield's school board's goals for 2003-2004 was "Monitor student demographic data and evaluate facility needs, including grade level configuration, should a new facility become needed in the next few years." The board also had a stated vision relating to facilities: "The vision of the facilities master plan is to enhance educational achievement through corporation resources which are inviting, adaptable, and fiscally responsible." On September 11, 2003, the board authorized the use of an architectural firm to begin the process of collecting data and eventually present the data to a broad-based planning committee. The school board scheduled a forum in October to receive input from the community. The staff meetings with the architects began on September 25 and the facility assessment was completed in November 2003

The Yellow Ribbon Task Force, which consisted of thirteen members from the community, was initiated to carry out the board's goal. It had its first meeting on December 10, 2003. A cabinet, consisting of two architects, one board member, and several administrators, was also formed and met seven times during the process for planning purposes.

The purpose of the Yellow Ribbon Task Force was to serve as a community-based group to develop the school corporation's master plan. This process was facilitated by an architectural firm, which collected data and provided the reports needed. The Task Force looked at the current and projected educational needs of the school corporation for the next twenty years. The needs took into account population growth trends, the latest state-and federally-mandated requirements being placed on the school systems, and anticipated possible new requirements (such as full-day kindergarten). By assessing the current facilities, examining demographic trends, and inviting public opinion as to how these needs might best be met, the Task Force was charged with making a recommendation to the school board. The Task Force members were told that their recommendations might include the construction of new facilities, the renovation of current facilities, and/or options for adapting current facilities. The recommendations were also to include any financial implications for implementing the recommendations and a proposed timeline.

The task force members were told that public input was essential to their success and their recommendations. They were also told that public input would help determine priorities, shape policy, and establish the community's fiscal commitment as to how best meet the educational needs of its children.

Public input sessions were held on January 29 and February 25, 2004. Several luncheons, presentations to community groups, and on-going meetings for smaller groups were held throughout the process. For example, luncheon meetings were held on January 27, 28, and 29 for significant "key communicators." The primary purpose of the luncheons was to discuss the rationale for having a feasibility study and to provide a progress report regarding the Yellow Ribbon Task Force. The Task Force members were requested to submit names of those who they would like to have invited to the luncheons.

PACE (Plainfield Assures Continuing Excellence) was the name given to the planning process. PACE Update meetings were provided to the community by the superintendent every Thursday at 4:30 p.m. beginning in February. PACE publications focused on a question-and-answer format, and were printed and mailed to the entire community on an on-going basis. This high quality publication attempted to answer questions that the public might be asking. One significant value was that the community was getting accurate and responsible data on a timely basis. Each publication listed the Yellow Ribbon Task Force members with the hope that those in the community would feel they were being represented by the broad-based group and were also reminded that they could contact any of them to voice opinions, check rumors, or just get an update. During the planning stages, there were approximately 100 news articles, meetings, publications, and presentations.

The agenda for three of the Yellow Ribbon Task Force meetings was as follows:

First Meeting

I.   Introductions

II.   Purpose/Charge/Thanks

III. Project Name

IV.   Responsibilities
    A. Yellow Ribbon
    B. Cabinet
    C. Board

V.   Timelines

VI.   Overview
    A. Demographics
    B. Educational Needs
    C. Preliminary Scope of Work
    D. Facility Assessment/Room Utilization

VIII. Next Meeting-Preparation (Including Tours)

Second Meeting

I.   Project Name

II.   Vision for the Project

III. High School Assessment

IV.   Tour High School Facility

V.   Fiscal Data

VI.   Explore Options for Meeting Facility Needs

VII. Update Timeline

Third Meeting

I. Grade Level Options

II. Building Capacities

III. Middle School Assessment

IV. Tour Middle School Facility

V. Financial Comparisons

VI. Explore Options for Meeting Facility Needs

Other Meetings

The remaining meetings were similar to the second and third meetings, but with a focus on different schools. These meetings were generally luncheon meetings beginning at 11:30 a.m. and ending at 1:30 p.m. Data were distributed to the members on an ongoing basis.

