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AN EXAMINATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROCESSES AND STRATEGIES THAT ARE SUCCESSFUL IN PASSING A SCHOOL BOND REFERENDUM IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS NOT EXPERIENCING GROWTH IN STUDENT POPULATION WITH A TOTAL ENROLLMENT OF 1,000 TO 3,500 STUDENTS

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

by

Jerry Elvin Gibson

December 2015

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Dedication

For Dr. Elvin and Dorothy Gibson

This book is dedicated to my parents, Dr. Elvin and Dorothy Gibson. Without your support and unconditional love, I would not be the person I am today. You always encouraged me to pursue aspirations I never thought I could achieve. Your constant support helped me realize that anything is possible with God's help.

Your love and patience and unyielding guidance throughout my entire life has meant everything, and from the bottom of my heart, I truly say thank you. I dedicate this, my dissertation, to your memory. Though you will not be there to see me complete this degree, I know you will be watching, and I look forward to telling you about the process. I love and miss both of you very much.

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AN EXAMINATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROCESSES AND STRATEGIES THAT ARE SUCCESSFUL IN PASSING A SCHOOL BOND REFERENDUM IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS NOT EXPERIENCING GROWTH IN STUDENT POPULATION WITH A TOTAL ENROLLMENT OF 1,000 TO 3,500 STUDENTS

An Abstract
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine school district superintendents’ perceptions of processes and strategies that are successful in passing a school bond referendum in school districts not growing in student population and have a total student enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500. Specifically, this study gave close examination to school district superintendents’ perceptions of (a) contributing factors that lead to the successful passing of a school bond referendum, (b) successful strategies that school districts utilize to successfully pass school bond referendums, (c) how superintendents’ of school districts perceive they influence the community will to vote in favor of the bond referendum, (d) perceived community barriers when attempting to pass a school bond referendum, and (e) additional challenges faced in the successful passing of a school bond referendum.

Research indicated that passing a school bond referendum can determine the direction for a school district for many years to come (Faltys, 2006). Research also stated that a superintendents’ knowledge of the perceptions of the community and the processes that go into a successful bond referendum can lead to success on Election Day (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014). This study is significant because it will expand the body of knowledge related to the challenges superintendents experience in passing a bond referendum in a district with no student enrollment growth and strategies that contribute to the successful passing of a school bond referendum.

Participants for this study included seven superintendents from Texas school districts not experiencing student enrollment growth and have an enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500 students. Semi-structured interviews consisted of 14 open-ended and close-ended questions and were conducted, audio recorded, and transcribed. Transcribed data were analyzed using a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2003) to identify emerging themes. Findings and implications related to policy and practice for superintendents and other district and community leaders were discussed and recommendations were provided that might assist public school leaders in the successful passing of school bond referendums.

The results from the research questions identified superintendents' perceptions that contributed to the successful passing of bond referendum and identified six emerging themes: (a) communicate the facts of the bond as often as possible, (b) be transparent to establish trust throughout the bond process, (c) build relationships with stakeholders in the community, (d) build community alliances to assist in strategic communication to voters, (e) solicit the opinion of experts in the bond process, and (f) be visible throughout the bond process. In this phenomenological qualitative study, the researcher used a content analysis to compare the perceptions that superintendents have regarding strategies used in passing a school bond referendum.

Table of Contents

Chapter Page

I. Introduction 1

Background of the Problem 3

Problem Statement 5

Purpose of the Study 6

Significance of the Study 6

Research Questions 8

Research Design 8

Theoretical Framework 9

Definition of Terms 10

Limitations 14

Summary 15

II. Review of Literature 16

Introduction 16

What Are Bonds and Their Purpose? 16

The Purpose for School Bond Referendums 19

Key Questions to Address in Bond Referendums 23

What are the needs? 23

Growing population 28

School bond referendum theme 33

What is the cost? 34

What is the self-interest of voters? 38

Determining Factors for Success in School Bond Referendums 40

Trust in administration (leadership) 40

Select the right steering committee....45
Selecting the right architect....48
Public relations campaign and voting strategies....49
Responsibilities for a school district....52
State political scene – Single issue elections....53
Alternatives to a School Bond Referendum....57
Why do School Bonds Pass or Fail?....58
Factors that shape bond election outcomes....58
Bond proposal – Substantive and fiscal impact tax rate....59
Economic conditions of the community....60
Prior bond elections....61
Academic performance....62
School bond campaigns....62
Alternate explanations....64
The endocogeneity problem....65
Solution to endocogeneity....69
Finding common ground....69
Expanding the net....70
Know the product....71
Educating voters....72
III. Methodology....76
Introduction....76
Research Design....77
Research Questions....78
Settings....79

Participants....81
Procedures....83
Instruments....84
Analysis....84
IV. Results....87
Research Question 1....88
Theme 1: Communication....88
Theme 2: Trust/transparency....89
Theme 3: Building relationships....91
Research Question 2....92
Theme 1: Build community alliances....92
Theme 2: Solicit experts in the process....94
Theme 3: Strategic communications with the community....95
Research Question 3....96
Theme 1: Communication....97
Theme 2: Relationships and alliances....98
Theme 3: Trust/transparency/visibility....99
Research Question 4....100
Theme 1: Alliance building....100
Theme 2: Communication/public relations....101
Theme 3: Visibility....103
Research Question 5....104
Research Question 6....107
Summary of Chapter 4....109

V. Conclusion 110
Introduction 110
Discussion of Results 110
Research Question 1 111
Research Question 2 112
Research Question 3 114
Research Question 4 115
Research Question 5 116
Research Question 6 117
Implications for District Leaders 117
Implications for Further Research 118
Conclusions 119
References 122
Appendix A IRB Approval Letter 133
Appendix B Interview Instrument Questions 135
Appendix C Transcripts of Participants 138

Chapter I

Introduction

The first domain for passing the superintendent examination in Texas is communication (ethics, creating a shared vision, establishing strong community communication and the social and political) (Terrier, 2010), and a great example of this domain is found when a school district superintendent leads a school bond referendum. Passing a school bond referendum can determine the direction for a school district for many years to come (Faltys, 2006). Upkeep of older facilities and the building of new facilities can have an impact on student instruction and perceptions toward the district (Gamkhar & Olson, 2004). There are many factors and strategies that go into successfully passing a school bond referendum (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014). A superintendent's knowledge of the perceptions of the community and the processes that go into a successful bond referendum can lead to success on Election Day (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014).

In 1984, a school district in southeast Texas with an enrollment of approximately 1,550 school students held a school bond referendum election. The election was successful and the school district built a new intermediate school for $2.5 million. The same district held a school bond referendum election in 1993 to construct a new high school campus and the bond election failed. Three years later, the same district once again held a school bond referendum election in an attempt to build a new high school campus. The voters approved the referendum for the new high school the second time.

On September 11, 2004, a different school district with an enrollment of approximately 3,000 students failed to pass a $25 million single proposition school bond

referendum (Faltys, 2006). On December 11, 2004, the same school district was successful in passing a school bond referendum once again totaling $25 million (Faltys, 2006). In May 2014, the same district attempted a $62 million school bond referendum and the attempt failed as voters did not pass it.

Various school districts use different strategies when placing a school bond referendum on a ballot. This study examined whether there were common strategies that enabled districts not experiencing growth to be successful in an attempt at passing a school bond referendum. Examination of the processes that led to the successful passing of a school bond referendum were examined to see the consistencies that were shared by districts in a successful bond package.

Some of the most recent school bond propositions have carried a whole array of needs including sports facilities, maintenance facilities, buildings, campuses, equipment and technology, safety and security, fine arts buildings, school improvements, buses, specialty schools, agriculture and vocational facilities, and campus renovations. Yet with the many school districts that placed a school bond referendum before the voters, the Texas Department of Education estimated that more than 6,000 additional schools needed to be build to cope with increased student population (Olson & Hendrie, 2003). The burden of the way school districts were financed has led to many school districts being hard pressed to simply maintain existing schools, let alone build new ones (Tedin, Matland, & Weiher, 2001)

In 2011, the State of Texas was faced with a projected shortfall of about $27 billion for the 2012-2013 biennium (Greider, 2014). The State Legislature passed a budget that amounted to approximately $5 billion in cuts to public education, once again

leading local districts to find ways to support infrastructure needs (Greider, 2014). This financial crisis that the State of Texas faced illustrated the dilemma many districts in Texas face today. How does a district support infrastructure needs that had been caused by school districts' exploding growth or from stagnant districts having old buildings that were no longer functional? School bond referendums have become the only choice that some districts have found to keep up with the various needs of a district. The result of taxpayers feeling financial pressure due to rising taxes and a growing cost of living has created problems in developing and implementing successful plans when trying to pass school bond referendums.

A Bond Referendum is a way to borrow money to fund capital projects, and it normally requires voter approval. The public votes to approve or to reject a school bond referendum. The bond referendum process is a complex one that includes several basic steps. The process begins with the superintendent of the school district preparing a proposal for capital expenditures that is submitted to the local school board (Strand, Giroux, & Thorne, 1999). The school board members must approve the proposal and call for the election, meaning the school board will then present a bond referendum to the voters of the district. When the school bond referendum passes the voters, the board may borrow the funds to pay for these expenditures. Upon gaining voter approval, the school board will issue and sell bonds to the company with the lowest interest rate bid (Holt, 2009; Strand et al., 1999).

Background of the Problem

The debate that surrounded the process of funding public schools in Texas took a turn 10 years ago. In 2004, State District Judge John K. Dietz declared the Texas system

for funding its public schools to be unconstitutional; the $30 billion-a-year budgeted for education was both inequitable and inadequate when funding schools (Stutz, 2004). Prior to the decision of Judge Dietz, local school districts were on their own to calculate the distribution of funds between their schools. Each district used any formula that was best for its particular district. Local property taxes generated enough money to run a district. The result was that districts with a high tax base had little-to-no-trouble balancing their budget and districts with little or no tax base struggled to offer teachers a competitive salary and to keep the district's facilities new (Schneider, 2002).

As a result, in property poor districts, an education environment came about that was often unsafe, dirty, and below the level of property rich districts. Facilities issues related to indoor air quality, thermal comfort, lighting, acoustics, building age, building quality, aesthetics, and classroom size affect academic outcomes (Schneider, 2002). Equity and how school districts are funded became unanswered when Judge Dietz's ruling raised questions such as "What is equity?" and "What is the result of equity in education?" (Carroll & Carroll, 1994). Equity may be explained by asking the following question: "Are we spending the same amount of dollars per pupil in school district across the State of Texas?" Equity ensures that money is distributed fairly and evenly across school districts and students (Odden & Picus, 2004). In order to attempt to even the playing field and offer their students the best opportunities for success, school districts began to pass school bond referendums in order to replace antiquated buildings or to build new facilities to keep up with the growth of a school district (Odden & Picus, 2004).

Today, school districts across the state of Texas attempt to pass school bond referendums for a variety of projects; the financial commitments range from a few million to hundreds of millions of dollars (Faltys, 2006). Factors such as increasing enrollment in suburban schools, a greater number of unfunded mandates that the Texas Education Agency passes down, and growing technology demands have contributed to districts' focus on facility renovations and new construction. A bond election will not be successful without hard work and without a district doing a needs assessment of the district (Faltys, 2006). School boards can help themselves by researching the needs of the district through a facilities study as well as having a thorough knowledge of the financial strength and weakness of the district prior to approaching the voters for a bond proposition (Faltys, 2006). For example, the school district may determine that one building needs to be renovated or expanded while another building needs to be torn down for a new construction (Holt, 2009). Depending on the economy, the school board can face many obstacles to pass school bond referendum (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014). Homeowners and business owners never want to see an increase in their taxes that many times is the result of selling the bonds after a successful campaign, no matter whether the district is considered property wealthy (Faltys, 2006). Public opinion drives whether the success of bond elections are won or lost (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014).

Problem Statement

School bond referendums are an ignored arena in both political science and the politics of education other than school board elections (Theobald & Meier, 2002). Wirt and Kirst (as cited in Theobald & Meier, 2002) only devoted seven pages to school bond

referendum elections in their survey of educational politics. A special issue of *Educational Policy* (Opfer & Wong, 2002) on "The Politics of Elections and Education" contained 11 essays on various aspects of election and education, with none of the essays focused on elections to ratify the issuance of school bond referendums (Theobald & Meier, 2002). Yet, school bond referendums are one of the only cases where citizens can directly make a decision in regard to school district policy (Theobald & Meier, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine school district superintendents' perceptions of processes and strategies that were successful in passing a school bond referendum in school districts that were not growing in student population and had a total student enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500. Specifically, this study gave close examination to school district superintendents' perceptions of (a) contributing factors that led to the successful passing of a school bond referendum, (b) successful strategies that school districts utilized to successfully pass school bond referendums, (c) how superintendents of school districts perceived their influence that the community would vote in favor of the bond referendum, (d) perceived community barriers when attempting to pass a school bond referendum, and (e) additional challenges faced in the successful passing of a school bond referendum.

Significance of the Study

Public school facilities in the United States are almost exclusively a state and local responsibility, and they should consist of infrastructures that create an environment in which all children can receive a proper education and preparation for the future (Holt, 2009). Currently, there has been a growing concern about safety and adequacy of many

of this country's school buildings (Holt, 2009). School districts today are searching for how to provide school facilities that meet the educational and health needs of America's millions of students (Holt, 2009). More than 7 million students attend school in buildings that fail to comply with safety codes such as stairwells, adequate exits, panic hardware, fire extinguishers, rated corridor doors, firewalls, and sprinkler systems (Holt, 2009). Currently, more than 15 million students attend schools that lack adequate heating, ventilation, and air conditioning: and over 11 million students frequent schools that need extensive roof repair (Holt, 2009).

Approximately 6.2 million fewer students entered the public school system in the years between 1970 and 1984, creating 12,400 empty schools (Carroll & Carroll, 1994). The reaction of many school boards was to close schools and allowed those existing campuses to deteriorate (Carroll & Carroll, 1994). In some districts, children now attend school in portable buildings and many campuses have run-down conditions (Holt, 2009). As student enrollment has grown again, school districts are left with buildings that have had little if any maintenance on them since 1985 causing the need for destruction and new construction or renovation (Holt, 2009). Yet, school districts that have seen rapid growth need to purchase land and build campuses in order to keep up with student growth in larger metropolitan areas of the state. The significance of the study was to examine the processes and challenges that superintendents overcome in order to pass a school bond referendum. Giving close examination of challenges that superintendents and school districts face and overcome in their successful bond referendum may help guide superintendents and other district and community leaders as they plan for a successful bond referendum election.

Research Questions

1. What are superintendents' perceptions of factors that contributed to the successful passing of bond referendums?
2. What are superintendents' perceptions of successful strategies that school districts utilize to successfully pass school bond referendums?
3. How do superintendents of school districts that successfully pass bond referendums perceive they influence the community will to vote in favor of the bond referendum?
4. What are superintendents' perceptions of effective processes to engage the community in an effort to successfully pass a bond referendum?
5. What are the perceived community barriers that superintendents face when attempting to pass a school bond referendum?
6. What additional challenges do superintendents report they face in the successful passing of a school bond referendum?

Research Design

This phenomenological qualitative study examined perceptions of school superintendents from school districts that are not growing in student population and have a total enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500 students regarding the processes and strategies that are successful in passing a school bond referendum election. In this study, seven superintendents were interviewed to examine their perceptions of contributing factors and strategies that led to passing school bond referendums along with their perceptions of how they influenced the community's will to successfully pass a school bond referendum. Data were gathered from one-on-one semi-structured interviews with seven

superintendents from mid-sized school districts with a stable student enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500 that have successfully passed a bond referendum.

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed to develop themes. The purpose for using the content analysis was to assist in identifying emerging themes. Information and perceptions were gathered through semi-structured interviews with seven superintendents (Lester, 1999).

In this study, seven superintendents were interviewed to examine their perceptions of factors and strategies that led to passing school bond referendums along with how the community's will was influenced leading to a successful school bond referendum. The results from interviews shared superintendents' perceptions of the processes that were successful in passing a bond referendum. Data collected showed the challenges that were overcome in districts passing successful school bond referendum.

Theoretical Framework

For a school district that is not experiencing growth to be successful in passing a school bond referendum, the superintendent needs to understand the processes and strategies that lead to a positive outcome on Election Day (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014). Superintendents have to completely understand what school bonds are, what they can be used for, and what passing a school bond referendum will do to the taxes of homeowner (Holt, 2009). A steering committee and an architect can assist in showing a community the needs and help form successful strategies that will lead to a favorable view from voters (Holt, 2009).

Research suggested the steering committee helped the superintendent and the school district work through the processes involved in informing voters of the need for

the bond referendum and engage the community in breaking down community barriers that could block success (Holt, 2009). A steering committee helps the superintendent gain a better understanding of the community and what outside sources influence voters (Holt, 2009). Every school bond referendum needs to create a theme such as school safety, Career and Technology Education, or renovation of buildings. With the assistance of a steering committee, a superintendent can create a platform to rally a community (Holt, 2009). A superintendent can gain theories explaining why a school bond referendum can pass in a community and help understand what perceptions need to be gained (Holt, 2009).

There is little literature to explain the processes that lead to successful bond referendums. School superintendents in mid-sized school districts with student population between 1,000 and 3,500 students who have been successful in passing a bond referendum were examined along with the processes and strategies that helped pass their bond referendum. In many small to mid-sized stable districts, passing a school bond gave students the greatest opportunity for success. If a superintendent understands the perceptions of the strategies, factors, and the need for community engagement, the school district has the greatest chance for success.

Definition of Terms

Average daily attendance (ADA) – Daily student attendance of a school district or campus average over a school year.

Average daily enrollment (ADE) – Daily student enrollment of a school district of campus averaged over a school year.

Bond – A security evidencing the issuer's obligation to repay a specified principal amount on a date certain (maturity date), together with interest either at a stated rate of according to a formula for determining that rate. Bonds are distinguishable from notes that usually mature in a much shorter period. Bonds may be classified according to, among other characteristics, maturity structure (serial vs. term), and source of payment (general obligation vs. revenue), issuer (state vs. municipality vs. Special district), price (discount vs. Premium), rating (rated vs. Unrated, or among different categories of ratings) or purpose of financing (transportation vs. health care).

Bond bank – Agency created in certain states to buy issues of bonds from municipalities or other local governmental entities. The purchases are financed by the issuance of bonds by the bond bank. The intended purpose was to provide better market access for small, lesser-known issuers.

Bond buyer municipal bond index – Represents an average of the prices, adjusted to a 6.00% yield basis, of 40 recently issued municipal securities, based on quotations obtained from six municipal securities broker's broker. The 40 component issues are selected according to defined criteria and are replaced by newer issues on a periodic basis. This index is published daily and serves as the basis for future contracts.

Bond committee – A group of people who serve a school district on a short-term basis to determine the need of purchasing property, building buildings, or renovating existing buildings.

Bond contract – An agreement outlining the obligations of the issuer with respect to the issuance of bonds. The terms of the agreement may be determined by reference to specified documents associated with the bond issue. Typically, the bond resolution

and/or trust indenture, together with any other security agreements, constitute parts of the contract, as do those laws in force at the time of issuance. The documents that form the bond contract vary according to the terms of each issue.

Bond counsel – An attorney or law firm, typically retained by the issuer, to give a legal opinion that the issuer is authorized to issue proposed municipal securities, the issuer has met all legal requirements necessary for issuance, and interest on the proposed securities (if they are intended to be tax-exempt bonds) will be excluded from gross income of the holders thereof for federal income tax purposes and, where applicable, from state and local taxation. Typically, bond counsel may prepare or review and advise the issuer regarding (a) authorizing resolutions, (b) trust indentures, (c) official statements, (d) validation proceeding, and (e) litigation.

Bonded debt – The portion of an issuer's total tax-supported debt represented by outstanding bonds.

Bond election – School districts and government agencies must raise funds to pay for expenses. Buildings must be renovated, and roads and bridges maintained. Sometimes extra cash is not available in government or school district budgets, and they must ask for a bond to be issued to cover the cost of projects. This must be done during an election.

Bond equivalent yield – The return on a discounted security figured on a basis that permits comparison with interest-bearing securities. For a short-term discounted security, the bond equivalent yield is an annualized rate of return. For a longer-term discounted security, the bond equivalent yield is determined by a computation that adjusts for the absence of periodic payments over the life of the security.

Bond fiscal year – The 12-month accounting period, established under some bond contracts, used in connection with an issue of bonds. Principal and interest payments are scheduled in accordance with the bond fiscal year. The bond fiscal year may not necessarily coincide with the issuer's own fiscal year and may be established in order to take full advantage of the scheduled cash flow of projected pledged revenues.

Bond fund – A colloquial term for a municipal securities investment company. The investment company holds a diversified portfolio of municipal securities and units or shares in the investment company are sold to investors.

Bondholder – The person or entity having a true and legal ownership interest in a municipal bond. In the case of book-entry only bonds, the beneficial owner will often be treated as the bondholder under the bond contract; although for certain purposes, the entity holds the global certificates representing the entire issue and will retain the rights of the bondholder under the bond contract.

Capital outlay expenditures (COE) – The amount of dollars a school district expends on capital outlay projects during a given fiscal year (FY).

Endogeneity – The correlation between the parameters or variables from a statistic model.

Equity – A term in school finance that denotes the most equitable and non-discriminatory distribution of resources to the recipients, based on specific need (Thompson, 1985).

General fund – In public sector accounting, it is the primary or catchall fund of a government, government agency, or nonprofit entity such as a university. It is similar to a firm's general ledger account and records all assets and liabilities of the entity that are

not assigned to a special purpose fund. It provides the resources necessary to sustain the day-to-day activities and thus pays for all administrative and operating expenses. (Investors Words)

Public education – Education for children between the ages of 4 and18 that is paid for through taxpayers' dollars and state financial support.

School bond referendum – A process whereby the voters of a governmental unit are given the opportunity to approve or disapprove a proposed new issue of municipal securities. An election is most commonly required in connection with general obligation or full faith and credit bonds.

School district tax rate – A school district's property tax rate is made up of a maintenance and operations (M&O) tax rate and, if applicable, an interest and sinking fund (I&S) rate. The M&O tax rate provides funds for maintenance and operations, and the I&S tax rate provides funds for payment on the debt that finances the district's facilities. The calculation of state funding for school districts is tied to tax efforts, thus tax rates are an essential components of the state's school finance formulas (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2011).

Limitations

One of the limitations of the study was the limited number of superintendent participants who were utilized; therefore, findings were not generalizable. Superintendents may not fit larger settings from states other than Texas. By only interviewing superintendents, perceptions could be different than community members and school board members. A final limitation of this study was that because only

superintendents were interviewed using one method of data gathering, data and findings were not triangulated with various other stakeholders and multiple methods.

Summary

One of the answers to the state funding equity battle at the local district level as it related to new facilities and facility renovation was to pass school bond referendum. The purpose of this study was to examine superintendents' perceptions of processes and strategies that were successful in passing a school bond referendum in school districts that were not growing in student population and had a total student enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500 students. Further examination was given to the perceptions of superintendents' successful strategies that were effective in influencing the community will to vote in favor of a school bond referendum. While there was little research available in the steps of the process of passing a school bond, there was the traditional sequence that most school districts in the State of Texas have used. This study showed superintendents' perceptions of the processes used to engage the community and the challenges of breaking down barriers that could stand in the way of a successful school bond referendum. The significance of the study was an opportunity to see the processes that small-to-average-size districts used to be successful in passing their referendums.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter II was to review literature and opinion on the process of school bond referendum and contributing factors that influenced voters and led them to vote in favor of the school bond referendum. The emphasis of this chapter was on factors that influenced the voting public that ultimately determined the passing of school bond referendum and determined when there was a need for a school bond referendum.

What Are Bonds and Their Purpose?

With the dismissal of various state grants to local school districts, local school districts had the complete responsibility for financing public schools, and this responsibility was eliminated in the early 1900s and led to school districts providing all of their facility expansion or improvements (Holt, 2009). The growing need for new buildings and the need for expansion in school districts have not changed. After years of local support for financial capital outlays, several different plans and procedures evolved in various states. Chief among these have been pay-as-you-go plans, use of reserve funds, and selling school bonds (Burrup, Brimley, & Garfield, 1993). Some school districts utilized a pay-as-you-go philosophy that called for school districts to pay for buildings, land, or renovations with yearly excess or from their fund balance. Selling and buying bonds eliminated payment of large sums of money for interest represented from 20% to 40% of the cost of a building, the costs of bond, attorney fees, and election costs (Burrup et al., 1993). This philosophy worked in larger districts that were not growing at

a fast pace or represented an affluent community but could present a problem for small-to-average size districts that were not experiencing growth (Burrup et al., 1993).

Although there had been a history of funding through various companies, the lack of state funding for public school facilities was nothing new in Texas school finance. Prior to 1997, school districts financed facilities using local tax dollars (Texas Association of School Boards [TASB], 2011). After 1997, the State of Texas began looking for more effective ways for school districts to renovate older buildings and provide new facilities for growing districts. In 1997, the Texas Legislature authorized the Instructional Facilities Allotment (IFA). The IFA has now disbanded and no longer provides assistance to help eligible districts make debt service payments on qualifying bonds and lease-purchase agreements (TASB, 2011).

A few years later, the Texas Legislature approved another measure to assist school districts. In 1999, the Texas Legislature approved the Existing Debt Allotment (EDA) that was established to assist districts in paying for existing bonded debt. During the same session, the Legislature approved the New Instructional Facilities Allotment (NIFA), a smaller program of state aid for operating expenditures associated with opening a new school (TASB, 2011).

The process of receiving IFA funding began when a school district first submitted applications to the TEA after voters had given authorization through a successful bond election but before the district priced the bonds or the board passed an order authorizing a lease-purchase program. IFA grant funds could only be used for construction or renovation of instructional facilities (TASB, 2011). IFA offered an alternative to school districts that were in need of facility improvements. In order to qualify, the bonds had to

have an unweighted average maturity of at least 8 years. After the IFA grant applications were submitted, TEA would then rank them according to school district property wealth, placing property-poor districts at the top of the list (TASB, 2011)

As previously stated, in 2011, the 82nd Legislature of Texas ceased to fund the New Instructional Facility Allotment (NIFA) thereby shifting this funding obligation to local taxpayers and has especially affected high-growth school districts, including the suburbs of the Dallas-Fort Worth, Austin, San Antonio, and Houston metropolitan areas (Texas Association of School Business Officials [TASBO], 2014a). This overturned the previous Legislature decisions and caused a hardship on local school districts. The NIFA allotment, enacted by the 76th Legislature in 1999, provided $250 per student in average daily attendance (ADA) in the first year of operation of the new campus, plus $250 for each additional student in ADA in the second year of operation. However, the loss of this allotment caused school districts to delay construction projects due to the need to temporarily increase class sizes and use portable buildings with their commitment to follow certain financial management strategies, including a balanced budget in the General Fund (Holt, 2009).

School bonds are currently the most common local program for financing public school facilities (Holt, 2009). The process involves taxpayers voting in favor of selling bonds to pay for the buildings and provide other facilities (Burrup et al., 1993). School districts that are growing at a fast pace or have insufficient tax revenues to finance renovations, property purchase, or new construction, use bonding. State governments regulate the ability of school districts to assess taxes for use in capital outlay projects, and many states determine the types of projects for which such funds can be used (Holt,

2009). In most states, expenditures are limited to the purchase of land, renovation of existing facilities, addition to facilities, remodeling of facilities, or the purchase of equipment. In some states, the selling of bonds may also be used for installment or lease-purchase payments for the purchase of real property, plant, or equipment (South Dakota Codified Laws Ann. 13-16-2, 1991).

Although school districts may use any of the three alternatives to fund capital outlay projects, most school districts utilize the bonding process for major building, repair projects, or updates simply because it is the only way they can obtain the necessary money for major projects (Holt, 2009). Securing funds through this process is not as easy as one would think. School districts in Texas must call for a school bond referendum election or be a part of an already called election. In either instance, voters must pass the bond referendum by a majority vote. Bond election success is sensitive to needs, cost, resources, knowledge of voters, and measures of self-interest (Theobald & Meier, 2002).

The Purpose for School Bond Referendums

School funding took a major turn early in the early last decade when school districts began to challenge if school funding was following the Constitution of Texas. The limits of what could be on a school bond referendum ballot have been previously mentioned. Changes in school funding laws have left districts today faced with different issues and concerns that were not present in society 20 to 30 years ago. In a past district court decision, *West Orange-Cove Consolidated Independent School District v. Neely* (2004), the judgment outlined several areas where schools were receiving increasing pressure to fund education. Judge Deitz's decision was based on many findings of state-

directed facilities and educational studies, as well as testimony by experts in the field of education (Faltys, 2006).

In *West Orange-Cove Consolidated Independent School District v. Neeley* (2004), Judge Deitz began his decision by outlining the basic principles of property tax for maintenance and operations behind school finance (Faltys, 2006). These fundamental principles included property tax for maintenance and operations of a district not to exceed $1.50 per $100 of property valuation (Texas Education Code, 2005b).

With the growth of many subpopulations, every Texas school is still accountable for closing achievement gaps among those subpopulations of students because of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Nearly three quarters of the Texas public school students live in districts that levy property taxes at or near the statutory cap of $1.50 per $100 of valuation (Smith, n.d.-c). The property tax that was received by the district was used for the everyday expenditures from the operations of the school district such as salaries, general maintenance, and utilities. What could not be financed through this tax was subsidized through the Tier I State funding mechanism.

In order to bring some equity to the system, the Tier II was developed (Faltys, 2006). The Tier II system is when a Texas school district exceeds $305,000 in per pupil valuation (Texas Education Code, 2005a), the state recaptures the excess funding. These funds were redistributed to districts with per pupil valuations of less than $275,000 in order to attempt to bring them to the same level of funding as some of the richer school districts in the state (Faltys, 2006).

Judge Dietz's ruling was once again challenged in 2013 and in August 2014, the earlier ruling stating that the current school finance system is unconstitutional was

upheld. Dietz's ruling reaffirmed that the current model for public school finding in Texas is ineffective, inequitable, and inadequate (McGaughy, 2014). "He ruled the system lacked equity, adequacy and efficiency, and said an overreliance on local tax dollars created a de facto statewide property tax in violation of the Texas Constitution" (McGaughy, 2014, p. 1).

On September 26, 2014 Attorney General Greg Abbott filed an appeal with the Texas Supreme Court, challenging Judge John Dietz's August 28 ruling that the way Texas pays for schools is unconstitutional (Whittaker, 2014). It all comes down to the clause of the Texas Civil Practice and Remedies Code (Whittaker, 2014). The language in question is Sec. 111.003 (a) (2) stating that the attorney general may not, without legislative approval, settle a claim that "commits this state of action that has reasonable probability of entailing a continuing increased expenditures of state funds over subsequent state fiscal biennium's" (Whittaker, 2014, p. 1). Where this stands on the state political scene when it comes to education today is anyone's guess. In a poll conducted in June 2014 by the University of Texas at Austin, only 5% of voters viewed education as the most important problem facing the state (Rosenthal, 2014).

Historically, the development of a funding system for Texas public schools has been characterized by a series of starts and stops, primarily driven by economic conditions and political considerations (Bingham, Jones, & Jackson, 2007). This process has become an evolutionary process since the filing in the federal court system of *Rodriquez v. San Antonio ISD* in 1971, which first challenged the funding system in the state of Texas. It was in Rodriquez vs. San Antonio that the funding system was first called unconstitutional. This attempt was unsuccessful and was followed by *Edgewood v.*

Bynum in 1984 challenging the State of Texas in state court. The case was filed again as Edgewood v. Kirby (1985), and in 1989, the Texas Supreme Court finally reversed the appeals court decision and affirmed the trial court's decision found the Texas system of public school finance unconstitutional (Walker & Casey, 1996).

School districts in Texas affected by funding problems saw recent hope. Judge Dietz's ruling of September 15, 2004, gave the legislature one year to replace the system with one that was constitutionally acceptable (Bingham et al., 2007). At that time, the Attorney General of Texas made the decision that the state would appeal the ruling directly to the Supreme Court of Texas in order to resolve the issue. As previously stated, funding and equity in the state of Texas has been an issue for years. The recent standard tends to focus on providing equal access to funds at substantially equal tax effort in order to address these gaps (Thomas, 2003). This would indicate that there is a still considerable difference in available revenue between property-rich and property-poor school districts (Bingham et al., 2007). Ensuring equity and adequacy of education funding are two of the most complex problems facing state legislatures (Augenblick, Myers, & Anderson, 1997).

The State of Texas has been dodging the school funding dilemma for years, though some solutions have appeared to be obvious. In 1993, Bill Ratliff introduced a plan that redistributed funding between schools, and Mr. Ratliff stated that the plan would still work if the State of Texas would adequately fund the education system (Osladacz, 2014). The only thing wrong with the current plan, according to Ratcliff, is that the State of Texas is not putting enough money into it. If they funded the current plan, it would be constitutional and adequate (Osladacz, 2014). Ratliff went on to say

that if there were another way, then it would be discovered by now (Osladacz, 2014). The 1993 legislation has stood the test of time, but the State of Texas has not held up their end of the deal when it comes to providing funding (Osladacz, 2014).

The change in funding is affecting small districts around the state and is making educating its students harder and harder (Neaves, 2014). The Fort Davis School District is trying to survive financially; they struggle from a lack of state funding (Neaves, 2014). They have been forced to make some deep cuts and now there is nothing left to cut (Neaves, 2014). In an attempt to save money, Fort Davis ISD has eliminated extracurricular activities like cross country, tennis, golf, and band (Neaves, 2014). From dramatic cuts in state funding, close to $3 million a year to a dramatic cut of about $600,000 a year, half of the funding cuts is landing on residents of Fort Davis because the district has few options (Neaves, 2014). This problem has led educators to visit Austin with the message of whether you are a Democrat, Republican, or Independent does not matter; the law needs to be fixed (Neaves, 2014). According to Neaves (2014), politicians need to work together do their job and come up with a plan that will address public school finance.

Key Questions to Address in Bond Referendums

What are the needs? Starting the effort to place a school bond referendum on a ballot is a long and calculated process that starts over a year before the actual decision is made by voters. Every campus and every classroom in the district need to be visited to look at every possible need closely (Rigg, 2014). District officials must work together and gain as much data as possible and engage the community through a steering committee to determine the facility and infrastructure needs and lay out a capital plan

(Rigg, 2014), created by the data and community dialogue to address the district's safety and facility needs (Rigg, 2014). It is important that the capital plan has educational inadequacies as well as looking ahead to the next 10 years (Rigg, 2014).

In November 2013, there were 50 school districts with bond proposals totaling over $5 billion that went before voters on November 5th, (Smith, n.d.-c). Items on school bond referendums for some districts represent needs and in some cases there are items on a school bond referendum ballot that represent wants. A difference in need and want can be seen in the need to expand campuses or the want of new sports facilities. An example of the difference in school districts having needs or wants can be found in Garland ISD placing a natatorium on the ballot in their November 4, 2014 attempt at a school bond referendum (Declerk, 2014). Previous attempts to fund a natatorium had been unsuccessful which led to Garland ISD to cut their bonds in 1992, 1996, and in 2002 (Declerk, 2014).

While a football stadium or a natatorium can cause a debate of the need in a school district, no one can deny the need for school districts to provide for student growth. The State of Texas is growing by over 80,000 students a year and has been for several years (Smith, n.d.–c). It does cost money to provide facilities, and the state has made no long-term provisions for new students nor replacement of aging and inadequate facilities (Smith, n.d.-c). With the growth in student population and new facilities, districts must find ways to increase transportation and technology in the classroom.

Katy ISD, a school district in southeast Texas, has experienced such growth and needs new campuses to keep up with the growth (Erikksen, 2014).

> The reality is we are going to have more children show up than we have space for said Superintendent Alton Frailey. We either shut the borders, which we cannot do, or we pay for the projects with debt from a bond, or we turn to the general fund said Frailey. That pool of money covers everything from staff salaries to fixing dying school buses and if we have to use that fund, it will become more challenging and the district will have to make some very tough choices. (Fraser, 2014, p. 3)

The needs of a school district can be demonstrated in a variety of ways: school buildings that are old and no longer enhance education, overcrowded schools due to growth, teacher shortages that challenge a district to meet the needs of students, and classrooms that are modern with technology and allow the room to enhance instruction are only a few needs a district can face (Theobold & Meier 2002). Class size, is measured as the ratio of students to teachers (Tedin et al. 2001). As student enrollment grows on a campus, claims about the need for more space gain credibility. It would be expected that voters would take these thoughts into consideration when they are making their decision if a school bond referendum is necessary and worth an increase in their tax rate.

Bryan ISD in Central Texas placed a $132 million school bond referendum on the November 2014 ballot (Editorial Board, 2014). The bond referendum proposed made schools safer and met state classroom size guidelines (Editorial Board, 2014). If districts are sensitive to need, then expectations would find the positive relationship between class size and the likelihood of a successful bond election (Theobold & Meier 2002). Voters deciding an election will see that there are costly wants rather than prudent needs (Fraser,

2014). School districts need to be proactive in their approach, but being proactive is something that voters do not always understand. It is easier for voters to wait until a problem becomes so big that the community starts begging that something must be done to meet the current needs.

Disasters that are out of human control can create a need in a school district that call for voters' attention. Post ISD, a small school district in the Texas Panhandle, has the need for a new elementary building after an early morning blaze devastated the west wing of the elementary campus including 16 classrooms (Musico, 2014). A bond election to replace the elementary school district would increase the school district's tax rate by 10 to 13 cents (Musico, 2014). Board members were optimistic that the community would see the need and the challenge was met with the school district passing the school bond referendum in 2012 (Musico, 2014).

School safety has become a top priority of districts in the United States due to an outbreak of violence in its schools that led school districts in every state to look at school safety. Class size and building capacity lead to the top priority of school districts and the greatest need of every campus; school safety was a major component of a recent school bond referendum in Navasota, Texas. Navasota ISD superintendent Rory Gesch said, "The top concerns are the safety of our students and security upgrades that will enable school safety, infrastructure needs, technology needs and building capacity" ("Navasota ISD," 2014, p. 1).

Gesch, like many other district leaders, has seen the increase in school violence and the need to place school safety at the top of school needs. The most pressing educational issues in education have become the violence in school, such as fighting

among students or most important, intruders with weapons, like the related problems of violence in society (Netshitahame & van Vollenhoven, 2002). School violence predictably rockets to public attention after highly publicized shootings, stabbings, and forms of violence, and each incident generates a renewed conviction that schools are becoming dangerous places (Cornell & Mayer, 2010).

Additionally, a school that acknowledges the complexity inherent in its climate and takes clear steps toward creating one conducive to learning is a school that will inevitably become a safer school (Noonan, 2004). The Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act of 1986, the Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990, and the modified Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1996 all reflected the conviction that schools were becoming increasingly dangerous places, and these acts showed the main concern of school districts, which is student safety (Cornell & Mayer, 2010).

If a district has campuses that are not safe, then the first priority has to be to make the campuses as safe as possible. Safety was a concern of Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District in their recent school bond referendum election. Of the $1.2 billion that was approved, technology upgrades, intrusion panels, entry buzzers, security vestibules, emergency call phones, lockdown buttons, and additional security cameras were included to increase the safety of students as well as faculty and staff (Radcliffe, 2014; Simmons, 2014b). Of the $1.2 billion that was approved by voters, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD will spend $55 million to tighten school security, including installing strategically placed panic buttons on campuses and replacing existing entry windows with bullet-resistant glass upgrades that experts call a necessary but unfortunate sign of the times (Radcliffe, 2014).

The concern for school safety has led many school districts to review the safety of their campuses. According to Radcliffe (2014), "Students are number one and staff is number one. Students, faculty and staff have to be protected. How do you put a price tag on someone's life?" (p. B1). School districts are becoming more aware and concerned with school safety, with the recent school shootings that have happened all over the United States.

> Cypress-Fairbanks ISD plans to add security vestibules to the front area of 50 schools to keep unapproved visitors from gaining access, upgrade security cameras and install lockdown buttons and stand-alone emergency phones at all schools – widely considered the best practices in school safety. (Radcliffe, 2014, p. B1)

Growing population. Student population growth in a district can be a great thing for any district. An increase in average daily attendance (ADA) results in more money for the school district that can lead to higher compensation for district employees or larger budgets for curriculum and instruction (TASBO, 2014b). The problem that is created with a gain in ADA is providing an adequate learning environment (TASBO, 2014b).

Suburban school districts are growing at such a rate that school districts are having a difficult time building campuses to keep up with the growth. One district (Katy ISD in Katy, Texas) is growing so rapidly that within two years, it will be larger than Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and this fast growth is causing problems for Katy ISD (Staff Report, 2014b). Rapid growth has led Katy ISD to ask voters to approve a $748,118,930 school bond referendum (Staff Report, 2014b). Cypress Fairbanks ISD is growing by

about 2,000 students a year, according to demographers with Population Survey Analysis (Simmons, 2014a). To accommodate a projected population surge of more than 15,000 new students by 2020, the Cypress-Fairbanks School District would have to open a new school a year (Simmons, 2014a).

A rapidly growing student population has Klein ISD administrators preparing to call the district's next bond referendum to fund additional schools and campus renovations and upgrades over the next few years (Simmons, 2014b). According to Superintendent Jim Cain,

> This election is critical to the future of this district . . . . Just do the math and you can see we need more schools, classrooms, buses, technology – anything you can think of, we need more of it. But if we don't get the passage of a bond issue, we're between a rock and a hard place. (Simmons, 2014b, p. 2)

Frenship, Texas, a suburb of Lubbock, Texas, is experiencing growth that is leading Frenship Independent School District to prepare for the growth. As the number of businesses and homes in the Frenship area grows, so does the number of students. According to Frenship Superintendent David, "That's why Frenship Independent School District needs the $85.2 million bond up for voters' approval next month," (Michael, 2014, p. 1).

With the arrival of the headquarters of Exxon-Mobile and the many other businesses that will accompany the new headquarters, Conroe Independent School district is also experiencing growth and is anticipating greater future growth. Current enrollment is close to 50,000. The student population has been increasing at about the same rate – between 1,100 to 1,200 students – annually for the past few years. School

Superintendent Don Stockton said demographers are projecting more of the growth for the next 2 to 3 years (Peyton, 2014).

Renovation and upgrades are necessary for districts that are experiencing growth, as well as districts that have had consistent enrollment for a number of years. An example of both of the reasons is found in Cypress Fairbanks ISD where rapid growth has created the need for new campuses and facilities, but it has also led to the need for renovation of the district's older facilities. Because the district made a commitment to ensure older facilities provide the same opportunities for students, the planning committee recommended upgrades and renovations for older campuses (Stinnett, 2014a).

Voters of suburban school districts that are growing traditionally have an easier time passing a school bond referendum in order to have enough campuses and to meet the various needs that will allow the school district to keep up with the growth (Scott, 2014). An average size school district that has a stable enrollment and only attempts a school bond referendum every 12 to 15 years faces challenges to pass a school bond (Scott, 2014). The education issues are the same in small districts as they are in large districts and lead administrators to attempt to perform well with fewer resources (Scott, 2014). Working in a small rural district allows an administrator to solve the depth of problems (Scott, 2014). Many voters as well as administrators and teachers value what small towns have to offer and want the same opportunities that bigger districts offer (Scott, 2014).

Virtually all of the issues, expectations, and difficulties in running a large school are present in small campuses as well; it is a matter of scale (Scott, 2014). Declining enrollment can hurt the bottom line of any school district, but the problems can seem larger in a smaller school (Scott, 2014). Declining enrollment is an issue for many small

districts because funding formulas are tied to enrollment, and a unit of funding that is lost for a small district is a larger percentage overall (Scott, 2014).

School performance is now being assessed differently; small schools districts are being placed at a big disadvantage as statistical models are applied to nonstatistical samplings that most small school districts can generate (Scott, 2014). By almost every social and economic measure, rural school districts are becoming more diverse, not different from metropolitan districts (Scott, 2014). In many places, the school district is the heart of the community; without the schools, the community would die (Scott, 2014).

The needs that lead stable districts to pass a school bond referendum are usually different from the needs of districts that are experiencing rapid growth. Hardin ISD is an average size school district in Southeast Texas and is currently using temporary metal buildings put up in the late 1960s (Stinnett, 2014a). The school's restrooms are accessible only from the outdoors (Stinnett, 2014a). Whether it is 100 degrees outside or 20 degrees, the children have to be taken outside to get to the restroom and back; therefore, Hardin ISD had a need for new a new building to meet the needs of students (Stinnett, 2014a).

Slocum ISD, another stable school district in the state of Texas that has not experienced growth in student population, recently sent a bond referendum to voters to add on to their current high school (Vernon, 2014). The bonds were used to finance a new school building, including the following features: seven standard classrooms, one computer lab, one science lab, one culinary arts lab, one physical education/gymnasium, one secured entrance, one administrative suite, one dining area with food storage, one

teacher workroom, furniture, fixtures, equipment, security, and technology for a complete faculty (Vernon, 2014).

Robinson ISD sits adjacent to Waco, Texas, and is a small stable district, and they faced a unique challenge recently attempting to pass a school bond referendum for the third time after voters had defeated the referendum on two previous occasions. The bond was the district's third attempt since November 2011 to replace its 50-year-old intermediate school that school officials say the campus has safety and electrical issues (O'Conner, 2014). The new proposed building would be approximately 85,000 square feet and accommodate the fourth through the sixth grades (O'Conner, 2014).

Student growth, replacing worn out buildings, and increasing safety are reasons often given when communities address the long-term facility needs of local school districts. Districts that are building new buildings due to necessity is one reason that is silently putting more pressure on stable districts to keep up with the latest building design. It is the state's failure to adequately fund facilities, therefore, slowly passing more of the burden on to local taxpayers for a greater portion of the funding, which is a challenge for average size districts that are not experiencing growth (Velvin, 2014). A community that has successfully passed school bonds every few years will see and understand the importance of public school education, yet the school districts that only have a school bond referendum on the ballot every 10 to 15 years will probably not see the importance of the issues that have led to a school bond referendum (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014).

In a recent remark, Dr. Jerry Burkett, who serves as career readiness director for an urban district, stated that the Texas Legislature has no interest in funding education at the state level and would prefer to pass the burden on to the local taxpayers:

> I agree and that appears to be what is happening as I watch local communities raise tax rates to assume more of the responsibility for maintaining the current funding levels for the local school districts . . . . The local option of accessing the meaningful discretion tier of the state funding system via a tax ratification election was originally meant for enrichment at local discretion, but today a TRE is necessary to maintain basic programs in many districts. (Smith, n.d.-a, p. 1)

School bond referendum theme. Most of the research surrounding the themes of a school bond referendum theme is out of date with Texas law (Hamel, 1984). According to Hamel (1984), one crucial step in a school bond referendum campaign is selecting a theme as the process progresses. A theme should be the key message that allows the voters to associate the ideas of the campaign with the need for the referendum (Brax, 1990). The theme will be the one thing that is easily remembered and will remind the voters of what is at stake. Holt (1993) echoed the thought that the theme needs to be centered on the key items of the bond referendum. This message should remind voters that by supporting the bond referendum that they would be investing in the future of the school district and enhance the perception of the quality of life for the entire community (Holt, 1993). Stockton (1996) went on to state that the theme of the referendum should be based on confidence of the voters and should influence their opinion.

Once the needs of the district are established, a school district can set the overall theme of the bond referendum (Holt, 1993). The theme does not limit a school district to

what can be placed on the ballot; yet, it designs the main area of development or improvement (Holt, 2009). A school district can prioritize what the needs are after the need of the main theme is developed (Holt, 1993).

What is the cost? What is the cost of a school bond referendum is a question that will always be asked by voters. Needs must be considered when examining the cost of a school bond referendum. It is important to study and know the cost of a bond per student. The cost of the referendum is what will determine the tax rate for individual home and property owners. If districts are sensitive to high tax rates, then evidence suggests there will be a negative relationship between the tax rate and the likelihood for success (Theobald & Meier, 2002). The effective tax rate enables homeowners to evaluate the relationship between taxes for the preceding year and for the current year, based on a tax rate that would produce the same amount of taxes if applied to the same properties taxed in both years (Combs, 2013). The calculation process starts after the chief appraiser delivers to the school district, the certified appraisal roll and the estimated values of properties under protest (Combs, 2013).