The thirty educational needs submitted to the Yellow Ribbon Task Force included the following:

1. The need for additional classrooms
2. New technology
3. Space to support future technology and guidance staff operations
4. Educational environment concerns such as security, student congregation, and generally an environment that encourages students to do well.
5. Over-crowding
6. Increase in special needs kids
7. Increase in special education staffing
8. The need to expand preschool
9. Possibilities of all day kindergarten
10. Increase in speech therapists, etc.
11. Improved sound systems in individual classrooms (i.e., attention deficit students)
12. Kindergarten center more wheelchair accessible
13. Closer knit schools (grade levels close by)
14. More space for small group instruction
15. Building more accessible to public (increase in parent participation as emphasized in Indiana's P-16 Plan for Improving Student Achievement)
16. More space for tutoring, including after school and evening accessibility
17. Possibilities of alternative school being more accessible for other grade levels
18. Need to isolate parts of the building for community use, i.e., evening school
19. Some rooms, such as kindergarten, needing larger rooms because of instructional assistance, wheelchair accessible, etc.
20. Increasing computer labs for increase in required testing
21. High school electives decreasing and enrollment in CORE classes increasing
22. Larger lockers for book bags
23. Lab issues at high school for business and older science rooms
24. Issues relating to Consumer and Family Science and Industrial Technology
25. Locker room at high school and east gym air conditioning
26. Additional classrooms at high school
27. Evaluation of media center for technology expansion
28. Space and personnel for potential full-time counselor or administrative assistant in each elementary building
29. Transportation, space, and personnel for before-and after-school enrichment and remediation
30. Gym and locker rooms too small at Plainfield Community Middle School

Once the Task Force developed its recommendations, the group assigned a spokesperson and met with the school board members during a work session on February 17, 2004. The recommendations were then presented to the community at a public meeting on February 25. The Task Force met once more to review the feedback received and then presented its recommendations at an official board meeting on March 11, 2004. The final process, since this was prior to the referendum requirement, was as follows:

April 15 - Public Hearing

April 17 - Published Preliminary Determination Resolution

May 24 - Began Schematic Design

August 22 - Approved Schematic Design

November 21 - Approved Design Development

November 22 - Began Construction Documents

February 20 - Completed Construction Documents

February 21 - Released Documents for Bids

March 23 - Accepted Contractor Bids

April 6 - Began Construction

Obviously, the referendum mandate adds a new dimension to the requirements relating to facility construction; however, the timelines are similar. One obvious difference is that an active PAC meeting needs to be organized in a timely fashion.

Targeted Networking Strategies for Two Targeted Groups

Lots of **networking** and **ongoing communication** efforts should occur in your community. Examples of programs or activities for two targeted groups in your community are included in the list below.

Business Community Participation

1. Providing Luncheon for Realtors
2. Encouraging Mentors and Tutors at School
3. Organizing Reality Mall
4. Recognizing Outstanding School Employees (ROSE)
5. Supporting Guaranteed Graduate Program
6. Supporting Values Program
7. Recognizing Top 20 Seniors
8. Recognizing Straight "A" Students
9. Supporting Million Dollar Volunteer Program
10. Organizing Meetings for Business-Education Committee

Senior Citizens Participation

1. Having Grandparents as Tutors
2. Recognizing Veterans
3. Involving Retired Teachers
4. Organizing Ice Cream Social and Arts Display
5. Providing Recreational Activities (i.e., walking and swimming)
6. Providing Athletic Passes for Seniors
7. Inviting Grandparents to Eat Lunch with Grandchildren
8. Offering "Senior Prom"
9. Providing Focus Groups
10. Using Expertise in Classroom and Field Trips

Information about all of the activities listed above is available from the FAIR staff.

New Media and Your Referendum

Scott Flood, Scott Flood Writing
School Board Member, Plainfield Community School Corporation
Executive Director, FAIR Inc.

While the value of public engagement is nothing new, and while savvy school superintendents have long understood the importance of fostering connections with the communities they serve, the past several years have brought dramatic changes in the ways in which information is shared. The explosion of what's often described as "new" and "social media" has profound implications for anyone who operates in the public eye – particularly anyone involved in a public campaign such as a referendum.

Ignore it at Your Own Peril

There are those who will respond to new media as a fad, or assume that because they are employing all of the traditional communications and community engagement strategies, they don't have to pay much attention to websites, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the like. Those superintendents will likely lose their fights for funding, because their opponents will use social media to defeat them.

That's not mere conjecture. Increasingly, social media are defining how and where Americans obtain information they trust, and how they share it with friends and neighbors. In addition, a communications effort can be implemented through social media for little or no cost. That means a school corporation can budget tens of thousands of dollars for fancy brochures and similar items, only to be defeated by a handful of tech-savvy individuals operating with a budget of less than $100. You can pretend it won't happen, or you can prepare for the reality of communicating in today's world. Only one of those strategies is likely to succeed.

You Don't Need to be the Expert

There's no need for a superintendent to devote the time and energy to learning everything there is to know about social media. You don't need to become an expert with Facebook and Twitter. But you do need to have experts around you. Odds are good that you already know people who use social media extensively. They may be in your parent and booster groups, they may be on your faculty, or they may be on the classified staff.