> Calculating the effective tax rate requires the prior year's taxes and the current year's taxable value for property taxed in both years . . . . Dividing the taxes by the value (and multiplying by 100 to convert to a rate per $100 of value) produces the effective tax rate. (Combs, 2013, p. 7)

Previously mentioned Cypress Fairbanks recently sent voters to the poll requesting $1.2 billion for the district's pressing needs through 2020. The bond proposal included $197 million for student growth, $666 million for facility renovations, and $72 million for transportation upgrades, $217 million for technology, and $55 million for

security (Simmons, 2014a). Cameron ISD recently called for a bond referendum that totaled over $5 million. Though Cameron ISD is not currently growing in student population, they were seeking improvement in athletic facilities. School Board President Alan Patterson said the district sought voter approval to issue $5.65 million in bonds to finance upgrades and construction of athletic facilities including improvements to the track, tennis courts, football stadium, and a new baseball field (Velvin, 2014). While voters look at the price tag of a school bond referendum, the greatest interest is what the cost will be to each household. The cost is determined by the increase in property taxes, discussed later in this chapter.

Can the district afford the bond issue that is being proposed? There are efforts for organizations that challenge voters' thinking that there could be a need in the school district for a bond referendum (Jackson, 2014). School districts are up against jaded public opinion, an offshoot of increasing diverse politics are coming against all levels of government, including local school districts (Jackson, 2014). Unfortunately, public confidence in any public-funded institution, including public schools, erodes more and more with each passing year (Jackson, 2014). This has caused school districts to first look at their current indebtedness and determine their future repayment schedule that will be a major part of a district budget each year (Theobald & Meier, 2002). If a district spends a significant portion of their budget paying off debt, then voters might not be willing to expand this portion of the budget since it would come at the expense of other budgetary items, such as expenditures on instructional categories that could affect a district's academic standing (Theobald & Meier, 2002).

A well-thought out debt structure is essential in addressing the duration and timing of principal and interest payments on a bond issuance (Lisheron, 2013). A district's business department needs to come up with a strategy that will allow the school district to carry out their strategic plan and still manage their debt. It is important to balance the payment schedule and district facility needs with the community's desire to maintain a low tax rate. The debt tax rate is directly impacted by the structure of the bonds, and the tax rate will be what many voters look at before going to the polls (TASBO, 2011). To increase the chances of winning a bond referendum, district administration must sell the vision of the school district to voters to help overcome resistance to tax increases and work to build long-term relationships with their communities based on open communication and mutual trust (Jackson, 2014).

Experts contend Texas must work to ensure that our localities do not rack up enormous debt and waste money on pet projects that cannot be afforded (Horsley, n.d.). Taxpayers should demand that local governments prioritize their spending, like good public safety and sound infrastructure (Horsley, n.d.). "The Leander Independent School District is awash in debt and feeling pretty good about itself. The district's $3.7 billion projected debt is higher than all but Houston and Dallas school districts which have several times the number of students" (Lisheron, 2013, p. 1). This is an example of decisions that have to be made across the State of Texas by school districts that are experiencing rapid growth. The growing debt per student can be alarming in some districts. "Leander's debt per student, projected at more than $114,000, is by far the highest in Texas for comparable sized districts" (Lisheron, 2013, p. 1). "In September 2013 the Leander ISD school board approved $206 million more bond debt, a single issue

that will cost district taxpayers $1.1 billion or five times more than the original cost if taken to full maturity" (Lisheron, 2013, p. 1).

In any bond referendum election, voters of a school district begin to ask the question, what is the cost? The answer is not only seen on an upcoming ballot, but in generations to come. "The district's current annual debt service of more than $61 million, which is about 20 percent of the annual budget, is expected to top $90 million a year within the next decade and $138 million in 35 years" (Lisheron, 2013, p. 1). Leander is a school district of about 35,000 students located northwest of Austin, and like a handful of other fast growing districts in the state, Leander has amassed billions of dollars in debt through the use of capital appreciation bonds (Lisheron, 2013).

Other opportunities are available for school districts to obtain the necessary money for district improvements. Capital appreciation bonds are an example of opportunities that are afforded school districts. Capital appreciation bonds are a product of their time, of $17 trillion national debts, incalculable unfunded national, state and local liabilities, and grotesquely underfunded public pensions. Unlike the more common current interest bonds that require that the issuer pay off the principal and interest throughout the term of the bond, interest on capital appreciation bonds compounds and accumulates until maturity (Lisheron, 2013). When voters pass a school bond referendum, a school district must pay close attention to who purchases the bonds and the length of the bond maturity.

In Leander ISD's case, that could be as long as 36 years from now (Lisheron, 2013). A decade ago, capital appreciation bonds were one of the financial tools used by suburban districts to build schools ahead of exploding growth in their student

populations. Leander's student body more than doubled, from 16,753 students at the end of the 2003 school year to 34,369 by the end of the 2014 school year (Lisheron, 2013).

In comparison, Northside ISD, northwest of San Antonio, grew by 31,000 students and topped 100,000 students during the same period and issued $2 million in capital appreciation bonds. Yet, the school district's overall outstanding debt of $3.3 billion is less than Leander and its debt per student of $33,331 is less than a third of Leander's (Lisheron, 2013).

Katy ISD, which is a fast-growing suburb of Houston, has grown from 21,472 to 61,427 students in the last decade with less total debt service and almost no reliance on capital appreciation bonds (Lisheron, 2013). Mansfield ISD, a growing suburb southeast of Fort Worth, has grown by more than 11,000 to 31,206 students with less than a third the overall debt of Leander ISD with just $6.5 million of it from capital appreciation bonds (Lisheron, 2013). Many of the districts that are experiencing significant growth requiring multiple bonds could face a different problem in 20 to 30 years. Not the voters of today who continue to pass school bond referendums, but their grandchildren will see the effects of their decisions when paying off the school district debt.

What is the self-interest of voters? There are many issues surrounding a bond referendum that are encountered and dealt with as a community and a local city, state, and a national level (Horsley, n.d.). Everything local voters see and hear about the school district in months and years leading up to the election will influence their opinion of the district and, potentially, their vote in the next bond election (Jackson, 2014). Some will want more and some will want less, or some will want the money spent in different ways (Fraser, 2014). One issue that can tear apart a community or school district faster than

any other issue is a school bond proposal (Horsley, n.d.). Some common reasons that bonds fail include a history of negative headlines about the school system in local media, and the failure of school district leaders to give voters confidence in their abilities to lead the district (Jackson, 2014). Building and maintaining confidence and trust of a community is not an easy process, yet is it is the key to winning school bond elections (Jackson, 2014).

Determining the self-interest of the voter will many times predict the outcome of the bond referendum. When a bond issue flounders, it is often because too many voters went to the polls with a poor opinion of the school district, anything from lagging test scores to an old argument between two board members that played out in the press (Vogel, 2006). On Election Day, voters need to think about how the money will improve students' education, and not think about nursing some grudge from years past (Vogel, 2006). Concern about self-interested voting among the population aged 65 and over has led many school districts to include an exemption from property tax increase for this group. Should a bond issue pass this exemption, it has to be communicated (Tedin et al., 2001). A majority of research shows that this strategy has been ineffective (Tedin et al., 2001).

The Tea Party movement is affecting many school districts that are attempting to pass a school bond referendum. The Tea Party movement is a fairly recent American political movement known for its conservative and at times radical positions and its role in the Republican Party (Anonymous, 2015). The Tea Party demands a reduction is the U.S. national debt and federal budget deficit by reducing government spending and taxes (Somashekhar, 2011). The movement has been described as a mix of libertarian (Ekins,

2011), populist (Halloran, 2010), and conservative (Arrillaga, 2014) activists. The beginning of the current Tea Party movement can be traced back to 2007 with the kick-start by Republican Congressman Dr. Ron Paul (Anonymous, 2015).

The Tea Party does not have a single agenda and the decentralized character of the Tea Party, with its lack of formal structure and hierarchy, allows each autonomous group to set their own priorities and goals (Anonymous, 2015). Their goals may conflict, and priorities will often differ between groups (Anonymous, 2015). Tea Party organizers see the disorganization a strength rather than a weakness, as decentralization has helped the Tea Party against outside entities and corruption from within (Ranch, 2010). Instead, the Tea Party has sought to have activists focus their efforts on economic and limited government issues (Kernike, 2010). The Tea Party generally focuses on government reform and push for a reduction in the size and scope of government (Anonymous, 2015). Among the goals of the Tea Party are limiting the size of the federal government, reducing government spending, lowering the national debt, and opposing tax increases (Foley, 2011). Mid-size school districts attempting a school bond referendum will have to increase the taxes of home and property owners, which goes directly against the theories of the Tea Party usually causing opposition.

Determining Factors for Success in School Bond Referendums

Trust in administration (leadership). According to the Texas State Board of Certification TExES Preparation Manual (TEA, 2006), Competency 3 stated that "The superintendent know how to communicate and collaborate with families and community members, respond to diverse community interest and needs and mobilize community resources to ensure educational success for all students" (p. 1). In his state of education

address in 1987, then Secretary of Education William Bennett attached the nickname “the blob” to administrators and the administrative system in public school districts (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Many would argue that is true of school bond referendums, yet leadership can lead through that potential stumbling block.

School bond referendums are won or lost based on the amount of trust the community has in the superintendent and the board of trustees (Nunnery & Kimbrough, 1971). The credibility of the superintendent can be a side issue that can kill a school bond referendum if the voters do not trust their leadership (Faltys, 2006). Whether superintendents like it or not, the community will follow their example (Abrashoff, 2002). A community looks to the superintendent for signals, and they have an enormous influence (Abrashoff, 2002). If the community sees the superintendent not telling the truth about what is in a school bond, then they may feel free to lie as well (Abrashoff, 2002).

In rural school districts in Kansas, Bohrer (1998) addressed 10 problems that were common to failed school bond elections. The only problem that could not be changed, but had to be overcome, was lack of trust in prior administration (Faltys, 2006). Piele and Hall (1973) stated that in their analysis of school bond referendums, the only significant difference between one district’s unsuccessful campaign and another district’s successful campaign was the salesperson. In a study by Boyle (1984), the research showed this connection to be significant.

The superintendent serves as the predominant leader to the school board and the Political Advisory Committee (PAC) (Lode, 1999). Initially, the superintendent for school board members allowed them to make informed decisions in regard to the school

bond proposal and ballot question (Lode, 1999). The leadership of the superintendent included preliminary work that included gathering data about property tax assessment, tax rates, building cost, community demographics, student data, academic goals, plus many other related matters (Lode, 1999). The superintendent needs to maintain a profile that would not give voters the impression that the proposal is coming from their office, but the plan is proposed from many individuals who are involved in the process (Lode, 1999).

An area that can strengthen issues of trust is the financial management of the district (Faltys, 2006). Taxpayers want to know that the superintendent and school board members can be trusted to do the right thing with the taxpayers' dollars (Surratt, 1987). Zakariya (1988) stated that school construction is one of the most politically charged challenges the superintendent and school board face. Unity between the superintendent and school board is necessary for the successful passage of the school bond referendum (Holt, 1993). The personal qualities and characteristics of district administration can be one of a school district's most valuable resources at the time of an election if that trust and unity is present (Lifto, 1995).

District leadership needs to see the big picture, rather than viewing the passage of a bond issue as a one-time project. Administration needs to focus on building an ongoing relationship of trust with stakeholders and voters (Jackson, 2014). In 70% of unsuccessful school bond elections in South Carolina, the credibility of school administration and the board of education were listed as contributing factors to the failure of the issues (Holt, 1993). According to officials at the North Carolina State Department

of Public Instruction (1998), the voters look to the opinions of teachers and principals if they are undecided about which way to vote on a particular referendum.

The feeling that a district and community have for the superintendent of schools can also go a long way to gain the support from voters. Confidence and trust can make a community feel at ease that what is on a proposition is what is best for the students of the district. The superintendent who presents a bond issue risks the public rebuke of the citizens if the bond issue fails (Theobald & Meier, 2002). "Trust is the major factor considered by voters in school districts asking for money" (Smith, n.d.-b, p. 1). Therefore, it is imperative that the leadership is thorough and clear on the vision of the district. If the vision is not clear, the people are not clear (Maxwell, 2005).

Katy ISD recently failed at an attempt to pass a school bond referendum. The referendum offered a football stadium, agriculture facility, and science center. According to George Scott, an education advocate and bond critic,

> This defeat shows that this Katy ISD administration and school board have become institutionally arrogant . . . . They lost sight of the fact that people in the community are dedicated to public education but also care about spending money wisely. This was simply the worst structured bond I have seen in my entire professional career. (Eriksen, 2014, p 1)

Voters will not simply figure out what a district is trying to accomplish; many details will have to be explained to some voters. "Once you know the answer, keep communicating and filling in the blanks until you can sense that most of your people get it-not just the quick ones" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 249). One of the greatest challenges superintendents face during their tenure in a district, especially if the district has failed in

passing school bond referendums, is to be successful in getting one passed (Theobald & Meier, 2002).

In 2013, Katy ISD's school bond referendum totaling $99,000,000 was not passed even though the school district was growing at a fast pace. Community members voted against the school because the district was proposing to spend too much money on things that were not necessities (Horsley, n.d.). Katy ISD was proposing a new bond for November 2014, but they added $700 million to the price tag with more fluff (Horsley, n.d.). New schools and a new additional stadium were on the ballot that many concerned citizens argued were not meeting the needs of the students. Supporters and opponents have formed political action committees, and the Katy school district has increased its outreach efforts just one year after plans for a larger football stadium was rejected by voters during the last school bond referendum (Fraser, 2014). Many say they have little faith that the district leaders were being honest about the needs of the district versus the wants (Fraser, 2014).

In November 2014, Port Arthur ISD in Port Arthur, Texas, placed a $195 million school bond referendum on the ballot for the purpose of improving older school buildings and keeping district schools safe (Macke, 2014). PAISD Superintendent Dr. Mark Porterie was on a mission to change the Port Arthur Independent School District for the better (Macke, 2014).

> Dr. Porterie genuinely cares about the students of Port Arthur and their growth and desires to make Port Arthur a better place . . . . He has a plan that will give younger students a better place to learn and he has a plan to keep the children of

> all ages safe . . . . Sometimes a leader comes along that gives us hope, gives us a reason to believe that things can get better. (Macke, 2014, p. 2)

Selecting the right steering committee. Competency 2 of the Texas State Board of Certification TExES Preparation Manual (TEA, 2006) stated the superintendent knows how to shape district culture by shaping a vision that is supported by the educational community. Having the right steering committee is an important part of the bond referendum process. "First get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people on the right seats – and then they figure out where to drive it" (Collins, 2001, p. 13). The steering committee along with a school board will help sell the bond referendum to the community and could be influential to voters who are undecided. "The steering committee has as its mission to identify and coordinate necessary tasks leading up to the formulation of the proposal to the board" (Holt, 2009, p. 101). Having a steering committee is necessary because even the greatest leader from history had blind spots and weak areas (Maxwell, 2005). A bond steering committee has the following objectives:

1. To organize the information provided by the other committees into a final recommendation to the board of education.
2. To prepare appropriate documents for the dissemination of information to the public.
3. To recruit volunteers to distribute information, make phone calls, or perform other proposal development services. (Holt, 2009, pp. 101-102)

One strategy for committee composition is to include the school superintendent, the community leader, and the chairs of the site and building committees (Holt, 2009). El

Campo ISD began their bond referendum process by forming a steering committee and breaking into groups to begin their work (Larimer, 2014). The El Campo ISD community facilities advisory group, when meeting, would break into subcommittees to address specific subjects when they met (Larimer, 2014). The first thing to do was have the general meeting, then select a chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary who take over and coordinate the group into subcommittees (Larimer, 2014).

Prior to Klein ISD's successful school board referendum, administration evaluated the need for a bond to accommodate growth. A steering committee composed of parents, staff, and other community members held two meetings to review background information related to growth, as well as capacity and expanding educational programs (Blanchard, 2014). The committee used information to examine the proposed capital projects such as school additions, renovations, repairs, technology, and new campus construction (Blanchard, 2014). The size of the bond referendum was not determined until after the steering committee had completed their work (Blanchard, 2014). Klein ISD successfully passed its school bond referendum in May 2014.

Community support is necessary for a school district to be successful at their attempt to pass a school bond referendum. To begin earning the trust of the community, invite residents to the campuses and offer opportunities for them to learn more about district staff, students, and current as well as future programs (Jackson, 2014). An honest and thorough community-driven planning process made the difference in success and failure on Election Day (Jackson, 2014). In Katy, Texas, they had a large school bond referendum on the ballot in November 2014; some wanted less technology, but the

committee voted for it and the committee was fairly well represented, so if that was what the committee wanted the voters could approve their decision (Fraser, 2014).

It can be difficult for district leaders to relinquish control of decisions are being made for a school bond, yet allowing a group of citizens to lead the charge for a bond issue is important in getting a school bond passed (Jackson, 2014). By including broad-based representation from community members in the decision-making process, a district has a ready-made group of champions for their plan (Jackson, 2014).

Cypress Fairbanks ISD recently passed a $1.2 billion bond referendum faced with adding about 2,000 students a year. Demographers predicted the district would have to accommodate 15,000 new students by 2020, which district officials said they will not have room for without new campuses (Staff Report, 2014a). Projected growth led to consideration for the large bond proposal being sent to voters. After a five-week long planning process, the Cy-Fair ISD long-range planning committee presented a $1.2 billion bond proposal to the Cy-Fair Board of Trustees (Simmons, 2014a).

Klein ISD was seeing growth at the rate of 1,200 to 1,600 students a year. This led to school leadership looking at a school bond referendum, which was successfully passed in May 2014. Superintendent Jim Cain first announced the need for a long-range capital plan in anticipation of a bond referendum to the Board of Trustees in late November 2014. The plan kicked off in March 2014 with a series of visioning meeting that included community members, businesses, and stakeholders. The next phase took place during the spring semester with two futures conferences to inform the community about district needs and receive community feedback (Simmons, 2014b). Klein ISD was successful in passing their school bond referendum in May 2014.

Selecting the right architect. The superintendent of schools needs to search for an architect who can assist the district in the process of a successful school bond referendum campaign (Holt, 2009). Finding the best architect for the project can help drive the meeting with the steering committee as well as the school board (Holt, 2009). The recommended criteria of the architect are as follows (Holt, 2009).

1. Experience in school design.
2. Creative design ability.
3. The knowledge to control the design so that the best results are obtained for the least amount of money.
4. Executive and business ability to oversee the proper performance of contract.
5. Proven ability in all the major phases of planning and construction: predesign planning, schematic design, design development, bidding, and construction.
6. Ability and temperament to work cooperatively with others.
7. Willingness to consult with staff on educational specifications.
8. Extent and experience of architect staff in relation to the scope of the planned project.
9. Reasonableness of architect's fee. (Holt, 2009, p. 91)

The superintendent gathers a scope of work that the school district is considering and sends a document to all architects in the region and architectural firms outside the region who have worked previously in the area (Holt, 2009). The document should include a description of the facility needs of the district with timelines for the selection process and the building project (Holt, 2009). A letter must be published in the local newspaper indicating that the school district is conducting a search for an architect (Holt,

2009). The superintendent should ask each of the candidates to prepare a presentation that portrays his or her experience, abilities, and ideas on educational facilities and be prepared to discuss qualifications under the previously mentioned criteria, including concessions they might be willing to make in the fee schedule (Holt, 2009).

After an architect has been hired, the superintendent will reach an agreement with the architect as to the type of the contract, specific fee schedules, and cost controls on change orders (Holt, 2009). The superintendent of schools will use an estimated cost of the project as a starting point to negotiate an architect's fee schedule (Holt, 2009). The school district will be responsible for providing the architect with a set of specifications upon which they base the building's design (Holt, 2009). The specifications for design should be derived from meetings with administration, steering committee members, and teachers (Holt, 2009). It is to be noted that the type of specifications addressed by the architect will vary depending if the school district needs new construction or if old buildings will be renovated (Holt, 2009).

Public relations campaign and voting strategies. There are many factors that go into an election and getting the word to the voter is key to success (Smith, n.d.-b). There are national, state, and local economic factors that may play a role for voters to consider; but for the most part, these are local elections and reflect local attitudes. What holds true and impacts election outcomes in one community is not necessarily true in the next (Smith, n.d.-b). A promising strategy is for school districts and campuses to host community events and offer local churches and nonprofits the use of schools, athletic fields, and playgrounds (Jackson, 2014). School districts can also promote school plays and concerts that could be covered by news media and in collaboration with local

employees to provide guest speakers for students (Jackson, 2014). Any opportunity to have stakeholders or voters on a campus can allow the needs of the district to be seen.

Getting organizations involved in the campaign can be key to voter turnout and success on Election Day. An example of this was recently found in Port Arthur ISD, which is located in Southeast Texas approximately 100 miles east of Houston, Texas, as they presented a $195 million bond to voters. The Great Port Arthur Chamber of Commerce issued formal support for the school district proposal (Henderson, 2014a). A group was put together of Chamber directors and representatives from area industry as well owners of businesses (Henderson, 2014a). The group met to decide whether the bond proposal was a justified expenditure (Henderson, 2014a). Based on those meetings and what was seen firsthand at schools, it was determined that the Port Arthur School District bond committee had presented what was the best package of a sound investment for the district (Henderson, 2014a).

Port Arthur ISD also had town hall meetings to educate and, hopefully, persuade voters. Calvin Rice, the principal of Booker T. Washington delivered the district's third town hall meeting to discuss the upcoming bond election in the Westside Development Center (Henderson, 2014b). Rice shared that the voters of Port Arthur had previously passed school bond elections for $189 million on 2007 and for $110 million in 2004 that allowed the district to construct new facilities for DeQueen Elementary School, the Wheatley School of Early Childhood, Robert E. Lee Elementary School, Memorial High School and its auditorium, Memorial High School CATE, Booker T. Washington, and Adams Elementary School (Henderson, 2014b).

Rice continued to share that the district has outgrown those additions and renovations and have already reached capacity (Henderson, 2014b). Rice said that when the proposed bond passed that the district would build new schools, upgrade technology infrastructure, meet security needs, build a new transportation facility, purchase 20 new school buses, and upgrade, renovate, or add on to more than 11 facilities (Henderson, 2014b).

Keller ISD, a growing district near Fort Worth Texas, with a $169.5 million bond package on the ballot, held town hall meetings (Engelland, 2014). Superintendent Randy Reid hosted these meetings to promote that voters would not see a rise in their tax rate with the passing of the bond referendum (Engelland, 2014). The successful bond package included renovation to existing campuses and to turn an existing campus into a technical education campus for high school students (Engelland, 2014).

Fort Bend ISD in the greater Houston area held a number of town hall meetings to present the facts of their successful school bond referendum in November 2014. Superintendent Charles Dupree stood before a crowd of community members and district officials in the auditorium of Elkins High School to present the facts of the Fort Bend ISD referendum (Binkovitz, 2014). In October 2014, the district began a series of 12 town hall meetings meant to explain and hopefully sell the $484 million bond that was presented to voters in November 2014 (Binkovitz, 2014). The bond provided Fort Bend ISD with new and expanded facilities while promising an ongoing system of accountability (Binkovitz, 2014).

Other major expenditures included new school buses, wireless infrastructure, land purchases and security updates, including new security vestibules for the schools that did

not currently have them (Binkovitz, 2014). The superintendent stressed the district's efforts to be financially responsible, citing Fort Bend ISD's $1.34 tax rate, lower than neighboring Katy ISD's rate of $1.52 tax rate per $100 valuation (Binkovitz, 2014). A school district must communicate to voters how the increase in the tax rate, if any, will affect their household. Fast growth and economic development can mean that there will be no tax increase for homeowners due to a higher tax base for a school district (Binkovitz, 2014). However, a district that is not experiencing growth will likely see an increase in property taxes (Binkovitz, 2014).

Responsibilities for a school district. School districts need to have a sense of responsibility to voters in order to be successful in passing a school bond referendum. A school district needs to present items in a referendum that will make sense to voters. School districts that do not place a school bond referendum on the ballot every five to eight years will need to do a greater job of campaigning to win approval of voters. One way of communicating how a passed bond is being carried out is a targeted voter communication plan to let voters know what is being completed from the items being proposed. Voters can look at a district and what is being proposed and look at their own finances and try to find correlations. Long-term debt should not be used to pay for short-term needs, but such inappropriate expenditures have become a staple of massive school bond packages (Wohlgemuth, 2014). Would it be responsible, much less possible, for a homeowner to pay for a car and new laptop as part of a 30-year mortgage on a new home? (Wholgemuth, 2014). No, they would be paying for the car long after the engine died and for the laptop long after it became obsolete (Wohlgemuth, 2014).

The same common sense should apply when taxpayers see nondurable goods, like buses and technology upgrades, proposed as part of school bond packages (Wholgemuth, 2014). Frisco ISD is an example of making decisions that do not make sense to a voter who looks at their own home and their debt (Wholgemuth, 2014). Frisco is a fast-growing area that sits north of Dallas, Texas. However, with its $775 million bond proposal in May 2014, the school board was simply asking its taxpayers to carry too heavy a burden (Wohlgemuth, 2014). Consider that the Frisco district already owes, including principal and interest, a debt burden of more than $2.59 billion, according to the Texas Bond Review Board. That is nearly $56,000 per student and more than $14,000 higher than the Denton school district, the next most indebted large district adjacent to them (Wohlgemuth, 2014). Accommodating growth does not have to mean mortgaging taxpayers' future (Wholgemuth, 2014).

State political scene – Single issue elections. A joint election is when two political subdivisions such as a city, a school district, or possibly a community college conduct all or part of their elections together and share polling locations. Montgomery County is a good example of second issues being on a ballot. The Lone Star College System presented a $485 million bond referendum to voters in November 2014 (Dominguez, 2014). The Lone Star College, in North Harris County, held bond referendums that provided 686,000 square feet of learning space to address the growing needs of campuses and the area's shortage of skilled workers (Dominguez, 2014).

Community colleges are so important right now in the educational world not only for academic transfers to four-year institutions, but for the workforce piece (Dominguez, 2014). The purpose of joint elections is to provide voter convenience to the voters of

political subdivisions with overlapping boundaries (TASB, 2014). There are laws for school districts to follow regarding joint elections, which are covered by Texas Election Code chapter 271.

There are two requirements covered by law for holding joint elections.

1. Create a joint election agreement that sets out the terms of the joint election.
2. Share some common election-day polling places (TASB, 2014).

When having a joint election with a city, you are not required to share every election-day polling place with the city. As long as you have at least one, you have met the joint election requirement (TASB, 2014). A school district may find it more practical and cost efficient to have more than one or all polling places within the city.

"All other joint election choices are left to the entities involved in the election. Specifics regarding the distribution of cost and responsibilities for ballots, election workers, early voting hours and locations are not prescribed by law" (TASB, 2014, p. 3). The law is flexible enough so that a district and city or county can structure its election in a way that will best serve voters.

Texas Education Code section 11.0581 does not require bond elections to be held as joint elections with other political subdivisions. Joint election laws pertain only to school board trustee elections (TASB, 2014). If a school district holds a bond election in conjunction with a trustee election, the bond as well as the trustee election will be held by the same election requirements (TASB, 2014).

From 2006 to 2010, bond referendum elections that were held in May passed at a higher rate than elections that were held in November by 8% (Melton, 2012). One theory as to why bonds referendum elections are more successful in May is that there is less

competition on the ballot in May (Melton, 2012). There are many state and national elections that are on the ballots in November and voters who are voting straight Democrat or Republican tickets will oftentimes not find their way to vote on the bond that will be on the bottom of the voting ballot (Melton, 2012). The timing of the election – with a presidential race on the ballot and the economy not fully recovered – could also factor into the outcomes (Melton, 2012).

There are times when a school district will break a bond referendum into parts. One part could be school improvement, while another part could be athletics. The question was asked in Katy ISD's November 2014 school bond election. Why is the stadium being forced into a bond issue that is primarily for education and facilities that promote education? (Horsley, n.d.). The question from some voters is why is the stadium not on its own ticket? (Horsley, n.d.). When there are more than one bond issue on a ballot, it could cause voters to be torn and confused when headed to the polls (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014). In a metropolitan area, voters cannot only face the issue of school bonds, but could also see bonds from roads and drainage to upgrade parks or libraries (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014). Community Colleges can also place items on a ballot for upgrades and expansions (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014). Katy ISD is bringing a controversial issue in their school bond referendum that voters decided favorably in November 2014. The controversy surrounded a football stadium that was on the ballot (Staff Report, 2014b). It would have been better if the committee had split the bond package and given the community the ability to vote yes to the new schools and no to the stadium (Staff Report,

2014b). A crowded field means competition for voters' attention and, in some cases, their pocketbooks (Melton, 2012).

According to Rice University political science professor Bob Stein (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014), the key to across-the-board wins is for the agencies to cooperate and coordinate their messages. The more measures on the ballot, the more likely all will fail (Melton, 2012). However, when agencies can work together, they can show voters the importance of the development of a community and how that will lead to increased home values (Melton, 2012). An example would be when a new school is built, the streets and ditches or curbs that lead to that school will be improved as a part of the process (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014). This is an example of how narrow bonds can be broadened if you get more entities involved (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014). This is an example of broadening the stakeholders to ensure success (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014).

An example of a school district and a community working together can be found in the Pleasantville community of Houston, Texas. Pleasantville Elementary of Houston ISD does not have a library in its building, yet thousands of books are checked out every year by the teachers of the school for their students to read (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014). This is a great example of how a school and a city entity work together. What voters can see is an example of how their tax dollars are working together (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014).

Alternatives to a School Bond Referendum

A superintendent must see what he can control and what he cannot control (Holt, 2009). The superintendent can control how the bond is rolled out, and the theory of the bond committee, because each school bond referendum is unique (Holt, 2009).

There are measures for a school district to obtain funding for projects to meet the needs of campuses and students when a school bond referendum fails. School districts can use qualified school construction bonds to save money on bonds issued to finance school, construction, land acquisitions, and renovation projects (TEA, n.d.). The Qualified School Construction Bond allows the school board to make a decision that goes against the voters' decisions. The Qualified School program is a federal program that provides bond holders with tax credits that are approximately equal to the interest that would ordinarily pay the holders of taxable bonds (TEA, n.d.). Though this is an option for some school districts, it is not the answer for all school districts. The Qualified School Construction Bond Program allows the state to grant program authorization to a limited number of qualifying school districts (TEA, n.d.).

Pay-as-you-go financing is an option available for school districts that need to renovate a building or build new buildings. Pay-as-you-go financing allows a school district to pay for construction from current revenues and pays the entire cost of a building project from the budget year's local tax levy (Holt, 2009). This method of paying for building projects is the quickest and easiest way to finance capital outlay projects (Holt, 2009). The pay-as-you-go system eliminates large sums of money for interest that can be 20% to 40% of the cost of a building along with the cost of bond attorney fees and election costs (Holt, 2009).

Accumulation to the school district fund balance from one year to the next can pay for constructing future school facilities (Holt, 2009). This plan allows the construction costs to be spread over a period of time as the buildings are erected and is a contrast with the principal of school bonds that spreads the cost over time after the buildings are constructed (Holt, Wendt, & Smith, 2006). There are great benefits to a community when using this system. For example, the buildings can constructed with no delay or interest that is included in financing a school bond (Holt, 2009).

Why Do School Bonds Pass and Fail?

Factors that shape bond election outcomes. One of the main concerns for homeowners who are voters is how an election will affect their taxes. Voters are interested in their tax rate and what a successful election will do to the tax rate on the house or property that they own. Typically, when a school district holds a bond election, the district first surveys voters in the community regarding the possibility of issuing debt (bonds) for school construction. Such debt often involves raising the tax rate in order to pay for the bonds (TASBO, 2011). As a borrower, the school district promises to repay the bonds with the taxes that are collected each year and pay interest to the bondholders over a set period.

In Texas, a school district may take up to a maximum of 40 years to repay its debt (TASBO, 2011). A school district will appoint a finance team that (a) ensures the district complies with state law, (b) demonstrates the district's ability to repay the new debt, (c) calculates any tax rate impact, (d) reviews existing board policies related to finance issues, (e) presents the district finances to the rating agencies, and (f) ultimately sells the bond (issues the debt) (TASBO, 2011). A well-planned debt structure addresses the

duration and timing of repayment on a bond issuance. It is important to balance the repayment and length with the cost of ongoing facility needs and the community's desire to keep a consistently low tax rate.

Marshall ISD (MISD), located in East Texas, recently called for a bond election and the tax rates became the major talking point in the community (King, 2014). The call for a bond election would build four new elementary schools, a new middle school, a new agriculture facility, and renovate Marshall High School and Maverick Stadium at a cost of no more than $150 million (King, 2014). "If voters were to approve the proposition, there would be a 40 cent increase per $100 valuation in the tax rate for the district's I&S fund, which is currently at $1.00" said David Weaver, MISD public relations director. With the district's M&O fund at $1.04, the total tax rate approved would be up to but not to exceed $1.44 (King, 2014).

Bond proposal – Substantive and fiscal impact tax rate. The change to their tax rate can determine how voters will respond on Election Day.

> A school district's property tax rate is made up of a maintenance and operation tax rate and, if applicable, and Interest and sinking tax rate. As its name suggest, the M&O tax rate provides funds for the maintenance and operation costs of a school district . . . . The I&S tax rate provides funds for payment on the debt that finances a district's facilities . . . . Some school districts have very little debt, if any, and have either a low M&O tax rate or none at all. The calculation of both Tiers I and II and the revenue at the compressed tax rate is tied to a district M&O tax rate. The calculation of facilities funding is tied to a district's I&S tax rate. (Texas Education Agency, 2011, p. 4)

The debt services portion of the rollback rate differs entirely from the M&O portion of a budget. The debt services rate portion is the tax rate necessary to pay the school district's debt payments in the coming year and nothing else (Combs, 2011). When voters support a school bond referendum, the M&O tax rate increases and can cause concern with voters. Districts that propose a school bond referendum election and have a large increase in their tax rate can lead to failure on Election Day.

Robinson ISD, which is a suburb of Waco, Texas, is a district that had run into tax-rate issues that led to two failed bond elections before passing their bond referendum in their third attempt (O'Conner, 2014). Their proposal was to replace its 50-year-old intermediate school, which school officials said had safety and electrical issues (O'Conner, 2014). The new proposed building would be about 85,000 square feet and accommodate the fourth through the sixth grades (O'Conner, 2014). The proposal raised taxes by 24.5 cents per $100 property value for the next 8 years and then decreased incrementally as the district's debt was paid off (O'Conner, 2014). The majority of community members who had spoken out against the bond said they simply could not bear the extra tax burden (O'Conner, 2014).

Economic conditions of the community. Community opinion in any election that will raise taxes and affect a household can determine if voters will be in favor or against a school bond referendum. "A community with certain citizens makes two policy decisions. The first policy issue is the level of general public spending" (List & Sturm, 2004, p. 1253). An example of economic conditions driving a successful bond referendum can be found in Conroe ISD. In 2014, Exxon Mobil Corporation started building a new complex just west of Interstate 45 and the Hardy Toll Road that will

house 10,000 employees. The community's new corporate home will be located within the master-planned community of Springwoods Village. The residential component of the community could have as many as 15,000 residents and a workforce reaching as high as 50,000 (Peyton, 2014). The expansion will drive enrollment up in Conroe ISD as well as surrounding districts.

Prior bond elections. It is important for a school district to know the history of bond elections in their district and, more importantly, the results and reasons for the results in prior elections. "If stakeholders feel good about how you used the last dollar voters gave the district, they are usually willing to continue investing with more funds" (Smith, n.d.-b, p. 1). Did the results of the election leave a positive or negative impact on voters? Did the district do exactly what was promised and advertised from past successful elections? Every decision arguably is to a greater or lesser degree a product of our history, of the culture we exist in, and of other circumstances not wholly of our making (Useem, 2006).

It is more important than ever for a district to be transparent in the eyes of voters; unlike years past, the passage of a school bond referendum is not considered an easy task. School bond referendums are one of the few vehicles of change where citizens can directly make decisions in regard to the school district policy (as opposed to indirectly via school board elections) (Theobald & Meier 2002).

Katy ISD is growing at an average of 3,000 students a year, and new schools must be built to keep up with the growth. In November 2013 voters turned down a $100 million facilities bond that included $69 million for a second football stadium for the

district, with 16,000 seats (Fraser, 2014). Yet, Katy passed a larger, more inclusive bond referendum in November 2014 (Fraser, 2014).

Academic performance. Voters can be affected by the success of the students. The results of state-mandated tests to measure academic success and the district rating can affect the outcome of a school bond referendum (Strand et al., 1999). If a school district is not performing at a successful level academically, then voters can determine that there are academic needs that are more crucial than new buildings or renovating the building that already exists (Strand et al., 1999). Districts with higher standardized test scores have more favorable votes and can be interpreted that voters are more willing to fund bond referendums when output performance levels are adequate (Strand et al., 1999).

School districts' pass rates on state tests and accountability measure the consistent with service effort and accomplishment criteria (Strand et al., 1999). This suggests that voters are willing to commit to higher taxes for new buildings and renovation of old buildings, when the school district performs well (Strand et al., 1999). Though Katy had a hotly debated school bond referendum on the ballot for November 2014 due to a football stadium, one thing that swayed voters was Katy ISD's students were scoring much higher than the state average on the state's achievement index (Staff Report, 2014b). Schools that are funded locally perform better than those whose funds come largely from the state (Fischel, 2001).

School bond campaigns. A great challenge in passing a school bond referendum is getting the word out to all voters and helping voters without children and grandchildren in the district to understand the importance of the ballot. Districts can reach people who

do not visit schools publicizing programs and concerns that are being covered in the school bond (Jackson, 2014). Local school districts can use local media and upload articles, blogs, and videos on school websites (Jackson, 2014). Many times voters do not know the conditions of schools in a district that, in turn, may lead to a lack of urgency (Jackson, 2014). Many voters do not see the condition of the buildings and cannot connect that to the importance of adequate housing of students (Jackson, 2014).

Following a recent passage of a school bond referendum in North Carolina, school superintendent James Merrill of the Wake County Public School System, attributed the bond passage to support from local leaders and to the district's transparency and openness throughout the planning stages (Jackson, 2014). Merrill stated the planning stages, establishing priorities, and communicating value to the community were all major selling points to voters (Jackson, 2014). An important reason for the recent win in Wake County, Merrill said, was the support of a group called "Friends of Wake County" who assisted the school district getting the importance of the school bond to all voters (Jackson, 2014). The local chamber of commerce created the group that included leaders in the community, business leaders, nonprofit organizations and faith groups, and had the challenge of gaining support in the community (Jackson, 2014).

To convince the public of the importance of the need of the bond referendum, administration must hold town meetings, publish community newsletters, develop up-to-date websites, or find any tool available to help voters make sense to the public (Jackson, 2014). If school leadership fails to connect and get their story to voters in a credible manner, then there is a chance of defeat on Election Day (Jackson, 2014). In today's world of technology, blogs, social media, and hyper local news, websites can be a

powerful force in driving voters' opinions (Jackson, 2014). The biggest obstacle that public school districts have in passing construction bonds is that schooling has evolved beyond the kind of education much of the voters received (Shaw, 2010). Districts can keep their communities informed of needs by conducting community surveys and communicating with the public through print, radio, local media, or online videos (Jackson, 2014).

School district superintendents, school board members, and other district leaders should reach out to voters individually (Jackson, 2014). However, in Texas, the superintendent cannot speak in favor of the school bond after the school board calls for the election. Call them and knock on their doors in order to make voters aware of the upcoming election (Jackson, 2014). Door-to-door canvassing was once the bread and butter of party mobilization, though door-to-door canvassing has not proven effective in rural settings (Green & Gerber, 2008). Inform voters of the planning and information involved in the election and attempt to clear up any questions (Jackson, 2014).

Before Dayton ISD had a successful bond election in May 2015, Superintendent Dr. Jessica Johnson spoke to the residents of the school district at the Dayton Community Center regarding the school bond referendum. The bond referendum would cost $87.82 million and would construct new buildings and provide for several updates including security, lighting, and communications (Stinnett, 2014b). The planned improvement that voters would decide would impact every student on every campus on every level (Stinnett, 2014b).

Alternative explanations. There are more and more Tea Party groups that oppose school bond elections and attempt to lead communities to defeat school bond

referendums across Texas. Though Texas is currently growing by 80,000 students a year, there are groups that are growing who are publicly saying they are not in favor of the debt that is required to educate those students (Smith, 2014). "To ignore the pressure that this growth causes on our public services is insane" (Smith, 2014, p. 1). This growth in population has several factors.

> More jobs, more people equals more students, and more student demand more classrooms. Lawmakers have not addressed facilities funding or public school funding in general since the 1990s . . . . Anti-tax people are calling for no new taxes, and anti-public school advocates are against building new schools. Bond issues may be the best choice at this time. (Smith, 2014, p. 1)

Cookie cutter ads are coming from citizens who have little or no interest in public school education, but are looking for a platform to be heard in their local community (Smith, 2014). Those groups are beginning to appear more and more frequently. We need to be reminded of what Sam Rayburn (n.d.) once said, "Any jackass can kick down a barn, but it takes a good carpenter to build one" (p. 1). Groups such as Empower Texas, Tea Party Nation, Texas Public Policy Foundation, Americans for Prosperity, and Watch Dog Wire are groups that are about tearing down educational progress (Smith, 2014). It is important that school districts place a variety of members on the previously mentioned community committees. If committees are packed with school employees who stand to gain directly from the bond, then voters could show their disapproval on Election Day (Fraser, 2014).

The endogeneity problem: School districts that hold bond elections do so because they feel strongly they can pass the bond. Studying only districts that hold

successful elections is subject to a selection bias. Is there a way to predict the success of a school bond referendum prior to Election Day? Katy ISD used Baselice & Associates, a polling group to conduct a community survey for an upcoming election (Endress, 2014). They surveyed 400 respondents, with a 4.9% margin of error. Forty-six percent of respondents were Katy ISD parents, while 54% were not (Endress, 2014). The survey shared reasons for opposition so their steering committee and administrators could address community questions.

A sociotropic perspective predicts those who believe that well-funded schools are a wise investment for a community and public resources and showed that voters supported a school bond referendum, regardless of how they were personally affected (Tedin et al., 2001). In any election, there will be some idiosyncratic and local factors that influence the vote. Demographic trends in large metropolitan school districts can sway many voters; however, almost every school bond election will activate predispositions regarding partisanship, ideology, race, the collective good, and considerations about whether one should or should not vote to increase one's own taxes (Tedin et al., 2001).

Voters would probably be more likely to support a bond if it built a new school in their neighborhood, given the new campus would benefit their own children even if that meant a raise in their property values (Theobald & Meier, 2002). Theobald and Meier (2002) went on to state that data on the number of voters in the district should be studied to better predict an outcome before the referendum is attempted (Faltys, 2006). These voters should be targeted and asked to promote the bond issue to relatives and friends, particularly of other children (Weathersby, 2002).

School leaders should identify their micro-audiences and craft the message specifically to them (Jackson, 2014). An example would be a district replacing an old elementary building that would require a lot of renovation and would cost the school district extreme amounts of money (Jackson, 2014). Identifying voters who live in the community that would be affected is key (Jackson, 2014). But when a district is communicating with voters in another part of the district that will not benefit from the newly planned elementary school, leaders should focus on another part of the bond plan that would be more meaningful to those voters (Jackson, 2014).

A second major demographic trend with implications for school bond elections is the age of the population. The Census Bureau estimates that in 1998, 13% of the population was 65 and over, a percentage that will increase to 20% by the year 2030 (Pressley, 2008). Cataldo and Holm (1983) identified five behavior categories for understanding voter outcomes in school referendum: (a) voters with school-aged children or retired voters; (b) socio-economic status: voter education and income; (c) political issues: perception of school quality and trust in school board; (d) taxpayer revolt: relative expenditure and tax levels; and (e) community conflict: racial and ethnic differences (Strand et al., 1999). Among White voters, both education and income have significant positive coefficients (Tedin et al., 2001). The higher the income and education, the more likely a positive vote due to a better understanding of the total impact for their community (Tedin et al., 2001).

There are models that have attempted to estimate demand or voter choice with specific taste in terms of the number of children in public schools and demographic variables such as age, sex, occupation, marital status, and length of residency in the local

community that can affect voting (Brokaw, Gale, & Merz., 1990). These variables have been placed in models in an attempt to predict voter turnout. In a regression model of voter turnout, the dependent variable has been expressed in terms of the probability of voting, while in a model of voter choice, the dependent variable has been expressed as the probability of voting yes (Brokaw et al., 1990). To increase the probability of realizing dividends from their efforts, school districts should treat the influencing of voters' attitudes as a constant process, rather than limiting action to sporadic, and sometimes desperate, attempts prior to a voters heading to Election Day (Brokaw et al., 1990).

Even with a core group of supporters on the side of the district, administrators as well as board members must take an organized, thorough approach to winning the support of voters (Jackson, 2014). It should include listening carefully to the voters who appear to be against the school bond, mainly due to not having all the facts (Jackson, 2014). A strategy that could be used is to ask voters who are against a school bond referendum to simply not vote. This can be described in a regression model of voter turnout that can also help predict voter turnout (Brokaw et al., 1990). In a model of voter choice, the dependent variable will go even further and predict the probability of a "yes" vote (Brokaw et al., 1990).

A Political Activist Committee or PAC can play a key role in taking the election theme from the vote of the school board to the day of the election. The role of the committee can vary; but everything that is done is about getting people out to vote (Shaw, 2010). Going door-to-door to state the facts of a bond campaign is still effective today. There are few things that a committee can do in a campaign that are as effective as door-

to-door campaigning (McNamara, 2008). A door-to-door strategy allows committee members to meet voters one-on-one and appeal directly to their votes (McNamara, 2008).

Second strategies that serve a great purpose are community rallies (McNamara, 2008). Community rallies generate energy and help build momentum on a campaign leading up to Election Day (McNamara, 2008). Rallies allow people who do not know the facts to hear how a school bond referendum can benefit not only the school district, but also the community (McNamara, 2008). There are many strategies that can be used, but the main job of the PAC is to mobilize the community to get people out to vote (Green & Gerber, 2008).

Solution to endogeneity. Simultaneously explain holding bond election independent of its success and failure (R. Stein, personal communication, June 23, 2014).

Finding common ground. A common problem in education is the infamous silo, meaning that leaders only look at problems one way (Halpin, 2014). In education today, there are siloed departments, siloed people, siloed dates, and siloed people (Halpin, 2014). There have been many plans for progress that have failed simply because of a focus on solving problems for one department or one institution and not take into account the fact that no institution is on an island and that everything is connected (Halpin, 2014).

New initiatives create an attempt to change the way that people look at education (Halpin, 2014). The goal is to gain the help of public sector leaders to work to effect positive change in a world where everything is increasingly connected and complex (Halpin, 2014). School expanding the scope of conflict can lead to more affective problem solving (Schattschneider, 1975).

Expanding the net. To win the vote for a school bond referendum, a school district will need to increase the number of voters who are involved in the process (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Getting community members involved in the process will not only spread out the work, but it will also educate voters regarding the needs of a school district (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Every voter gets one vote so it is obvious that the difference between stakeholders, as well as homeowners and those in businesses within the municipalities, work together for the cause of the school district (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009).

A school district needs to develop a model to account for long periods of stability and domination of important policy areas by voters and for rapid change in political outcomes, where apparently entrenched economic interests find themselves in the political battle (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Enlisting a variety of voters to help carry the cause of the bond referendum can carry many different labels: (a) policy subsystem, (b) islands of functional power, (c) systems of limited participation, (d) iron triangles, and (e) power elites (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Entrepreneurs are usually successful in convincing others that their view of an issue is more accurate than the views of their opponents, which can lead to an altering of the philosophy of voters (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). As the net widens, the opinions of their advisories find a new way of understanding old problems allowing a new jurisdiction over issues that previously had no interest in them (Baumgartner, & Jones, 2009).