As you plan your engagement strategies, find out who among your supporters is conversant with social media. Reach out to them personally – don't delegate the task to a staff member. A direct request from you will be more meaningful and tougher to turn down. Explain that you recognize that social media needs to be an important part of your engagement effort, but that you don't have the time or expertise to implement a plan. Establish a task force of supportive, interested individuals. (Depending on the advice of your legal counsel, you may want that task force to be part of a parent organization or a PAC.)

How Can Social Media be Used?

The social media phenomenon is expanding more rapidly than any other form of communication, and new sites and systems are unveiled each month. It would be impossible for a printed publication such as this to keep up with the developments. So what we'll do is talk about some of the channels that are currently available, and how they might fit into your strategy (and that of your opponents) at a macro level.

Websites

A website should be the foundation of your new media effort. While your school corporation already has a website, your engagement effort should use a separate site. Instead of being registered in your corporation's name (or that of any employee or board member), it should be owned and funded by an outside parent organization or PAC. That will ensure that information can be updated and shared after the 1028 hearing. (Again, you'll want to work closely with your legal counsel to ensure that you don't inadvertently violate the law.)

When selecting a URL (web address), choose something that's memorable and that summarizes your effort. Names such as www.SupportOurSchools.org or www.HelpPlainfieldStudents.com will be easier to remember and promote than abbreviations or more esoteric choices.

Keep your website simple. The home page should briefly state the case for your project, so that someone glancing at the site will be able to draw a quick conclusion. Use ordinary, conversational language rather than educational jargon, because the average voter isn't a professional educator. Include a page that spells out all the details of your project, focusing on educational and community benefits rather than construction details.

When providing financial information, present it in ways that will be meaningful for the average person. Saying that your project's potential maximum impact is a "$0.23 increase to the debt service rate" is far less meaningful than "the owner of a $100,000 home should see an increase of no more than $120 a year in property taxes." To help voters keep tax increases in perspective, put the increases in more simple terms. That $120 a year is just $10 per month or 33 cents per day – less than a cup of fast-food coffee.

A very powerful website tactic is including a page of frequently asked questions. You already know what types of questions people are likely to ask. Presenting those questions along with the answers will help you overcome potential objections and prove your willingness to be upfront with information. As patrons ask you other questions, add them to the website.

It's also a good idea to include a link from the site to your opposition's site. While that might seem counterproductive, it sends a subtle message that you're willing to let voters draw their own conclusions, that you're confident enough in the value of your stance to give your opponents a platform, and that you believe in fairness. That message will be even more powerful if the opposition fails to reciprocate. (In fact, unless your attorney advises otherwise, you should include links to sites for both supporters and your opponents from your corporation's site.)

Email

Sending mailings to potential voters can be effective, but it's also expensive and time-consuming. That's especially true in the final days of a referendum battle, when your supporters may need to respond to messages and misinformation from opponents. Email is inexpensive and instantaneous.

Ensure that your supporters gather email addresses whenever possible. Those email addresses should be kept in some sort of central database. There are a number of online services and software applications available for managing email communications. (Don't use email addresses that parents have given to teachers and administrators for online grade checking and such. Many people will consider that a violation of their privacy – and it might land the school corporation in legal trouble.)

Use email as necessary, but don't overdo it. If you send too many emails, recipients will start to ignore them (or even worse, you'll annoy them to the point at which they join the opposition). Keep messages relevant and concise, and email can work wonders for you.

Video Sites

What does YouTube have to do with school referenda? Videos can actually be a very convincing tool, and YouTube and similar sites give you a place to post your videos. You can then use email and links on your website (and other social media) to point people to the videos.

"Talking head" videos that feature the superintendent talking into the camera may do a lot for the ego, but they tend to turn off the average voter. Instead, use your videos to document your school corporation's needs. If your project's goal is to eliminate overcrowding, show images of crowded hallways, classrooms and cafeterias. If you plan to improve one school so that it is similar to another, provide a visual comparison of the two. And if you're targeting deferred maintenance or problems such as roof leaks, show what needs to be fixed.

Facebook

If you haven't used a social networking site such as Facebook, stop reading this article and log into facebook.com right now. Create your own account and play with the site for a few minutes. I'm completely serious. Before you understand the role Facebook can play in your engagement effort, you need to understand how it works – and how easy it is for users to share information. The technology is simply amazing, and amazingly simple.

Facebook allows users to create "fan" pages. Like-minded users can identify themselves as "fans" of those pages. Then, whenever information is added to the fan page, those users will see it when they log in. As with email, Facebook gives you the opportunity to share information instantaneously. Most other social networking sites, such as MySpace, aren't intended for adults and should probably be avoided.