Any study of the dynamics of American political institutions will be able to account for both long periods of stability and for short periods of change (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Widening the net will help show voters that the winds of change and need

are best for the local school district and will help traditional voters respect the process of challenging issues (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). As we compare any controversial issues in a school bond referendum, a school district can compare the development of issues both over time and across areas and demonstrate the forces that create both incremental and rapid change (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Widening the net will also allow the institutions to pursue the issues, often in the absence of serious opposing forces (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009).

Know the product. The committees and those who have expanded the net must generate most of the information about the new facilities needed to present the school bond proposal to voters (Holt, 2009). The public relations committee must be careful to ensure that the product being presented to voters is a quality education – not a specific building (Holt, 2009). It is important that community members form the mentality that the district's children deserve the best education possible, yet voters want to know how their tax dollars will contribute to education (Holt, 2009). Voters want to know if they will be throwing their money away (Holt, 2009).

Proponents of the school bond referendum must be able to justify every expenditure of the bond in terms of how it will provide a better future for the school district's children (Holt, 2009). Voters want to know how educating young people will contribute to their quality of life (Holt, 2009). Voters must be shown that providing students with the best education possible will provide a more positive attitude toward the community and how it is viewed (Holt, 2009).

The above analysis points to several important strategies for public relations committees to communicate to voters (Holt, 2009).

1. The campaign must be about education, not about square feet, new lockers, or art rooms.
2. The public must be assured that the management of education in their community is solid and rational. Almost everyone knows of businesses that once prospered, and because of poor management or poor goals, went bankrupt. The public must have confidence that the school district will have a good management plan.
3. The campaign must focus on how education benefits the community and homeowners will share in the value of their property with a good school district. (Holt, 2009, p. 101)

Educating voters. To understand the failure in demographic homework in public education, one must start with the history of Baby Boomers. At the close of World War II, American parents produced a high number of children 9 to 12 months after the war ended (Carroll & Carroll, 1994). The monumental birth rate continued until 1964, reaching a peak in 1957 when 4.3 million babies were born (Carroll & Carroll, 1994). Public schools felt the strain of the Baby Boomer generation as they entered school systems and led to the building of new campuses in school districts (Carroll & Carroll, 1994). Classroom and campuses were beginning to empty upon the graduation of approximately 76 million Baby Boomers (Carroll & Carroll, 1994).

During the 1960s and 1970s, it was easier to get approval for a school bond proposal because most voters had children in the schools (Carroll & Carroll, 1994). In the decade of the 1970s, there were 4 million more school-aged students than there were adults (Carroll & Carroll, 1994). However, in the 1990s, 25- to 45-year-olds

outnumbered school-aged children by 33 million (Carroll & Carroll, 1994). The aging of Americans has already begun to have an effect on today's schools and how school bond proposals are viewed. Older adults, who do not have children in the school system, question if they should pay for the education of other people's children through their tax dollars. The middle-aged Americans between ages 35 to 50 have increased greatly, and the number of Americans over 50 years old has increased by 18.5% (Carroll & Carroll, 1994). The median age of the Baby Boomers was 55 in 2010; therefore, it is expected that by 2015, over one-third of the nation's grandparents with grandchildren under 18 will be Baby Boomers (Carroll & Carroll, 1994).

If a population has a large proportion of Baby Boomers and the district's referendum addresses an issue important to them, it will likely pass (Carroll & Carroll, 1994). However, if the bulk of voters are elderly and the referendum is of little concern to them, it will likely fail. Voter turnout will play a key role in success or failure in a school bond referendum. Citizens over the age of 60 vote at a higher rate than Baby Boomers, and 18- to 35-year-olds have the lowest voter rates (Carroll & Carroll, 1994).

The trend in low voter turnout and the elderly age of Americans shows the difficulty in passing a school bond proposal in any district (Carroll & Carroll, 1994). It is imperative that a district present a school bond proposal that meets the needs of the district and not the wants of administrators and the minority of the community (Fischel, 2001). Every part of a school bond is considered an investment in the current as well as future students of a district; and while that is easy to see in buildings and buses, a district must also consider the future and the repayment of the school bond as well as meeting

current needs (Fischel, 2001). School bond referendum must meet the critical areas of the school district both present and future (Fischel, 2001).

An important part of winning a school bond referendum is for voters to be educated in not only what can be done for students, but also what the effects are for home and property owners. The important fact is that home values are the largest part of most people's assets, and public events like taxes and spending affect the value of homeowners' assets (Fischel, 2001). Property taxes must be analyzed as part of a system of local government that provides public services with less economic waste than others (Fischel, 2001). Homeowners are aware that local amenities, public services, and taxes affect the value of the largest single asset they own (Fischel, 2001).

As a result, homeowners pay much closer attention to such policies at the local level than they might on the state or national level (Fischel, 2001). They balance the benefits of local policies against the cost when the policies affect the value of their home, and they will tend to choose those policies that preserve or increase the value of their homes (Fischel, 2001). The better the school district performs, the greater the value of property and homes in a school district. That concern for home values is the central motivator of local government behavior, in a package in which financing, regulations, and expenditure are all done by the locality (Fischel, 2001). Local officials and voters are assumed to be capable of seeing the entire picture (Fischel, 2001).

An increase in local property taxes to add teachers for schools may make the community more attractive to homebuyers (Fischel, 2001). This will add to the value of all homes in a community, not just the homes that contain school-age children (Fischel, 2001). The added value to homes from an efficient program in turn increases the

property-tax base (Fischel, 2001). Property taxes pay for spending that is not financed by other means, such as higher-government grants and local fees and user charges (Fischel, 2001). For school districts that are considered property rich, the property tax is their largest single source of discretionary funds (Fischel, 2001). The result leads to public officials paying closer attention to the tax base (Fischel, 2001). With their homes being their biggest asset in one location makes homeowners painfully attentive to the affairs of their municipality (Fischel, 2001).

Commuting and homeownership created a new view of urban politics in that cities are different from states and in that urban politics are above all the politics of land use (Fischel, 2001). It is beginning to be recognized that urban issues require an understanding of the political economy of the suburbs, in which more than half the American population now resides (Fischel, 2001). In the suburbs, towns, and small cities, which is where most people live, homeowners have become the dominant political force (Fischel, 2001).

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

Clearly, administrators and school boards face many dilemmas in terms of their the schools in their districts (Holt, 2009). Many school districts simply do not have the necessary money available from their general fund to solve their building problems (Holt, 2009). Many school districts face attitudes within their communities that become barriers to taking positive action to meet the current physical needs (Holt, 2009). A superintendent must know the processes to successfully lead a school district through the school bond referendum process.

The purpose of this study was to examine school district superintendents' perceptions of processes and strategies that were successful in passing a school bond referendum in school districts that were not growing in student population and had a total student enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500. Specifically, this study gave close examination to school district superintendents' perceptions of (a) contributing factors that led to the successful passing of a school bond referendum; (b) successful strategies that school districts utilized to successfully pass school bond referendums; (c) how superintendents of school districts perceived they influenced the community will to vote in favor of the bond referendum; (d) perceived community barriers when attempting to pass a school bond referendum; and (e) additional challenges faced in the successful passing of a school bond referendum.

This chapter describes the methods used in this study: (a) research questions, (b) research design, (c) data collection, (d) the instrument used in the study, (e) a description of the data and the methods used to interpret the data, and (f) the limitations of the study.

Research Design

This phenomenological qualitative study examined perceptions of school superintendents from school districts that were not growing in student population and had a total enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500 students regarding the processes and strategies that were successful in passing a school bond referendum election. In this study, seven superintendents were interviewed to examine their perceptions of contributing factors and strategies that led to passing school bond referendums along with their perceptions of how they influenced the community to successfully pass a school bond referendum. Data were gathered from one-on-one semi-structured interviews with seven superintendents from mid-sized school districts with a stable student enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500 that had successfully passed a bond referendum.

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to develop themes. The purpose for using the content analysis was to assist in identifying emerging themes. Information and perceptions were gathered through semi-structured interviews with seven superintendents (Lester, 1999).

In this study, seven superintendents were interviewed to examine their perceptions of factors and strategies that led to passing school bond referendums along with how the community was influenced leading to a successful school bond referendum. The results from interviews shared superintendent's perceptions of the processes that

were successful in passing a bond referendum. Data collected showed the challenges that were overcome in districts passing successful school bond referendum.

Information from the superintendents who served as chief executive officer was gathered through interviews. Interviews allowed an opportunity to find the processes that were present that drove the bond election to succeed and many times led to another question and a need for clarity. The opportunity to clear up the questions and concerns led to a better understanding of the issues that the district was facing at the time of their election.

Research Questions

1. What are superintendents' perceptions of factors that contributed to the successful passing of bond referendums?
2. What are superintendents' perceptions of successful strategies that school districts utilize to successfully pass school bond referendums?
3. How do superintendents of school districts that successfully pass bond referendums perceive they influence the community will to vote in favor of the bond referendum?
4. What are superintendents' perceptions of effective processes to engage the community in an effort to successfully pass a bond referendum?
5. What are the perceived community barriers that superintendents face when attempting to pass a school bond referendum?
6. What additional challenges do superintendents report they face in the successful passing of a school bond referendum?

Settings

The seven superintendents interviewed for this study were currently leading, or have led, school districts with student enrollments between 1,000 and 3,500 in the State of Texas. Additionally, these districts had not experienced substantial growth and had successfully passed a school bond referendum.

District 1 was a rural district located in Central Texas that covered 360 square miles. Approximately 65% of the students received free or reduced lunches. The district was about 23% below poverty. The district consisted of 40% of the students being Hispanic, 35% Anglo, and about 25% African-American. A prior bond had failed a little over 90 days prior to their successful passing of their $25 million school bond referendum.

District 2 was a sawmill town that was very diverse with a student population of 53% Hispanic, 16% African American, and 31% Anglo. The superintendent had been the superintendent 1 year prior to the beginning stages of the school bond referendum, but he had been in the district in another administrative capacity prior to becoming the superintendent. The community did not have a lot of industry or business and was a bedroom community to a larger city. The district consisted of many of the third and fourth generation families who came from all walks of life. It had been 20 years since their last successful bond, and the bond referendum that was successfully passed was for $22.5 million.

District 3 was a bedroom community to a large region and had no industry. There was an enrollment of approximately 2,200 students that were housed on four campuses. The student population was 85% Anglo, 12% African American, and 3% Hispanic. The

school district was experiencing minor growth from a struggling school district located 12 miles away. There had been 41 years since the district had passed a major school bond referendum. The district had passed two very small bond referendums for minor building projects. The successful school bond referendum that was passed totaled $37.5 million.

District 4 was a rural district with close to 1,000 students and had 48% of their students receiving free or reduced lunches, and the elementary was a Title I campus. It had been 24 years since the district had successfully passed a school bond referendum, and the district requested $17 million that the voters approved.

District 5 was a mid-sized school district and was a property-rich district that was geographically 620 square miles. They are large in minerals with 70% of the property values coming from the minerals and 92% of those minerals being natural gas. The value of the district is $1.1 million per student. The district does a school bond referendum every two to three years, and they have ranged from $22 to $29 million.

District 6 was a rural district with about 1,200 students when the district passed their first school bond referendum under the leadership of the current superintendent. Sixty percent (60%) of the school district's students receive free or reduced lunches. The population of the school district is 50% Anglo, 25% African American, and 25% Hispanic. The school district is a property-rich district with a value of a little over $2 billion. There had been 30 years since the previous successful school bond referendum, and the total amount of the bond was $5 million.

District 7 had a student population of 2,700 students, and 60% of those students were economically disadvantaged and receiving free or reduced lunches. The

demographics of the students were 76% Anglo, 19% African American, and 5% Hispanic. The school district had unsuccessfully attempted a school bond referendum six months prior to successfully passing a school bond referendum that totaled $29.9 million.

Participants

Participants in this study included seven superintendents in the State of Texas who were purposefully selected based on the following criteria: (a) school district successfully passed a school bond referendum; (b) district student enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500 students during the year that the school bond referendum was passed; and (c) the district did not experience student enrollment growth during the previous five school years leading up to the successful passing of the school bond referendum. Districts that had successfully passed bond referendums were identified from the Texas ISD website (www.texasisd.com) and cross-checked with the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports to filter districts with a student enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500 students and stable enrollment during the previous five years. If more than 10 districts were identified, the researcher selected districts that were the closest in proximity to the researcher.

Superintendent 1 had been the superintendent a little over two years before the first bond referendum was attempted. He had served as assistant superintendent in the school district prior to serving as superintendent. Prior to serving as assistant superintendent, he had served the district as high school principal and as the districts' alternative education principal before he became the high school principal. Due to the mentioned experience, the superintendent was well known and respected in the community.

Superintendent 2 had been the superintendent one year when the school district was successful in their attempt at passing a school bond referendum. Prior to becoming superintendent of schools, the superintendent had served as athletic director and head football coach. He had worked in the school district as an assistant principal and coach 7 years prior to being hired as athletic director.

Superintendent 3 was superintendent is the district for two years when the district successfully passed a school bond referendum. He had worked for six years in the district as the Chief Financial Officer and went to a neighboring district for about nine months before coming back as assistant superintendent and then quickly became superintendent.

Superintendent 4 was superintendent in the district for two years prior to successfully passing a school bond referendum. He had been a coach and eventually the elementary principal prior to becoming the school district's superintendent. The previous superintendent had retired and had been preparing the school board and community for the need of a school bond referendum.

Superintendent 5 was superintendent eight months prior to successfully passing a school bond referendum. He had served as superintendent of a school district that had been unsuccessful in three attempts to pass a school bond referendum prior to coming to the district where he had successfully passed a school bond referendum.

Superintendent 6 was the superintendent for two years prior to successfully passing a school bond referendum. He had two years of experience as a superintendent prior to coming to his current district. In his previous position, the district had attempted a school bond referendum and it was defeated soundly by the voters.

Superintendent 7 had been the superintendent in the school district five years before successfully attempting a school bond referendum. He had two years of superintendent experience in a prior district and saw a school bond referendum to completion. The previous district had successfully passed a school bond referendum as he served as high school principal and eventually became the superintendent.

Procedures

The study was conducted in the spring of 2015 and consisted of semi-structured interviews with seven superintendents who had been successful in passing a school bond referendum in districts with 1,000 to 3,500 students and a stable student enrollment during the past five years. Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix A), potential superintendents were called by phone to solicit consent using a prepared script (see Appendix B). The purpose of the phone call was to explain the purpose of the study and solicit their voluntary involvement as a participant in the study. During this initial phone call, the researcher explained the importance of the study as well as assuring the respondent that participation was completely voluntary and that names of participants would be kept confidential. When the superintendent agreed to participate, a scheduled interview date and time were set and a location of the superintendent's choosing was chosen to allow for privacy. Prior to the interview, a consent form was sent to and signed by superintendent who was to be interviewed. Each interview lasted 45 minutes to one hour, and the setting was in a confidential setting of their choosing. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed by a trained transcriber. The transcribed notes were analyzed inductively using a general inductive approach.

Instruments

The instrument utilized for this study consisted of open-ended questions used during a 45-minute to one-hour one-on-one semi-structured interview with superintendents. The questions were developed by the researcher and reviewed by members of the University of Houston Professional Leadership Program faculty. Additionally, the questions were pilot tested with three current assistant superintendents or superintendents to determine that the questions were interpreted as intended and generated the kind of rich description data the researcher sought to answer the research questions. These open-ended questions allowed superintendents an opportunity to elaborate on the questions. The questions encouraged dialogue between the superintendents being interviewed and the interviewer to gain a better and more complete understanding of the processes in each successful school bond campaign and learn as much as possible from the superintendent.

Analysis

This study utilized a general inductive approach to data analysis (Thomas, 2003). The purposes for using this inductive approach were to (a) condense extensive and varied raw text data into a summary format; (b) establish clear links between the research objectives and the findings derived from the raw data, and (c) develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes that were evident in the raw data (Thomas, 2003). The primary purpose of the inductive approach was to allow research findings to emerge from the dominant or significant themes consistent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structural methodologies (Thomas, 2003).

The process of inductive coding began with close readings of the text and consideration of many meanings that were in the text (Thomas, 2003). The researcher identified text segments that contained meanings, created a section for a new category into which the text segment was assigned, and text segments were added to the category where they were relevant (Thomas, 2003). The researcher developed an initial description of meaning of category and by writing a memo about the category (Thomas, 2003).

The following examples and procedures showed inductive analysis of qualitative data:

1. Preparation of raw data files—Raw data files were formatted in a common format and a backup of each raw data file was made.
2. Close reading of text—After text had been prepared, raw text was read in detail to familiarize the researcher with the content that helped gain an understanding of themes and details of the text.
3. Creation of categories—The research identified and defined categories and themes. The upper level or general categories derived from the research. The lower level or specific categories were formed from multiple readings of the data. Several procedures for creating categories were used. The researcher copied and pasted marked text segments into each category.
4. Overlapping coding and uncoded text—Of the commonly assumed rules that underlie qualitative coding, two were different from the rules typically used in quantitative coding: (a) one segment of text was coded into more than one

category and (b) a considerable amount of text was not assigned to any category if it was not relevant to the research objectives.

5. Continuing revision and refinement of category system—Within each category, the researcher searched for subtopics, including contradictory point of view and new insights. The researcher selected appropriate quotes that communicated the core theme or essence of a category. The categories were combined or merged under similar categories when appropriate (Thomas, 2003).

Procedures used for assessing the trustworthiness of the data analysis included consistency checks and credibility checks (Thomas, 2003). Credibility checks involved opportunities for participants to comment on the interpretations made (Thomas, 2003). Comparisons were made with previous research on the same topic (Thomas, 2003).

Chapter IV

Results

The student population in Texas continues to increase by close to 80,000 students per year (Neely, 2004). The average age of school facilities in Texas, according to the Department of Education is approximately 52 years old nationwide (Holmes, 2000). These statements show there is a need for school districts to continue to attempt to pass school bond referendums.

The results of this study are focused on comparing superintendents' perceptions of processes and strategies that have been successful in passing a school bond referendum in school districts not experiencing growth in student population with a total enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500 students. The survey data were collected from interviews with superintendents in Central and East Texas. This study compared the open-ended responses in the survey instrument mentioned in Chapter III. The guiding research questions were:

1. What are superintendents' perceptions of factors that contributed to the successful passing of bond referendums?
2. What are superintendents' perceptions of successful strategies that school districts utilize to successfully pass school bond referendums?
3. How do superintendents of school districts that successfully pass bond referendums perceive they influence the community will to vote in favor of the bond referendum?
4. What are superintendents' perceptions of effective processes to engage the community in an effort to successfully pass a bond referendum?

5. What are the perceived community barriers that superintendents face when attempting to pass a school bond referendum?
6. What additional challenges do superintendents report they face in the successful passing of a school bond referendum?

The researcher collected and analyzed responses from semi-structured, open-ended interviews with seven superintendents who had successfully passed a school bond referendum.

Research Question 1

When superintendents were asked their perceptions of factors that contributed to the successful passing of bond referendums, the following themes emerged after an examination of transcribed notes:

1. Communication
2. Trust/transparency
3. Relationships

Theme 1: Communication. The most salient theme was communication; five of the seven superintendents interviewed stated that communication was the most important factor in successfully passing a school bond referendum. Communication was accomplished in several ways; most superintendents felt that holding community forums in various settings was the most affected. Superintendents communicated the facts of their school bond referendum at Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, and women's groups. Communication led administration to speak the facts of the needs of the district, cost of the bond, the tax implications, and the entire plan of the school bond referendum.

When speaking of communication being a factor that contributed to the successful passing of their districts school bond referendum, superintendents commented in the following ways:

- (S2) “Start with a clear focus and communicate what the bond would accomplish.”
- (S2) “Bring them the facts about what facilities are needed.”
- (S3) “We went out and spoke.” As I quoted “when there are 2 or more gathered, I will be present to speak.”
- (S3) “We told the community what the tax implications would be.”
- (S4) “We kept voters informed of the facts.”
- (S5) “The biggest key in passing the bond was getting the information out.”
- (S6) “Communicate the items in the bond.”

Theme 2: Trust/transparency. Trust in the administration and transparency in the eyes of the community was a second theme mentioned by three of superintendents interviewed. Superintendent 1 had served the district as a DAEP principal, high school principal, assistant superintendent, and eventually as superintendent. Serving in several administrative capacities had allowed him to get to know many of the parents, and they had witnessed how much he cared about the students of the district, which created a trust in his leadership. Superintendent 2 had served his district earlier in his career as a coach and assistant principal. He left the district for seven years and came back to the district in an administrative capacity and became the superintendent a few years later. The familiarity of the community with the superintendent led to a trust in his leadership.

They trusted that when he brought the facts of the school bond referendum, he knew what he was sharing.

Transcribed notes showed the following comments when superintendents' perception of trust and transparency being a factor that contributed to the successful passing of their bond referendum.

- (S1) "Trust was the biggest factor."
- (S1) "Trust was the biggest one. I was at a unique place and time. The families of the kids who weren't having a good experience knew that I was going to care about their kids . . . . So the mainstream parents got to know me and see the things I was doing and they got on board. Then in the spring, I ended up being the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction over maintenance and was still the high school principal, because Dr. John (Pseudonym) had gone through and pretty much cleaned house. Because of that, I got to wear a lot of hats that spring. At graduation, I introduced myself as the superintendent, high school principal, and business financial director. Because of that, I got to know a little bit of everybody; they knew I was there for the long haul. Trust was one of the biggest factors here. Dr. John said 'I'm setting the table for you.' I think we could have still got it done, but as you know, there is a certain way you go about earning their trust. You go to the rotary club meetings; you take the banker to lunch, and going to church in the community."
- (S1) "I got to know the parents of the students."

- (S1) “The families of the kids who were not having a good experience knew their kids were cared for.”
- (S2) “Being a coach, assistant principal, and athletic director in the past, I felt that I had earned the trust of the community.”
- (S4) “Transparency with the community was the key to the whole thing.”

Theme 3: Building relationships. Building relationships was the third theme found in interviewing superintendents to examine their perceptions of the factors that led to a successful school bond referendum. Four of the superintendents had served various capacities in the district prior to becoming superintendent. Each felt their previous roles had allowed them to build relationships with the community. The relationships had allowed the community to see that they cared about the success of the students of the school district.

Transcribed notes showed the following comments when superintendents’ perception of relationships were a factor that contributed to the successful passing of their school bond referendum.

- (S1) “Serving in so many capacities in the district, I felt that I got to know the parents.”
- (S2) “I have been in the community, my first time in the district, so they knew me.”
- (S2) “I feel that I was involved in the community.”
- (S2) “I went to church in the community.”
- (S2) “I was involved in civic clubs and had business associations.”

Research Question 2

When superintendents were asked their perceptions of successful strategies that school districts utilized to successfully pass a school bond referendum, the following themes emerged after an examination of transcribed notes:

1. Build community alliances
2. Solicit experts in the process
3. Strategic communication with the community

Theme 1: Build community alliances. The most salient theme from superintendents interviewed was to build community alliances in the process of the school bond referendum. Community alliances were carried out by communicating the facts of the bond as often as possible. Six of the superintendents interviewed said that meeting with as many groups of people as often as possible was the most important strategy in passing their school bond referendum. The second way that community alliances were built was by enlisting community members to assist in getting the facts of the bond to the voters. Some superintendents called this group of people a political action committee, others called the group a steering committee, and one superintendent called his group a bond committee. Each group, no matter the name, was charged with getting the facts of the school bond to the community. The facts of the bond were communicated through mailers, flyers, newspaper ads, and signs in the community soliciting a favorable vote.

Superintendents interviewed also shared that community alliances were formed when they went to speak to groups about the facts of the school bond. Groups that were mentioned were church groups, ministerial alliances, Rotary clubs, Lions Clubs, and

ladies organizations. Two of the superintendents interviewed mentioned that they would target community pockets and attempt to meet at either their churches or community centers. Meeting with organizations, as well as enlisting the help of community members to assist in getting the facts of the school bond referendum to the voters, created a community alliance.

When superintendents interviewed spoke of building community alliances being a perception of a successful strategy the school district utilized to successfully pass their school bond referendum, transcribed notes showed the following:

- (S1) “Make sure you have a committee that is a wide variety of people in your community.”
- (S1) “Having a good bond committee was key; having the right people, a diverse group, the movers and the shakers helps a lot.”
- (S2) “We had a group of interested parents that formed a pro-active political action committee.”
- (S3) “We enlisted community leaders that we knew would be vocal and negative so we could bring them along in the process.”
- (S2) “I escorted through the school and they did an evaluation of the buildings.”
- (S5) “Really, I think one of the factors that was obvious, because we are such a large geographical district, it was not easy to get the information out because we had voting boxes everywhere. We went to churches, fire stations, community centers, anywhere that we could get an invitation we would go out and I would give a presentation.”

- (S5) “Early on, we had some people who were very influential in the community who just did not know how the process worked. So I invited them to come to my office. They were very intelligent gentlemen. I just laid it out for them; I did not have to water it down for them.”

Theme 2: Solicit experts in the process. Solicit experts’ advice in the process was the second strategy that was mentioned by four superintendents. Advice was solicited from school bond attorneys to make sure the school district was in compliance in what was being published and spoken. Architects were interviewed and hired to produce models of what would be built in the school district if the school bond election was successful. Construction companies to assist with strategies to help pass the bond were brought to the districts. Two school districts hired a construction manager agent to explain what would be built in the community where they passed the bond.

Transcribed notes showed the following when superintendents spoke of soliciting experts in the process being a perception of a successful strategy the school district utilized to successfully pass their school bond referendum.

- (S4) “We brought invest (pseudonym) right away. They started looking at a lot of funding type situations and what it was going to cost our taxpayers. We hired lawyer (pseudonym) as our counsel. We did interview several architects; we presented three to the board and they selected Johnson and Wilson (pseudonym). We did something a little different than everyone else; we brought in a construction management agent. We used builder construction (pseudonym). They came on right away to help us with strategies to help us pass the bond.”

- (S5) ”We brought in a bond attorney to make sure we were in compliance.”
- (S7) “Before we ever decided to go to the community with a bond, we agreed we would bring in a third party to be our set of eyes and ears to track every penny to oversee what was going on with the architect. We also said we would bring in an architect who had experience in building schools. The buildings that were going to stay, we made sure we brought them up to secure standards. We had a project manager that looked at everything we did.”

Theme 3: Strategic communication with the community. Superintendents interviewed stated that they were very specific about the communication that was shared in the community. A tailored emphasis was given to groups who had specific interest. When speaking to community groups that had young children, the emphasis would be on a new elementary school that would be built. One superintendent had subcommittees formed to examine the area of the district that interested them most. An example would be district four who was looking at a new campus and an indoor athletic facility.

Transcribed notes showed the following when superintendents spoke of specific communication with the community being a perception of a successful strategy the school district utilized to successfully pass their school bond referendum.

- (S4) “One of the ladies was a hairdresser who worked on a lot of the ladies’ hair so she was able to talk to them. Another one was a gentleman who owned the feed store in town; the community tended to believe him a lot more than me.”
- (S5) “Early on, we had a facility task force which was made up of school people, business owners, community members, parents, just a wide array of

people that we felt were influential across the county. We invited them to be a part of it; it was probably 50 to 60 people. When we held meetings, there might have been 45 people in attendance and we broke them into groups. We let them tour the campuses with an architect, and he would point out things to them that they would not even realize was an issue. Then this group came together and said, 'Okay, this is what we see the needs are.' A lot of things they were bringing back to us we already knew and there were things they brought to light that we had not thought of or seen."

- (S7) "I called a public open forum and specifically invited people that I knew had voted against the previous bond. So we could discuss why we needed this and where to go and get suggestions."
- (S7) "I sent out about 50 letters to churches in the district inviting their pastors in for a meeting trying to get the pastors to get their churches involved in the schools. While I had them there, I talked to them about where we were headed and why. I knew that they would have influence with their congregations and could answer questions when they were asked."

Research Question 3

When asked how superintendents of school districts that successfully passed a bond referendum perceive they influenced the community will to vote in favor of the bond referendum, the following themes emerged after an examination of transcribed notes:

1. Communication
2. Relationships/alliances

3. Trust/transparency/visibility

Though superintendents interviewed had talked about communication being a factor in successfully passing a school bond referendum, communication was the most salient theme in superintendents' perception of how they influenced the community as well.

Theme 1: Communication. Superintendents interviewed felt that when they communicated the facts of the school bond to the community, it enlightened voters to the needs of the school district. Getting the voters the information of the needs of the district influenced the community without promoting the bond, which is the purpose of the community groups. Superintendent 3 shared, "It is a fine line to walk; because you cannot say to vote for this." Superintendents interviewed, communicated what was going to be built and that got community members excited. In one instance, superintendents used drawings and models of potential building to communicate visually what the school district would receive when the bond passed.

Transcribed notes showed the following when superintendents spoke of communication being how superintendents of school district that successfully passed a bond referendum perceived they influenced community will to vote in favor of the bond referendum; superintendents commented in the following ways:

- (S3) "Obviously the communication is the most important thing. Also being able to show them pictures, not just what the issues are, but what we are planning to build."
- (S4) "I worked hard on getting the information to the community correctly. We never ran from the information; we poured out the information. I would

meet with faculty members throughout the year to get them the correct information, updates; that way when they were out in the community, they were able to give the correct information. My role was mainly to be a communicator."

- (S5) "You have to be careful because as superintendent you can't promote the bond, you have to just give information. Just give the facts. So we were very confident that we gave just the facts. In doing that, it opened up for a lot of questions, a lot of good information would get out then also."
- (S6) "For us, the biggest thing was communicating the concept of what was going on with the finances. Anything that we were able to gain in that one year in a bond issue automatically became Chapter 41 payments. We had one year to maximize the tax payment and to keep the money in the district."
- (S7) "Any opportunity to speak was taken advantage of, whether it was Rotary, Lions Club, public forums, we went where we were invited."
- (S7) "We tried to get out there and talk to everyone, anywhere people invited us to come."

Theme 2: Relationships and alliances. Superintendents interviewed felt that building relationships and community alliances helped influence community will to vote in favor of the bond referendum. Four of the seven superintendents interviewed had worked in the district in a different capacity prior to becoming superintendent, creating a familiarity and trust in them and the community. Three of the superintendents interviewed had served in the district more than five years prior to becoming

superintendent. Familiarity and tenure had led to trust in the administration from the community. Visibility also led to the community establishing trust in the superintendent.

Transcribed notes showed the following when superintendents spoke of trust and alliances being how superintendents of school districts that successfully passed a bond referendum perceived they influenced community will to vote in favor of the bond referendum; superintendents commented in the following ways:

- (S1) "I got to know the parents who helped form an alliance."
- (S1) "I showed up at all the student events [that] helped me form a relationship with many of the parents."
- (S2) "I went to church in the community; He was involved in civic clubs and business associations."
- (S2) "Living and working here earlier in my career helped that I already had a relationship with the community."
- (S2) "I'm a regular at the coffee shop. The majority of them are retired people and retired school employees. I can go in there and just talk and they can fire away and I would fire right back, give them the facts, then we will drink coffee and on my way out I will fill their cups."

Theme 3: Trust/transparency/visibility. Transcribed notes showed the following when superintendents spoke of their perceptions of how they influenced the community will because there was trust in administration. Trust was earned by each through relationships; two of the superintendents felt trust was earned because the district had accomplished what it had advertised in previous bond referendums.

- (S1) "Trust was the biggest factor in winning our bond election."

- (S1) “The folks in the community knew that I loved and cared for the students of the district.”
- (S1) “The mainstream parents got to know me and see the things I was doing and they got on board with the bond.”
- (S2) “The main things that established trust was that I had been in the community.”
- (S2) “Being a former teacher, coach, assistant principal, and athletic director and we had some success which created trust.”
- (S7) “Being truthful with community members created trust.”

Research Question 4

When asked, “What are superintendents’ perceptions of effective processes to engage the community in order to successfully pass a bond referendum,” the following themes emerged after an examination of transcribed notes:

1. Alliance-building
2. Communication/public relations
3. Visibility

Theme 1: Alliance-building. The most salient theme was alliance-building. Six of the seven superintendents interviewed said that the community became engaged through various bond committees. Alliances were formed through these committees which were labeled as political action committee, task force, and bond committee. In district 5, committees were formed around the area of interest that individuals had in the facilities forming a common alliance based on what excited them the most. This strategy kept the committee engaged and excited throughout the process.

Transcribed notes showed the following when superintendents spoke of the perceptions of the alliances being a factor that contributed to the community being engaged in an effort to successfully pass bond referendum, superintendents commented in the following ways:

- (S1) “Having a good bond committee is crucial; having the right people, a diverse committee, the movers and the shakers helps a whole lot.”
- (S2) “Getting the biggest stakeholders involved helped in passing our bond.”
- (S3) “We formed a facilities committee to look at the buildings that needed to be replaced.”
- (S4) “I took the business owners through the school and we did an evaluation of the building.”
- (S4) “I looked for stakeholders in the community that had ties to the school district.”
- (S5) “Getting a task force together was very helpful and keeping them involved all the way through the process.”
- (S5) “We involve our influential community members and their organizations; if they are not on your side, then you don’t have a chance.”

Theme 2: Communication/public relations. Communication of the facts of a bond referendum from administration is a constant theme. The role of the bond committee in the area of communicating the facts of the bond was shared by six of the seven superintendents interviewed. Three of the superintendents interviewed said that after the school bond referendum was called by the school board, that they could no longer speak in favor of the school bond. The superintendent can only speak the facts

after the school board takes the official action of placing the school bond referendum on the ballot. School bond committees cannot only speak the facts, but they can ask voters to vote in favor of the bond. Bond committees took the role of public relations directors for the school district. Bond committees encouraged citizens to become registered voters, let registered voters know when and where to vote, and handled public relations in getting the word to voters and encouraging them to vote in favor of the school bond referendum. Finally, the bond committee can share the facts when rumors were spread that were not factual.

Transcribed notes showed the following when superintendents spoke of the perceptions of communication and public relations being a factor that contributed to the community being engaged in an effort to successfully pass bond referendums. Transcribed notes showed the following:

- (S1) “We sent brochures to the community; we educated voters through brochures.”
- (S1) “Having a good bond committee is crucial; having the right people is key, a diverse committee, the movers and the shakers helped a lot.”
- (S2) “I had a group of people on my political activist committee went out and made sure that those who could vote were registered to vote.”
- (S3) “The most important thing that came out of the communication was we were able to address the rumors that were out there.”
- (S3) “Our committee went out and encouraged people to go and register to vote so they could count on Election Day.”

- (S5) “When enough people have the truth, then you have enough people to combat the false information.”
- (S6) “Make sure you have a committee that is a wide variety of people in your community.”
- (S6) “We used mass mailings to get the word to voters.”
- (S7) “We had a public relations person who would meet with our political action committee.”
- (S7) “We had some real go-getters on our committee and they beat the bushes, they got signs out, they promoted the bond, and put articles in the paper.”

Theme 3: Visibility. Superintendents interviewed perceived that visibility was important in successfully passing a school bond referendum. Visibility was obvious in being seen at opportunities to share the facts of the bond to civic groups and outlying communities. Superintendents perceived that their presence at school activities was also an opportunity to show voters that they cared about more than just the buildings, but they cared about the students in the district.

Transcribed notes showed the following when superintendents spoke of the perceptions of visibility being a factor that contributed to the community being engaged in an effort to successfully pass bond referendums. Transcribed notes showed the following.

- (S1) “The biggest thing for us was me being in front of the people.”
- (S1) “Be visible, be honest, be consistent, and develop the community trust.”

- (S2) “Was a regular at the local coffee shop and the majority of whom he met was retired people and retired school employees.”
- (S3) “Went out every day and every evening for about a month.”
- (S5) “Going out being visible and talking to the civic organizations is the core.”
- (S6) “When you are open enough and approachable enough to where people felt comfortable coming up and talking to you.”
- (S7) “Engaged the community by being visible; go anywhere they will let you speak.”

Research Question 5

When asked the perceived community barriers that superintendents face when attempting to pass a school bond referendum, it was obvious that each community and school district has their own unique history, and that led to a community being positive or negative in their view of a school district. Each superintendent had barriers that he had to overcome in order to be successful in his school bond referendum election. The history of the district dictated the barriers that were in place and had to be overcome. Due to the uniqueness of each community, there were no salient themes as each answer varied from superintendent to superintendent. Each district had its own unique set of barriers reflected below.

Transcribed notes showed the following responses were shared when superintendents were asked about the community barriers that were faced when attempting to pass a school bond referendum:

- (S1) “There were financial barriers that had to be overcome.”

- (S1) “There were also racial barriers which the superintendent said that he did not know how to overcome.”
- (S1) “We overcame these barriers by trying to educate the community on the facts of the bond and keeping everything about the students.”
- (S2) “The barrier that had to be overcome in the community was the ‘perception between the haves and the have nots. “The poor community will benefit the same as the ones who have land and some money.”’
- (S2) “We overcame the barrier by keeping everything about the students and what their needs were.”
- (S3) “Had one influential individual in the community who tried to influence the steering committee to attempt a smaller bond for less money. He owned a lot of land and the tax rate increase would hit him harder than other voters.”
- (S3) “The barrier was overcome when the steering committee sat and negotiated somewhere in the middle between what the influential citizen was suggesting and what the majority of the committee wanted.”
- (S4) “The only barrier that had to be overcome was the negative comments and lies that were posted on social media.”
- (S4) “The barrier was overcome by reposting the negative comments with the truthful facts by members of their political action committee.”
- (S5) “Had a unique community from the other superintendents interviewed. There was a community college that was in the school district. The school district had passed several bonds with no tax increase to property owners due to the taxes from natural gas fields. The laws of a community college and a

school district are not the same with funding. The community college passed a bond on the heels of the school district passing a bond. Property owners saw a rise in their taxes after the community college passed a bond. When the school district attempted a new school bond referendum, the community remembered the increase in taxes from the community college and began questioning the school district about a potential increase."

- (S5) "Overcame the obstacle by offering a greater explanation of the difference in tax laws between a school district and a community college."
- (S5) "We answered more questions that in prior bonds and held more community forums."
- (S6) "When interviewed, shared that once the district passed their first school bond, that there were no community barriers."
- (S7) "The school district attempted their school bond when the economy was weak and that some in the community kept telling administration to just wait until the economy improved."
- (S7) "A second barrier that had to be overcome was that the community did not feel that they had received what they had been promised in the last bond. It was for a new high school and there was a difference in what was proposed and what was built."
- (S7) "The barriers were overcome by explaining the buildings were too bad and the district could not wait." The superintendent shared that the cost to fix the air conditioning alone would be $4 million. S7 continued putting the needs of the school bond in front of the community.

- (S7) “The barrier of the community feeling that they had been lied to about the building of the high school was overcome when the district hired a project manager to show the community that they would get what they were being promised.”

Research Question 6

When asked what additional challenges superintendents reported they faced in the successful passing of a school bond referendum, only two superintendents who were interviewed felt that there were additional challenges faced when passing their school bond referendum.

Superintendent 1’s school district successfully passed a school bond referendum after one had failed less than 90 days previously. In the second attempt to pass a school bond referendum, the administration broke the school bond referendum into separate propositions so voters could be specific about what they favored and what they opposed. One of the items on the original ballot was replacing an elementary school that bore a former superintendents’ name. The former superintendent was hurt by the perception that he would no longer have an elementary school named after him, and he publically opposed the first school bond referendum. The open opposition from the former superintendent influenced community members to oppose the original school bond referendum.

Superintendent 1 addressed the additional challenge by personally visiting the former superintendent and explaining that the new campus would also be named after him and would sit at the bottom of a hill near the retired superintendent’s residence. The former superintendent aligned with the second bond referendum when it became apparent

the new building would continue to bear his name. The former superintendent shared his excitement with the major stakeholders in the community, and the school bond referendum received a positive result.

Superintendent 5 faced an additional challenge as a result of the junior college in the community passing a bond that raised the taxes of the community. Because the school district was property rich, they had successfully passed several school bond referendums with no tax increase to property owners. The voters had approved previous school district bond referendums by 85%. The junior college in the community had successfully passed a $35 million bond for campus improvements by a similar 85% margin. Because colleges have different laws on their bond elections and the payments than school districts, the community saw an increase in their taxes for the junior college bond that they had not expected because they had never experienced an increase with the successful school district bond elections. The community became concerned over the next school bond referendum proposed by the school district due to their taxes being raised with the successful passing of the junior college bond. The community felt that they had been misled.

Superintendent 5 addressed the challenge by leading the school district to wait longer than it had previously before presenting a new school bond referendum for the school district. The superintendent spent a great amount of time visiting with key community members to ask what had led to the confusion in the junior college bond that had affected their tax rate. The conclusion that the superintendent came to was that the leaders of the junior college did not tell the property owners that there would be a tax increase and the voters never asked. Property owners' taxes increased as a result of the

college's bond that led to the school district having to educate the voters on the tax issue. Administration had to show the community that the laws the college worked differently than the school district when it came to tax rates. The school district was successful in passing their last school bond referendum, which was the first one after the junior college had passed their bond election. However, the percentage of voters who favored the school district bond election declined.

Summary of Chapter 4

In summary, results from this study of superintendents' perceptions of strategies that were effective in passing a school bond referendum in districts that were stable and had an enrollment between 1,000 and 3,500 were similar in the way that they influenced their communities. Communicating the facts of the school bond referendum was the most salient theme that was repeated in each interview. It is important for superintendents to communicate the facts of the school bond to community members as often as possible. A bond committee's role is to communicate the facts of the school bond referendum with the community through public relation efforts. Superintendents need to be visible in the community to give the opportunity for the community to see that the superintendent cares for the students of the district, which will establish trust.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Introduction

Passing a school bond referendum in school districts that have mid-sized enrollment and located in an area that is not growing is a great challenge. Superintendents at mid-sized school districts experiencing little or no growth tackled the challenge of passing school bond referendums. The passage of a school bond referendum is no longer considered an easy task (Faltys, 2006). Perceptions of the processes and strategies that superintendents used to pass a school bond referendum have showed examples of communication, trust, and community relations. According to Faltys (2006), passing a school bond referendum can determine the direction for a school district for many years to come. According to Gamkhar and Olson (2004) upkeep of older facilities and the building of new facilities can have an impact on student instruction and perceptions toward the district. The superintendents at districts that have been successful in their attempt to pass school bond referendums have influenced the promotion of education in many ways (Faltys, 2006). The superintendents' perceptions of the processes and strategies that led to a successful bond referendum indicate educational advancement in their districts through facilities that enhanced learning and provided a safe and secure campus.

Discussion of Results

This study examined school district superintendents' perceptions of processes and strategies that were successful in passing a school bond referendum in school districts not growing in student population and had a total enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500. This study

included semi-structured interviews with seven superintendents who had been successful in passing a school bond referendum in their district. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed to better understand the setting and history of each school district and to effectively find consistent themes from superintendents interviewed.

Research Question 1

The first question in this study addressed the perception of the factors that contributed to the successful passing of bond referendums. To answer research question 1, superintendents were asked what factors contributed to the successful passing of the bond referendum. There were three emerging themes:

1. Communication
2. Trust/transparency
3. Relationships

Superintendents interviewed regularly discussed the need for communicating the needs of the school district to voting members of the community. Superintendents communicated the facts of the school bond referendum through community forums, various groups, and organizations to give understanding to the scope of the bond, cost of the work, and implication of property owners' taxes. According to Smith (2014), there are many factors that go into an election, and communication to voters is a key to success. The theme of trust in administration was consistent with research done by Nunnery and Kimbrough (1971) stating that school bond referendums are won or lost on the amount of trust the community has in the superintendent.

Additionally, Fatys (2006) asserted that the credibility of the superintendent can be a side issue that can kill a school bond referendum. Coupled with this, four of the

seven superintendents interviewed stated that trust and transparency were key elements with their successful bond election. Building relationships was a third theme that emerged from interviews. Superintendents felt that relationships with community members established a trust in administration. According to Jackson (2014), administration needs to focus on building an ongoing relationship of trust with stakeholders and voters.

Research Question 2

The second question addressed in this study was, "What are the superintendents' perceptions of successful strategies that school districts utilize to successfully pass school bond referendums?" To answer question 2, superintendents were asked the following question, "Were there specific strategies that the school district utilized that were successful in passing the school bond referendum? If so, what were they? Why do you think they were successful?" Three themes emerged regarding superintendents' perceptions of the strategies that were utilized to successfully pass school bond referendums:

1. Building community alliances
2. Soliciting experts in the process
3. Strategic communication with the community

Building community alliances was accomplished from forming a bond committee and from superintendents speaking at community forums. Bond committees consisted of stakeholders, parents, staff, and other community members. Committee members had various tasks depending on the school district. Some committees evaluated facilities and helped in formulating a strategic bond plan and other committees led strategies to get

information to voters. These findings are consistent with research done by Holt (2009) stating that steering committees will help sell the bond referendum to the community and could be influential to voters who are undecided. Holding community forums was a key strategy and is consistent with Jackson (2014), when he stated to inform voters of the planning and information involved in the election and attempt to clear up any questions.

Four of the superintendents interviewed felt that soliciting experts in the bond process was a key strategy. Superintendents hired architects, bond attorneys, construction companies, and project managers. These strategies were consistent with research done by Holt (2009) stating that finding the best architect for the project can help drive the meeting with the steering committee. Holt (2009) also stated that superintendents of schools need to search for an architect who can assist the district in the process of a school bond referendum.

Strategic communication with the community is consistent with research done by Jackson (2014) stating the need to call voters and knock on their doors in order to make them aware of upcoming elections. Henderson (2014) stated that getting organizations involved in the campaign can be key to voter turnout and success on Election Day. Expanding the net through involving community members is consistent with the research. To win the vote for a school bond referendum, a school district will need to increase the number of voters who are involved in the process (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Getting community members involved in the process will not only spread out the work, but it will also educate voters regarding the needs of a school district (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009).

Research Question 3

The third question in the study was, "How do superintendents of school districts that successfully pass bond referendums perceive they influence the community will to vote in favor of the bond referendum?" To answer research question 3, superintendents were asked, "In thinking about your role as the superintendent during the successful passing of the bond referendum, how do you perceive that you influenced community will to vote in favor of the bond referendum? There were three themes that emerged in the superintendent interviews:

1. Communication
2. Relationships/alliance-building
3. Trust/transparency/visibility

Superintendents cited communication was used to influence community will during the process of their bond election. Six of the seven superintendents interviewed stated that they spoke to community members in public forums repeatedly to state the facts of the bond. This is consistent with research done by Binkovitz (2014) stating that district needs to hold a number of town hall meetings to present the facts of their school bond referendum. Trust, transparency, and visibility was communicated by three superintendents interviewed and is consistent with Abrashoff (2002) stating that the community will follow the example of the superintendent, and they have enormous influence. Abrashoff (2002) goes on to say if the community sees the superintendent not telling the truth about what is in a school bond, then they may feel free to lie as well.

Research Question 4

The fourth question addressed in this study was, "What are superintendents' perceptions of effective processes to engage the community in an effort to successfully pass a bond referendum?" When interviewing superintendents, there were consistent themes throughout the answers. They resoundingly agreed that communication and alliance-building were consistent in their individual bond processes. To answer research question 4, superintendents were asked what processes were found effective in engaging the community in order to successfully pass the bond referendum. If so, what were they? When superintendents reflected on the perceptions of community effective processes to engage the community, three themes emerged:

1. Alliance-building
2. Communication/public relations
3. Visibility

Superintendents' communication on question 4 was consistent with their previous answers. Building alliances within the community to communicate the facts of the bond was a consistent answer for many of the questions answered by superintendents. This finding is consistent with research done by Baumgartner and Jones (2009) stating to win the vote for a school bond referendum, a school district will need to increase the number of voters who are involved in the process. Baumgartner and Jones (2009) went on to say that getting community members involved in the school bond process will not only spread out the work, but it will also educate voters regarding the needs of a school district.

Research Question 5

The fifth question in the study was, "What are the perceived community barriers that superintendents face when attempting to pass a school bond referendum?" To answer research question 5, superintendents were asked the following question: "Were there any community barriers that you faced when attempting to pass a school bond referendum? If so, what were they?"