(When you set up your Facebook account and it looks for people you know, you may be surprised at a number of teachers and employees who have their own accounts. Don't be offended if they don't accept your invitations to be their online "friends," because most people like to keep their work and private lives separate.)

Twitter

Think of Twitter as a middle ground between email and Facebook. Users sign up to "follow" people who post messages that are no longer than 140 characters. Every time those people post a message, it instantly becomes available to all the followers. Twitter is particularly popular among users of wireless devices such as BlackBerries and iPhones. Your supporters can use Twitter to send quick messages to each other, which may be particularly useful as Election Day draws near.

Forums

Most newspapers, TV stations, and other media outlets now maintain companion websites, and many of those sites give readers and viewers the opportunity to comment on stories. In addition, some individuals establish forums for discussing current issues in their communities.

Some forums are carefully monitored and require posters to identify themselves. Unfortunately, many more allow users to remain anonymous and post whatever they want. In the case of referenda, it's not unusual to see very misleading information, outright lies, and personal attacks directed at administrators and board members. And sadly, some people assume that anything posted online must be true.

It can be frustrating to see false information and attacks on these forums, but it's important to resist the temptation to reply. Local officials who think they have a responsibility to correct the record will quickly find themselves the object of derisive and insulting comments. Instead of the original post fading away, it will draw additional attention.

A better approach is to have designated members of the PAC or parent group monitor the forums and respond to correct the record with facts when necessary. However, keep in mind that many of these forums have very few viewers, so don't give them more attention than they deserve.

Monitoring the Opposition

As mentioned earlier, the advantages offered by new media will make these strategies appealing to referendum opponents. You may find your program the target of opposition websites, their own Facebook fan pages, email campaigns, and the like.

Fortunately, these situations can be easily monitored. Members of your supporters' group can sign up as Facebook fans, become Twitter followers, place themselves on email lists for opposition (this can typically be done anonymously), and make regular checks of websites and forums. If they become aware of false information, a response can be prepared. They can also alert you to new efforts to sway voters.

In Conclusion

New media channels are here to stay for the foreseeable future, and it's a safe bet that their numbers and popularity will continue to expand. Tapping into the expertise of supporters is a great way to ensure that you're using these new opportunities to their full advantage, and maintaining a solid defense against those who would use them to defeat you.

Overview of Legislative Changes

1. Projects may be subject to either the Petition/Remonstrance process or a Referendum

2. D.L.G.F. approval no longer required

3. "Circuit Breaker" legislation affects all local units of government including school corporations by imposing "caps"

Which Projects are Affected?

1. First - need to determine if it is a "controlled project"

   - Projects funded by bonds or lease and will cost more than the lesser of $2,000,000 or 1 % of the total gross assessed valuation
   - Exempted projects
   - Re-fundings
   - Projects in response to a natural disaster, accident or emergency which makes the building unavailable for intended use (needs to be approved by the County Council)

2. Second - need to determine if the project is subject to the Petition/Remonstrance Process or a Referendum

   - Controlled projects not large enough to trigger a Referendum are subject to the Petition/Remonstrance Process
   - Same procedure as in the past
   - Triggered only if an application petition is filed with 100 certified taxpayer or voter signatures

3. If the project is subject to the Petition/Remonstrance process and it wins it is still subject to the Circuit Breaker "caps"

4. Third - Referendum Process applies if it is a controlled project and it fits one of three categories

   - Building for academic instruction for any combination of grades K-8 and total cost is greater than $10,000,000
   - Building for academic instruction for grades 9-12 and total cost is greater than $20,000,000
   - Other controlled project, not type l or 2, and costs more than either $12,000,000 or 1 % of the total gross assessed valuation (AV)

Key Considerations

1. If the project is subject to the Referendum process and it wins it is not subject to the Circuit Breaker "caps"

2. If the project is subject to the Referendum process and a Petition is not filed to call for a Referendum, it is subject to the Circuit Breaker "caps"

Resources to Read for the Busy Superintendent

Indiana is discovering a new process. Referendums are likely here to stay. Many superintendents will be relieved to discover that some architectural firms and construction management firms offer excellent services relating to community engagement and political action committee (PAC) strategies. The key is to identify the firms or companies that have the skills to do it correctly. Superintendents and other school staff members will be much better prepared for the new process in Indiana by reading the books listed below.

School Finance Elections: A Comprehensive Planning Model for Success

Don E. Lifto and J. Bradford Senden
Published in partnership with the American Association of School Administrators
Published by Scarecrow Education.
An imprint of the Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200
Lanham, Maryland   20706
New edition available at local bookstores.

The ABCs of Teacher-Parent Communication

William J. Banach
Rowman & Littlefield Education
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200
Lanham, Maryland 20706
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The ABCs of School Board Marketing

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