Each community discussed had its own unique history and personality that led to various responses from superintendents who were interviewed. Each community and school district faced unique barriers that needed to be overcome to be successful in passing a school bond referendum. The community barriers can come from individuals or from groups of people. The uniqueness of each community and school district led to many barriers with none being repeated by other districts.

When community barriers need to be overcome; due to the history of every district, superintendents need to be extremely versatile in the way they deal with the community. Superintendents need to examine and learn the history of the district. An important strategy when passing a school bond referendum is to allow the political action committee to get information to voters including increase in taxes and when and where to vote. Community members need to be involved in the entire school bond referendum process. Involving community members from the beginning of the process will encourage ownership from the community. Depending on the history of the school district, an effective strategy could be to bring in a third party to evaluate every part of a school bond referendum. Bringing in a third party will give unbiased eyes on all crucial areas of the school bond referendum. Many existing barriers can be overcome by

speaking at community forums to give administrators the opportunity to state facts and correct untruthful information.

Research Question 6

The final question in this study was, "What additional challenges do superintendents report they face in the successful passing of a school bond referendum?" Only two superintendents had faced additional challenges when they successfully passed a school bond referendum. Each superintendent faced the additional challenges due to past experiences in the community. Each superintendent handled the challenge through effective and strategic communication with community members and authentic engagement.

Implications for District Leaders

School district leaders should be responsive to the needs of the school district and the desires of the community to encourage support in school bond referendums. It appears that communication and involvement of community members are keys to successfully passing a school bond referendum. School administrators should give every effort to inform community members of a school district of the need for new facilities. Community members also need be informed as to what will be done with proceeds from a successful school bond referendum and what the implications will be for property owners. One important finding that was revealed in this study was the uniqueness that every district brings different challenges and obstacles that have to be overcome. Knowledge of the background of each community allowed superintendents to be sensitive to barriers that had to be overcome. It was obvious that each superintendent understood his role as chief communicator for his school district and how to specifically

influence the will of his community. Based on results from this study, the following recommendations are presented:

1. Communicate the facts of the school bond referendum as often as possible to as many groups of voters as possible.
2. Create community alliances to establish trust and to assist in carrying out political strategies to voters.
3. Visit with influential community members in small groups to discuss the specifics of the school bond and give opportunities for questions and soliciting support.
4. Practice transparency throughout the school bond referendum process.
5. Be visible throughout the school bond process.

Implications for Further Research

The findings of this study can only be examined in the environment in which it was studied. This specific study examined school districts that were not experiencing growth. Urban and growing suburban districts would provide additional case studies to lend them to additional opportunities for further research. The suggestion would be to look at all school districts, whether stable or growing and in varying geographic locations such as urban, suburban or rural. The following are specific recommendations for further research.

1. Additional research might include expanding the sample geographic location of the superintendents interviewed. The majority of districts are located in Central or East Texas. The perceptions of superintendents and the obstacles that were overcome could look different in other regions of Texas or in states

other than Texas. It would be interesting to see if superintendents' perceptions on this topic would be the same in other regions of the state or other states.

2. Additional research might include gathering from larger school districts that have successfully passed a school bond referendum. Though this study involved school districts with an enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500, a study of larger school districts and their attempts to pass a school bond referendum could look different.
3. Additional research might consider including perceptions other than superintendents. It would be interesting to interview additional stakeholders in a district such as members of a political action committee or administrators other than superintendents. This data could be studied comparatively to analyze the difference of perceptions of other stakeholders and school district leadership.
4. Additional research might include how to break racial barriers in voting. Two of the superintendents interviewed elaborated on racial tension and racial barriers in communities that were present in the bond process. Neither superintendent went into detail of how the racial barriers were overcome.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine school district superintendents' perceptions of processes and strategies that were successful in passing a school bond referendum in school districts not experiencing growth in student population with a total student population with a total enrollment of 1,000 to 3,500 students. One significant

finding was the consistency from every superintendent interviewed regarding the need to communicate with all members of the community the components of the school bond referendum. Three consistencies were identified: (a) put together a group of influential community members and ask them to communicate the facts of the school bond referendum, (b) hold as many community forums as possible, and (c) form a political action committee to effectively use various tools to inform the community of facts of the bond.

Each superintendent interviewed communicated that the most important strategy used in passing a school bond referendum was communication. The answers to each question, though they varied in content, would directly or eventually turn to the importance of communicating with voters. Communicating the facts of the school bond referendum was handled through individual meetings with influential community members, community forums, organizations, civic groups, and churches.

Though the superintendent served as the chief communicator for the district, enlisting as many people as possible to help communicate the facts of the school bond referendum is crucial. Utilizing as many people as possible to communicate the body of facility improvements through renovations or building new buildings, how voters' tax rate will be affected, to when and where to vote, helps a community feel informed. Communication remained the single key to success.

Superintendents who successfully pass school bond referendums in stable school districts, face many challenges in leading a community through a time-consuming process. Communication is the key factor indicated that not only was effective in passing a school bond referendum, but passing a school bond referendum after a previously failed

attempt. Successful school bond referendum cannot exist without communication to voters and community members. The superintendents interviewed in this study indicate that the success of their school bond referendum was driven by communicating the facts of the needs of their district.

In the final analysis, communication and involving as many people as possible to communicate with voters were perceived to have led to a successful school bond referendum. Superintendents who had successfully led school districts through the school bond referendum process had established a trust from the community and were perceived to be effective leaders. When conducting the interviews and reading transcribed notes, it became apparent that the superintendents leadership was perceived to have made the difference in passing their bonds. In many cases, the superintendent would deflect much of the success to those who had done much of the legwork for the bond; however, it was apparent that each superintendent perceived he had influenced his community for the further advancement of the school district.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

June 10, 2015

Jerry Gibson
c/o Robin McGlohn
Dean, Education

Dear Jerry Gibson,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "An Examination of School District Superintendents' perception of processes and strategies that are successful in passing a school bond referendum in school districts not experiencing growth in student population with a total enrollment of one-thousand to thirty-five hundred students" was conducted on May 6, 2015.

At that time, your request for exemption under **Category 2** was approved pending modification of your proposed procedures/documents.

The changes you have made adequately respond to the identified contingencies. As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review. * Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and further approval. Please contact me to ascertain the appropriate mechanism.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,

Kirstin Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **June 9, 2020**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 15405-EX

316 E. Cullen Building Houston, TX 77204-2015 (713) 743-9204 Fax: (713) 743-9577

Appendix B

Interview Instrument Questions

Interview Instrument Questions

1. How long have you been a superintendent? How long have you been a superintendent in this district? (descriptive question to describe participant)

2. Please take a few minutes to describe your district. (descriptive question to describe setting)

3. How long had you been superintendent in this district before the bond referendum election? (descriptive question to describe participant)

4. Have you had prior experiences as superintendent in this district or another in attempting to pass a bond referendum? (descriptive question to describe participant)

5. From your experience as a superintendent who successfully passed a bond referendum, what factors do you think contributed to the successful passing of the bond referendum? (Research Question 1)

6. Were there specific strategies that the school district utilized that were successful in passing the school bond referendum? If so, what were they? Why do you think they successful? (Research Question 2)

7. In thinking about your role as the superintendent during the successful passing of the bond referendum, how do you perceive that you influenced the community's will to vote in favor of the bond referendum? (Research Question 3)

8. Were there any processes that you found were effective in engaging the community in order to successfully pass the bond referendum? If so, what were they? (Research Question 4)

9. What made these processes so effective in engaging the community? (Research Question 4)

10. Did these processes work for engaging all community stakeholders or were there specific ones that worked better with engaging certain groups? Explain. (Research Question 4)

11. Were there any community barriers that you faced when attempting to pass a school bond referendum? If so, what were they? (Research Question 5)

12. How did you overcome these barriers? (Research Question 5)

13. What additional challenges were faced in successfully passing a school bond referendum? (Research Question 6)

14. How were these challenges addressed? (Research Question 6)

15. What advice would you give to another superintendent of a stable mid-sized school district who is considering passing a bond referendum?

Following Interview questions, two questions will be asked to assist in describing the setting,

1. How much time had passed since previous bond attempt?
2. How many dollars were requested in this bond election?

Appendix C

Transcripts of Participants

Interview #1

Interviewer: How long have you been a superintendent? How long have you been the superintendent in this district?

Interviewee: I was named interim in April of 2003 and was finalized in June- July 2003, so a little over 2 years.

Interviewer: So you had time to let them trust you.

Interviewee: Being the High School principal probably gave me more trust than anything.

Interviewer: They already knew you in the community.

Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: Please take a few minutes to describe your district

Interviewee: We were pretty much a rural district; there was a nice little town center, we covered a little over 360 square miles. Kids came from all over the place. We were about 65% to 68% free and reduced lunch. We were about 23% below poverty level. We were pretty much a 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 on ethnicity, probably pushing 40% Hispanic, 38 or 39% Caucasian and about 25% African-American and then kind of a mix there, a pretty diverse community.

Interviewer: How long had you been superintendent in this district before the bond referendum election?

Interviewee: It was just a little over 2 years. Willis Mackie, had laid a lot of the ground work as far as doing the facility reviews, had community hearings on what we needed to do and brought in Omar Garcia, a finance guy who talked to the decision makers in the community.

Interviewer: So you pretty much took it and ran with it.

Interviewee: Yes Sir

Interviewer: That was your first superintendent job, so you didn't have any prior experience in that district or any other; none as a principal on passing a bond? So pretty much you did it cold turkey.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: From your experience as a superintendent who successfully passed a bond referendum, what factors do you think contributed to the successful passing of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: I feel like research will bore it out, trust was the biggest one. I was at a unique place & time. I came in from a disciplinary alterative campus; I got to know those parents. The families of the kids who weren't having a good experience knew that I was going to care about their kids. My last semester there we developed an alternative track to diploma. We had our first alterative graduation ceremony the fall before I was introduced as the new superintendent. We had about 7 or 8 kids that graduated and I thought we will just hold it in a class room. We had standing room only for this graduation. These parents were proud of their children. I love Willis Mackie's quote, "Who are we to deprive a child's God given right to earn a diploma and go to work at Wal-Mart." The folks who didn't really like the structure of the schools knew that I loved the kids and cared for their kids. Then when I showed up over at the high school no one knew me, only the kids I had before over in alternative knew who I was. After a couple of years there, we brought structure, high goals and discipline to the campuses. We hired some good teachers; the athletic department was doing great. So the mainstream parents got to know me and see the things I was doing and they got on board. Then in the spring, I ended up being the

assistant superintendent of curriculum & instruction, over maintenance and was still the high school principal, because Dr. Mackie had gone through and pretty much cleaned house, because of that, I got to wear a lot of hats that spring. At graduation I introduced myself as the superintendent, high school principal, and business financial director. Because of that, I got to know a little bit of everybody, they knew I was there for the long haul. Trust was one of the biggest factures here. Dr. Mackie said "I'm setting the table for you." I think we could have still got it done but as you know there is a certain way you go about earning their trust. You go to the rotary club meetings; you take the banker to lunch going to church in the community. Interviewee: Showing you care.

Interviewer: Showing up to all their activities.

Interviewee: Absolutely; showing your support to the kids of the schools.

Interviewee: I have a very supportive wife and we go to everything.

Interviewer: Were there specific strategies that the school district utilized that were successful in passing the school bond referendum?

Interviewee: That's an interesting question. The first one that failed was a single propose and at the time the research that I did; said to have one proposition, now I am hearing to have a split proposition may be a better way. People want a lot of detail. Between September & December when we did the bond again, splitting it and having the newspaper editors come out and write an article and say it's time for a new football stadium. I had employees saying we don't need a bond to get new facilities; for those kids to tear up, those parents knew what I stood for, knew that wasn't me. We had to terminate a few people along the way. The biggest thing was being out; getting out in

front of people. We held about 20 to 30 meetings. Having a good bond committee; having the right people, a diverse committee, the movers and the shakers helps a whole lot.

We had a couple of guys in town that had moved their kids to other schools. These men were respected in the town. What we did with those people, was I had to go and talk with them, set down and convince them to not fight it. It had to be me; they want to hear from you not your CFO.

Interviewee: I brought my CFO along just in case if I could turn to him if I got stumped on a financial question.

Interviewer: Were there any processes that you found were effective in engaging the community in order to successfully pass the bond referendum? If so, what were they?

Interviewee: We used the bond committee as a study group. Selecting the right people for your committee is the key.

Interviewer: Were there any processes that you found were effective in engaging the community in order to successfully pass the bond referendum?

Interviewee: We did surveys (brochures), we educated through surveys (brochures). What I have learned is that when people show up to vote, they are educated. Our survey questions were very detailed, but it was our way of educating them. Have handouts, flyers. Being out there, talking, holding meetings. You have to be open. Know your facts, because if you say something one time you have to say it again. I basically told my wife & kids I will see you in 90 days. It's something that you have to do, we had about 65 presentations. You have to know your facts.

Interviewer: Did these processes work for engaging all community stakeholders or were there specific ones that worked better with engaging certain groups?

Interviewee: It didn't help with confirmed No votes. Just being in front them and not getting your feelings hurt, it is something that has to be done. Give them the facts and be honest and up front.

Interviewer: Were there any community barriers that you faced when attempting to pass a school bond referendum?

Interviewee: I would say it was financial barriers; they didn't want to take on the financial burden, and racial barriers. On the racial barriers I don't know how you overcome that. You have to talk to them and let them know they need to vote. Historical you don't vote, you have to get out and vote to get this done. Once again you have to educate them. My secretary did a fabulous job of contacting people. It takes a lot of time and effort to reach these people.

Interviewer: How did you overcome these barriers?

Interviewee: You have to get out and educate them. You need to let them know historically you don't vote. You have to be careful on how you do this but you need to let them know. Interviewer: So educate.

Interviewee: My secretary was amazing she spent a lot of time on the phone. You have to be careful though how you do this. You have to choose your words very carefully.

Interviewer: What additional challenges were faced in successfully passing a school bond referendum?

Interviewee: I would say influencing your movers and shakers, and financial.

Interviewer: What advice would you give to another superintendent of a stable mid-sized school district who is considering passing a bond referendum?

Interviewee: Be visible, be honest, be consistent, and develop their trust. Let people know your here. You need to have a relationship with the movers and shakers. You have to be careful to not shoot the messenger.

Interviewer: How much time had passed since the previous bond attempt?

Interviewee: It was 90 days in between the failed bond election to putting it up again.

Interviewer: How many dollars were requested in this bond?

Interviewee: The bond was for 25 million.

Interview #2

Interviewer: How long have you been a superintendent? How long have you been the superintendent in this district?

Interviewee: This will complete my 7th year.

Interviewer: This is your first Superintendent Job.

Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: So you have a total of 7 years as a Superintendent.

Interviewee: Yes Sir.

Interviewer: Please take a few minutes to describe your district

Interviewee: We are a saw mill town, very diverse, 53% Hispanic, 16% Africa-American, the rest white, a hard working community. We don't have a whole lot of businesses in this town because we are so close to Lufkin. A lot of things around here revolve around the saw mill. There are a lot of 3rd and 4th generation families here; we have people here from all walks of life.

Interviewer: How long had you been superintendent in this district before the bond referendum election?

Interviewee: One year.

Interviewer: Have you had prior experience as a superintendent in this district or another in attempting to pass a bond referendum?

Interviewee: Yes, but I was not the Superintendent, I was the Athletic Director in Anahuac, when they attempted to pass a bond.

Interviewer: From your experience as a superintendent who successfully passed a bond referendum, what factor do you think contributed to the successful passing of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: I would start with a clear focus and communication on what you want the bond to accomplish. We knew we needed a new elementary school building here. There had been an old elementary here right next to the saw mill. There had been discussion over a new elementary building for the last 17 to 18 years. So Because of that, it was easy for me to go out and start talking to the community about that one item. When I was interviewed I discussed the fact that we needed facility work in the district. I had worked in this district in other areas. So I felt like people in this community trusted me being a former coach, administrator, teacher, bus diver you name it for the district. I feel like the community trusted that I would bring them the facts about what we needed and work with them. I feel like the # 1 thing was communication; then putting a plan together. Put together a group of people, not all supporters but people that would get the facts out to people. It took about a year to get everything together to present the bond.

Interviewer: Were there specific strategies that the school district utilized that were successful in passing the school bond referendum?

Interviewee: I had a group of people on my political activist committee who went out and made sure those who could vote were register to vote, found those that were not registered and would encourage them to go register so they could vote. We had a calculator on our website that showed you how much it cost. Everyone is going to ask you how much it is going to cost me. Let’s be honest, everyone wants to know what it is going to cost them. So, I used that strategy in two different ways. Here is what it is going

to cost and here is what it is going to cost if we don't. If we keep using our M&O money to build these things then what programs are we going to have to cut? I also talked about how much money was going to be left sitting in Austin on IFA and EDA money because we would qualify for it after the first year.

Interviewer: In thinking about you role as the superintendent during the successful passing of the bong referendum, how do you perceive that you influenced the community's will to vote in favor of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: I think one of the things is because I had been in the community; I am involved in the community. I go to church in the community; I'm involved in the civic clubs, business associations. I was a former teacher, coach, assistant principal, athletic director, we had success and there was some trust. I had not lied to them; I had followed through with what I told the community. They were going to give me a chance to do it. There was a chance it was going to fail because we are in a rural community. Now when you talk about people's money, it changes everything; they will flock to your meetings. One of the things you face in a rural community is that people own a lot of land. They don't care about the appraised value until it goes up. Their comment to you is" I don't care the appraised value because I'm not selling it." When they would get up upset, I would say ok I will buy it from you for what it's appraised for and they would say well no it's worth way more than that. I would have those kinds of conversations and we would laugh about it. I'm a regular at the local coffee shop. The majority of them are retired people and retired school employees. I can go in there and just talk, they can fire away and I would fire right back, give them the facts, then we will drink coffee and on my way out I will fill their cups. There was trust there. I feel like that had a lot of

influence because I had a been here for 7 years left for 6 years and came back as the AD for 2 years and told them this was it, this is my last stop.

Interviewer: There is a lot of trust here; to be honest with you.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Were there any processes that you found were effective in engaging the community in order to successfully pass the bond referendum? If so, what were they?

Interviewee: The first community wide meeting probably had about 150 people there. What I did was have the facts about local tax rates; I used it as an education that night. Tried to play offense, here is what we can do, what do you think. I had my administrative staff there with 3x 5 cards. I did not give anyone the mic, I told them if they had a question or concern write it down or tell one of my administrators and they would write it down for you. We're not going to put your name on it. I will put it on the website; question with the facts as we knew them. I thought that really set the tone, I said ok we are going to have another meeting for those who didn't get all the answers they wanted, at that meeting there was about 130. At the next meeting we only had about 5 people there, which upset me. I thought to myself, well I really messed this deal up. The ones that were there said we came because we like what we are hearing; I said well where everyone else, they said you don't have to worry about them you have answered all their questions. Then if I heard anything around town I would immediately send it out to my board and administrators to my principals; In order to get the facts, not opinions but the facts. I would then put it together the figures and things together and put it out there. I think that helped a whole lot.

Interviewer: What made these processes so effective in engaging the community?

Interviewee: Using the facts and the truth; when a district needs facilities and people quote, have been giving it lip service for a number of years. I came in 1992; it had been 17, 18 or 19 years saying that they wanted new facilities. When we started putting the bond together and showing we were going to build a multi-tier elementary building, trying to keep our cost down. There was a group that said why you don't just build a new high school. It is one of our newer buildings which were 21 years old. We had just done some work on our Junior-High school and some other buildings but we didn't need to keep adding onto our buildings that were 50 years old. For us to compete with the other school districts in our areas for more students we need new facilities. We can't compete with others around us. If our facilities were something that people would say "Wow they care" and I use the term by this vote our people will tell us they value education. We value it enough to say it is time to get some new facilities.

Interviewer: Did these processes work for engaging all community stakeholders or were there specific ones that worked better with engaging certain groups?

Interviewee: I would say yes, at first when the board and I discussed it, I didn't have full board support. There were concerns. I took the top ten taxpayers in the district and I would go to them individually and talk to them. I went in and acknowledge they get one vote. At first I met with some resistance. My main fight, was so you want me to vote to continue to add on to these old buildings instead of building new schools and oh by the way I need some more land. That would open up the door then we would begin to negotiate on some land that was out of town. I was negotiating on the land the whole time, knowing that if I got the land they would support the bond. Getting the biggest stakeholders involved helped. I explained to them IDA IFA. I said ok here is what is

going to happen; I would show them their first year tax rate. I told them as long as I was the superintendent their tax rate would go down after the first year and it did. After the bond passed we also passed a TRE. There is going to be 20% that vote no because it has the word TAX on it, there is going to be 20% that vote yes because they are for kids, there is going to be 60% in the middle and with them you better make sure you get your facts straight. 31 % of them will vote yes, if you do that nobody is going to remember if you won by 1 or lost by 1.

Interviewer: Were there any community barriers that you faced when attempting to pass a school bond referendum?

Interviewee: Sometimes in a community like us there is a barrier between the haves and have not's. Because you are a poor community, it's going to benefit them the most because the ones with the land are the ones who are going to be paying for it. The 27% are going to paying more than your 73%.

Interviewer: OK so how did you get around that issue?

Interviewee: By making it about kids. In one meeting I went to them and said ok if we don't pass this we will become a 1A district. If we don't have the facilities or the programs, then people are going to leave, take their kids to other districts who offer more. One of the turning points before the election was at the coffee shop. One of the toughest opponents came up to me outside the coffee shop and said I support you.

Interviewer: How did you overcome these barriers?

Interviewee: We first started out in the community asking questions to see how they feel about it and what they think their needs are. When you are in the planning stages for your bond, if you can incorporate some of those things in your plan; you will have support.

Then visit with your board on the information you are getting. Make sure you communicate how the funding goes. Their always going to say we are going to burden our students with this expense for years. They would say, "Well, it was good enough for me", I would just say "well then I can't get new people to come." For our community to thrive we are going to have to provided something that the other communities are not providing. We needed to provide state of the art facilities.

Interviewer: What additional challenges were faced in successfully passing a school bond referendum?

Interviewee: Nearly 20 years between bonds.

Interviewer: How much time had passed since previous bond attempts?

Interviewee: 20 years

Interviewer: How many dollars were requested in this bond election?

Interviewee: We requested 22.5 million. 6.1million of that was QZAB because we qualified for that. Understand that was interest free and we would pay that back in 15 years. So we really sold two sets of bonds.

Interview #3

Interviewer: How long have you been a superintendent?

Interviewee: I have been a superintendent for 10 years.

Interviewer: How long have you been a superintendent in this district?

Interviewee: 10 years

Interviewer: Please take a few minutes to describe your district

Interviewee: We are a bedroom community for people who work in the Beaumont/Port Arthur area. There is no industry out here just house tops. We have 2200 kids; we have 4 campuses, 2 elementary, 1 middle school and 1 High School. We are 85% Anglo, 12% African American and 2 or 3% Hispanic and our sub populations are growing smaller. We are getting a lot of move out from the west end of Beaumont, which is the white area of Beaumont. Those people are moving out because of the problems in Beaumont. It is a changing demographic. Our demographic changes are different from the demographics in the state.

Interviewer: How long had you been superintendent in this district before the bond referendum election?

Interviewee: I was superintendent in this district for 2 years. I started in 2005 and we passed the bond in 2007. I had been in the district since 1998. I had been CFO since 1998, I knew the community and the board and I knew there were facility issues. I didn't have to start fresh. Interviewer: Growing up here you knew it even deeper.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: Have you had prior experience as a superintendent in this district or another in attempting to pass a bond referendum?

Interviewee: I didn't have any prior experience with bond elections. Prior to 2007 we hadn't tried to pass a bond. I believe somewhere around 1989 was the last bond. We had some really obvious facility issues at two of the campuses, so it was pretty much an easy sell. Now on the need, we had to work a little harder on the tax issues since we were going to need to work on two campuses.

Interviewer: From your experience as a superintendent who successfully passed a bond referendum, what factor do you think contributed to the successful passing of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: We did a really good job at letting our community know the issues we had on the two campuses that we needed to replace. We held 4 community meetings at those two campuses. We took our community leaders around and showed them the issues, and they were very obvious. When everything was rusty and leaking it was pretty easy for them to see this is an issue and needs to be taken care of. We also went out and spoke. As I quoted "when there are 2 or more gathered in my name" I will be present to speak. I spoke to little old ladies groups, the lions club, to the chamber of commerce, when we went out for our presentations we showed them everything that we showed on the campus tours. We also talked to them about how to vote, when to vote. We told what the tax implications were. At that time, was when the state was doing the property tax compression. So we went from 1.50 tax rate to a 1.00 tax rate. We passed a bond election and still saved people tax money. It was an easy sell because of that. We had a lot of community pride at the time. We had won a state champion that year, and we won it in March, then voted on the bond in May. We held a state championship parade the weekend before, so it was good timing, luck of the draw. There was sound practice

behind it too. Interviewer: Our attorney said we needed to do it in November. You always have a good football team, so hold a vote in November around the time of the playoffs. That was the plan at one time but it didn't happen.

Interviewer: Were there specific strategies that the school district utilized that were successful in passing the school bond referendum?

Interviewee: We did some of the branch voting, it was a May election. We had branch voting at a band concert, Sports banquet, and a third one is not coming to mind right now.

Interviewee: We had a group of interested parents that formed a pro-active pack. They went out and solicited funds. They got us yard signs, and put out flyers and such before the bond election. We couldn't do that all we could do was the information stuff; the pack is one who could do the promotional things. We had formed a group running up to the announcement that we were going to have a bond election for about a year prior to the election of community leaders and the folks that we knew that would be vocal and negative; because that is who they are, so we could bring them along in process. That way at least when they were snapping at us they were snapping at us with the right information. We had a good architect that partnered with us, that was PBK; they did a good job of helping us through that process.

Interviewer: In thinking about your role as the superintendent during the successful passing of the bong referendum, how do you perceive that you influenced the community's will to vote in favor of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: It is a fine line to walk there, because you cannot go out there and say vote for this. You could go out and encourage people to go and registrar so they could vote. We even did that with high school seniors. With the vote being in May you had kids on

campus that were 18 years old who could vote. Like I said, I was out every day, every evening for about a month, it got to be really old but I would just talk about the bond all the time. When I was in the hardware store if someone would say hey what is going on. I would say, “Well, we have a bond election going on.” So to anybody that would listen.

Interviewer: So basically you put out the facts.

Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: To where it became a no brainer.

Interviewee: Right

Interviewer: Were there any processes that you found were effective in engaging the community in order to successfully pass the bond referendum? If so, what were they?

Interviewee: Obviously the communication is the most important thing. Also being able to show them pictures, not just what the issues are but what we are planning to build. In our community there are three different towns and three or four other non-incorporated communities. Everyone comes to the high school for its identity, its community. So showing them what we were going to build, to get them excited about what we were going to build was a good thing.

Interviewer: What made these processes so effective in engaging the community?

Interviewee: I think the most important thing that came out of the communication deal was we were able to address the rumors that were out there. The first time everyone had all the facts, the second time there were so many rumors and miss-communication. Everyone had the facts. The second time around we didn’t pass a bond because of all the miss-communication. You know social media, the rumors. Facebook is the worst. You know if it is on Facebook it has to be true.

Interviewer: Did these processes work for engaging all community stakeholders or were there specific ones that worked better with engaging certain groups?

Interviewee: I think for the most part it worked for all the groups. There was one group; one community that was hard to get a hold of, there was not a meeting place; not a church or anything to hold a meeting. It was a community that was on the far edge of the community so it was hard to get them to come to a meeting. They didn't vote, they just were not active.

Interviewer: Were there any community barriers that you faced when attempting to pass a school bond referendum?

Interviewee: There was one community barrier. We had one very influential person in the community and he was on our facilities committee. He really overly influenced that committee, he said "hey we should really only go out for this amount of money." He owned a lot of land so he was trading the tax money at that time. If he had not been as influential in that area we would probably gone for more. Instead of the $37 million we would have gone for $40 million and had the extra for all the bells and whistles. It wasn't negative it was just conservative.

Interviewer: So how did you overcome it?

Interviewee: Through negotiations, we would settle somewhere in the middle to bring him along.

Interviewer: What challenges were there?

Interviewee: You know there really weren't any. We passed the bond around 70-30. We had overwhelming support.

Interviewer: What advice would you give to another superintendent of a stable mid-sized school district who is considering passing a bond referendum?

Interviewee: The game has changed since I passed a bond. The onset of the tea party for one thing. I think figuring out where your community is political is a very important issue. You need to get to know your community as a whole; not just the people who are going to vote. You have to figure out who your voters are, which they are leaning. Some people vote every election; you need to get to know what their preferences are. What are going to be their hang ups. You need to address those up front. I think you have got to have some community impute, because ultimately this is their school district, their community, their debt that they are taking on. You have to know what you are talking about. You can't get out in front of people and get stumped by a question. I've seen that happen in some district around me and that tore up some of their bonds. You have to listen to some of the things that the community doesn't want. I've seen in one districts bond, the community was for a new school but didn't like the property that the school was going to be built on and because of that the bond didn't pass. I've seen a community that was really big in CTE and the new high school did not include a new Ag shop, so the whole thing went down. You really need to listen to what the community wants and doesn't want and address those things.

Interviewer: How much time had passed since previous bond attempt?

Interviewee: I think the previous major bond was in 1996, and then in 2000 they passed a 2 million dollar bond for a new field house. Then in 2005 we passed a major bond to replace 2 campuses. So from 1961 to 2005 was the gap between major bonds. We had 2

small bonds, one in ’96 and one in 2005. Interviewer: So there was 41 years between major bonds. Interviewee: Yes

Interviewer: How many dollars were requested in this bond election?

Interviewee: It was 37.5 million.

Interview #4

Interviewer: How long have you been a superintendent? How long have you been a superintendent in this district?

Interviewee: I had been a superintendent for 2 years and both years have been here.

Interviewer: Please take a few minutes to describe your district.

Interviewee: It's a 2A district; we have approximately 215 Junior & Senior students and about 1070 from Pre-K all the way up through 12. We are about 48% low social economic, title one funding at the elementary school for some reason at the high school we don't have that, I think that comes people not turning their lunch forms. We compete fairly well in multiple sports; we had the opportunity to stay down in 2A. We stayed down by 4 individuals. As far as participating in extra-curriculum activities it helped us a lot.

Interviewer: It's a rural setting?

Interviewee: Yes, it is a rural setting.

Interviewer: How long had you been superintendent in this district before the bond referendum election?

Interviewee: I took over on July 1 and in the June board meeting the question was asked;" when should we look at a bond issue"? The outgoing superintendent was sitting there and said I think you should do one now. In the July board meeting, this was my first board meeting. The board decided that they wanted me to start doing research on a bond. I believe it was about November that they decided we were going to go ahead and push this through in May. So from there it was hands on. That was my first year.

Interviewer: They already knew you.

Interviewee: Yes, I coach here previously and was an elementary principal.

Interviewer: Have you had prior experiences as superintendent in this district or another in attempting to pass a bond referendum?

Interviewee: I had not had any experience in doing a bond. I came in 1998 and the last bond they did was in 1989.

Interviewer: From your experience as a superintendent who successful passed a bond referendum, what factors do you think contributed to the successful passing of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: Honestly this community really wanted the bond. If the former superintendent had done the bond I think they would have had the same results. There has been such a need for a new elementary school. The community was already on board. Something else we did was be transparent. We talked about the tax increase from day one. We kept them informed; we would put things in the paper. I think the transparency helped with the whole thing.

Interviewer: Were there specific strategies that the school district utilized that were successful in passing the school bond referendum? If so, what were they? Why do you think they were successful?

Interviewee: We brought government capital in right away. They started looking at a lot of funding type situations and what it was going to cost our taxpayers. We hired Powell Leon as our counsel. We did interview several architects, we presented 3 to the board and they selected Goodwin Lasseter. We did something a little different than everyone else; we brought in a construction management agent. We used Gallagher Construction. They came on right away to help us with strategies to help us pass the bond. We did things

such as handouts and brochures. We held public forums, newspaper articles, any way we could reach the people. One of the biggest things was hiring the construction management agent; a lot of people didn't like it because it cost the district money. But they were able to look at the drawing of the plans and make suggestions, which was great.

Interviewer: In thinking about your role as the superintendent during the successful passing of the bond referendum, how do you perceive that you influenced the community's will to vote in favor of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: I worked on getting the information out there correctly. We never ran from the information, we poured out the information. I would meet with faculty members throughout the year to get them the correct information, updates, that way when they are out in the community they were able to give the correct information. My role was mainly to be a communicator.

Interviewer: Were there any processes that you found were effective in engaging the community in order to successfully pass the bond referendum? If so, what were they?

Interviewee: Not really, you know as I first told you, the community was ready. They felt like it was going to pass. When we held our public forums, the people who I knew supported the bond did not show up. We mainly had the opposition and they made you feel like it wasn't going to pass.

Interviewer: What made these processes so effective in engaging the community?

Interviewee: It goes back to the factor the community knew you could only fix so many things. We kept talking to them about your pouring money into a bad building. The community realized we were putting money into a bad situation.

Interviewer: Did these processes work for engaging all community stakeholders or were there specific ones that worked better with engaging certain groups?

Interviewee: We had a community group that we formed. Some of the people were small business owners, some parents from the high school, and some parents from the elementary. One of the first things we did was do a facility study of the elementary and the high school. I took the business owners through the school and we did an evaluation of the buildings. I think that helped. One of the ladies was a hairdresser who worked on a lot of the ladies hair so she was able to talk to them. Another one was a gentleman who owned the feed store in town they tend to believe him a lot more than me. We looked for stakeholders in the community that had ties. The other thing that helped me was if you looked at my school board at the time, my board president owned the grocery store at the time, one of my school board members is the largest tax payer in the district, I had the pastor on the board from the cowboy church, and a highway patrolman. There was a lot of community trust with the makeup of my school board.

Interviewer: Were there any community barriers that you faced when attempting to pass a school bond referendum? If so, what were they?

Interviewee: No, not really. You know social media puts a lot of negative stuff out there. I had some of the community members go back and re-post after they had said lies on the forums.

Interviewer: How did you overcome these barriers?

Interviewee: We had people re-post the truth. Another thing I did post a newspaper article that said if you have any question please come to the office. Some people would write letters and I would write back and let them know when the next meeting was, I also

addressed their concerns. The biggest challenge we had was what it was going to do to the tax rate. We knew what the increase was going to be, we weren't real comfortable with that, we thought it was a little high but we didn't want to go in with it smaller with the cost of construction.

Interviewer: How did you overcome that?

Interviewee: I went back and told my board at one time, I thought it was high. I'm going to tell you I rented a place here for years and if I was renting here right now I wouldn't try to push this through. It is real easy for a tax payer to say you're renting a house, you're increasing our taxes by this much but you're sitting there in a rent house. We built a house so I felt a little more comfortable. Being upfront and honest with them helped. We had break down charts to show the impact of the tax increase. We did power points to show at different meetings we held. I don't think anyone wanted a tax increase, I would start meetings that way, but in order to get the new facilities there has to be a tax increase.

Interviewer: What additional challenges were faced in successfully passing a school bond referendum?

Interviewee: The first thing you need to do is conduct a facility study. Have a long range plan. We never had one. When the community can see there is a plan they are more apt to jump in. What they don't like to see is you just putting things on that bond. We have a lot needs in the district; we have even more wants in the district. When you look at the way we did our bond; we were able to look at our facility master plan and go from there. We looked at the elementary school first and then attacked the facility master plan for the high school. Even though the coaches want new facilities, we stayed away from athletics; I think the only thing we did for athletics was washer and dryers. We stayed away from

the wants, I think if you are a superintendent trying to pass a bond, you will want to stay away from the wants. If you are going to do a want give them voters some options; Item A: new elementary school, Item B: AstroTurf for the football field; give them something to vote no on. You have given them something they feel like they had a hand in, they feel better when they walk out of the voting place.

Interviewer: How many years had passed since a previous bond?

Interviewee: 24 years

Interviewer: How much money was the bond proposal for?

Interviewee: 17 million

Interview #5

Interviewer: How long have you been a superintendent? How long have you been a superintendent in this district?

Interviewee: This is my 14th year as a superintendent and this is my 8th year as a superintendent in this district and my 38th year in education.

Interviewer: Please take a few minutes to describe your district.

Interviewee: We are a mid-size school, we have high wealth. Houston ISD is 305 square miles geographically; geographically we are 620 square miles. Our district runs all the way to the Louisiana boarder, down to the headquarters of Toledo Bend. We are large in minerals, 70% of are values come from minerals, 95% of those minerals are natural gas. We set on the largest natural gas reserves in the world. We have 3 shales; one of which we discovered that has not been tapped into very much. Our values are 1.1 million dollars per student. So financially we have been in pretty good shape. However, because of recent changes in the law, has made it a little bite more difficult. Like everyone else, we lost funding several years ago. Where a lot of the chapter 42 schools funding was restored ours was not. It was partially restored then it was not. Our revenue has been pretty flat. You know cost of living continues to go up but our revenue has been pretty flat.

Interviewer: I learned something already, coming from the Beaumont area over to East Texas I didn't realize the square mileage was so large.

Interviewee: Yes, geographically we are a very large school district. We have 2 small districts in our county but we are the main district.

Interviewer: So the other 2 are Gary and part of Elysian Fields.

Interviewee: That's correct.

Interviewer: How long had you been superintendent in this district before the bond referendum election?

Interviewee: The first bond election I had only been superintendent for about 8 months. I came in June and our first election was in November, so maybe 6 months.

Interviewer: So the process was already started?

Interviewee: No

Interviewer: So you started the bond process.

Interviewee: Yes. It was a smaller bond; it was a maintenance bond along with some other small things. They had already started laying it out, such as 5 million for HVAC and some renovations at the high school. They had already built a football stadium but the bond for it was not sufficient enough to cover the cost. So we recouped some of our general fund revenue with that bond. We needed to purchase buses and some other things, so it was about a 10 million dollar bond. The second bond was for 22 million dollars. This bond took place a year and a half later. That's when we built a new elementary school. We had one that was 60 years old; it was built in the old hotel style; where all the doors opened to the outside. It was a safety night mare. There was no way to renovate this building. Our Jr-Hi was built in 1950, it was a little older but it was built like Fort Knox. We've done renovations to it. A lot of these bonds are small; they had a lot of small things in them, like the tennis courts, and parking lots and things like that. The largest ticket item was the elementary school. It was 101 thousand square feet. The cost for the elementary building was at 15 million dollars.

Interviewer: Have you had prior experiences as superintendent in this district or another in attempting to pass a bond referendum?

Interviewee: Yes, I had attempted 3 in Elkhart. I was superintendent there for 4 years. All 3 of those bonds failed. That was to build a new high school. We were growing, we were out of space, land locked. We had purchase 55 acres right on the edge of town to build the new high school. Right after I left they did pass the bond and built the new high school. This is just my opinion but I think with someone else coming in and saying the same thing helped to finally get it passed.

Interviewer: From your experience as a superintendent who successful passed on bond referendum, what factors do you think contributed to the successful passing of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: The biggest thing here in this district and like anywhere else I believe the word bond scares people. They are very apprehensive about it. In our bond since it was not going to raise taxes we needed to get that out there in the community. The biggest key in passing the bond here was getting the information out. Through the media, newspaper, radio, writing articles, printing brochures, was speaking to civic organizations. Really, I think the one factors that was obvious, because we are such a large geographically district it was easy to get the information out because we had boxes out everywhere. We go to churches, fire stations, community centers anywhere that we could get an invitation and we would go out and I would give a presentation. What we had noticed was that before even though we had won, was some of the boxes we had more negative votes than positive votes. It may have been only like 40 votes in that box but you know we wanted everyone to feel good about what we were doing. So when we went out and visited those areas we saw a completely different reaction towards the bond. I could tell that when I went in and started the presentation about 50% were not for the bond but by the time I

left they were coming around. They had gotten the information. So I felt pretty good that there were going to be more supporters. Now you have to be careful because as superintendent you can't promote the bond you have to just give information.

Interviewer: Just the facts.

Interviewee: Just the facts. So we were very confident that we gave just the facts. In doing that it opened up for a lot of questions, a lot of good information would get out then also. When we went back after the election some of those same boxes were unanimous where before there was less than 50% were for the bond. We hit enough of those out in our county that enough of those went up percentage wise.

Interviewer: Were there specific strategies that the school district utilized that were successful in passing the school bond referendum? If so, what were they? Why do you think they were successful?

Interviewee: I will say we were very careful; we had bond attorneys, that would go over our brochures and make sure we were in compliance. We were very careful that we wouldn't do anything misleading. The facts were pretty compelling in our situation. Getting the facts out for us was a really good thing. A lot of the businesses would take our brochures. The chamber of commerce supported the bond. We could not promote it but there were a lot of people out in the community that could and were willing to. We were fortunate in that we did not have any organized opposition.

Interviewer: No tea party in this area?

Interviewee: Yes, there are, and we talked to some of those groups. We were invited to speak to those groups and we did. Some of those groups were a little more skeptic, but after they heard the facts I believe most of those got on board.

Interviewer: In thinking about your role as the superintendent during the successful passing of the bond referendum, how do you perceive that you influenced the community's will to vote in favor of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: I think by just getting the information out. I was a facilitator in many areas when it came to people in the community who were supporting the bond. I made myself available to those people. You know you might think that just talking to a few people won't help but they will talk to others. Just being available to talk to as many people as possible; I think it is very important. Early on we had some people who were very influential in the community who just didn't know how the process worked. So I invited them to come to the office. They were very intelligent gentlemen. I just laid it out for them; I didn't have to water it down for them. Interviewer: Did you go to them one on one?

Interviewee: Two of them together. They were good friends so they came in together. Very smart people, so like I said I could just lay it all out for them on how it all worked and they grasped it very quickly. They are a huge influence, and they could have turned a lot of votes negative if they didn't have the information. Because they were educated in what we were doing, they were able to get the correct information out there. Let's face it anytime you are talking about replacing an old building that has been part of the community for a long time, there is going to be sentimental value there. You have to be smart enough to realize this is their community; their schools. Even though our Jr-Hi was 65 years old and had structural problems and needed to be replaced; it was difficult for them to handle. I figured out there would have to be a lot of funerals in our community for that building to be replaced. The other building did not have as much sentimental

value to it. Even though some of those people had not been in that building since they went to school, it looks a whole lot different. You give them a tour of the building and they find out it is not what they had envisioned. Once you get those people on board with you, others will follow. I'm going to back up a little bit; early on we had a facility task force which was made up of school people, business owners, community members, parents, just a wide array of people. That we felt like were influential across the county. We invited them to be part of it; it was probably 50 to 60 people. When we held meetings there might have been 45 people in attendance, we broke them up into groups. We let them go tour the campuses, they went with an architect, and he would point out things to them that they would not even realize was an issue. Then this group came together and said ok this is what we see the needs are. A lot of things they were bringing back to us we already knew and then there were somethings that they brought to light that we hadn't thought of or seen. We then had them make a list of what was most important. Once that was made then we took that information to the board. One of the leaders of that task force made the presentation to the board. Some of the information the board already knew as well but it gives that community involvement. When you go out to get support for the bond you already have several supporters out in the community because they were part of this process. They have information they can share with others.

Interviewer: so say from the 45 people did you break into committees basically? I guess what I'm saying, did 10 of them go look at this building.

Interviewee: Right, as opposed to all 45 going into one building or trying to hit all facilities. We let them go into areas they were interested in. People, who looked at the

athletic facilities, people who looked at the elementary, so on and so forth. Now, some severed on more than one Committee.

Interviewer: So the time that you did the indoor facility did that group go and look at another schools facility?

Interviewee: No, they didn't do anything outside the athletic facility. Well I take that back, there were some parents and teachers and administrators that did go look at other elementary schools and indoor facilities but it was not the committees.

Interviewer: Ok

Interviewer: Were there any processes that you found were effective in engaging the community in order to successfully pass the bond referendum? If so, what were they?

Interviewee: I think getting a task force together was very helpful and keeping them involved all the way through the process.

Interviewer: So after your task force you went out and did your research basically? Did you have a political action committee; people who did phone calls?

Interviewer: No, I didn't think it was necessary. I know in some communities it is necessary, for us I thought if we just get the information out, since it was so compelling. You know we were going to be able to do all this because we are going to be sending 20 million dollars back to the state and be able to keep those tax dollars. We did restructure our taxes; we swapped some of our M&O for our INS, that's where the big gain came for us. We were able to keep multi millions of dollars in the district. Since 2001 we had paid in 211 million dollars to the state. The first year I was here we wrote a 22 million dollar check to the state. Now we write a check for 13 to 14 million dollars to the state a year. A lot of that had to do with the restructuring of our taxes. We are at 1.14 and 24 cents of

that is INS and 90 cents is M&O. It was 1.04 & .10 cents. So we swapped out .14 cents, now only .10 cents of that made any difference because .04 cents was golden pennies. We were going from 1.00 to 1.04 which .04 cents was INS.

Interviewer: What made these processes so effective in engaging the community?

Interviewee: Communication is the biggest factor. In the absence of communication people can make up all kinds of stories. Dispelling what is being said on social media can wear you out. Interviewer: Yes Sir.

Interviewee: When enough people have the truth, then you have enough people to combat the false information. We saturated the county and the district with the correct information. Through brochures, newspaper, articles that they wrote, and articles we submitted, with radio interviews. We tried to be as open as possible. Get all the facts out that we could, at the same time we didn't want to go overboard. One other thing we didn't do was we didn't have special election sites. While the majority of those people at those events are going to be for the bond you also risk stirring up a bunch of negative people who are going to say that's cheating. You've got a captive audience, so if enough of those people start a negative campaign against you could do yourself some damage.

Interviewer: Out of all the things you have talked about is there any one thing or 2 that worked better; articles in the newspaper, you going out and talking to the civic groups, and any group that would have you basically, the radio.

Interviewee: I would say going out and talking to the civic organizations is the key. Getting them the information, they are the ones who are going to get the information out to reach more of the community members. In our community we have several civic organizations they have a lot of your influential community members in their

oganizations. If they are not on your side you don't have a chance. These are the people who want to see the community grow, they are going to be your biggest cheerleaders.

Interviewer: As long as I can remember this community has always been a big supporter of their school district.

Interviewee: Yes, and that remains today. You know it helps to if you are a one school community. You have one high school; you have a lot of community pride.

Interviewer: Did these processes work for engaging *all* community stakeholders or were there specific ones that worked better with engaging certain groups? Explain.

Interviewee: No, I don't think so. Most of our community wanted to see us make some advances. They wanted to see some our facilities improve. Part of that comes from our neighboring community. They couldn't see why if they were doing it why couldn't we. You know part of my interview was based on my experience with bonds, even though they weren't successful. So basically when I came on board I followed through on what I had said. It was not hard to lead them because I was leading them to what they wanted.

Interviewer: Were there any community barriers that you faced when attempting to pass a school bond referendum? If so, what were they?

Interviewee: No, I think the only challenge we had was in our last bond election. Which was Panola College which is a Jr. College in our community just had a 35 million dollar bond election. Two years ago, that came right on the heels of 3 our positive bonds. Their tax structure does not work like ours; we told people all along that your taxes were not going to go up. The bond itself will not make your taxes go up. We get 85% vote for passage, the college then, had a 35 million dollar bond, and people just assumed that the college worked the same as the school district did. Their bond passed by 85% and people

were surprise when they got their tax notices. They never asked and the college never said and the people didn't listen they just assumed. We waited about 3 years for the last bond. Because of the college bond we had to do a lot more education on the tax issue. To remind them that the way the college works is not the way the ISD works. Our percentage went down some and I believe that contributed to that.

Interviewer: What advice would you give to another superintendent of a stable mid-sized school district who is considering passing a bond referendum?

Interviewee: Educate your community. Good or bad, you want your information out there. You can't assume that people know what you know. We as superintendents think people know what we know. We assume the board knows what we know and a lot of the time they don't. It's my job to let them know. Having a task force to get your community involved, having your board 100% for the bond. If you have one board member that is against it you are wasting your time.

Interviewer: How much time had passed since previous bond attempt?

Interviewee: Because ours are what we call maintenance bonds we go two to three years between bonds.

Interviewer: How many dollars were requested in this bond election?

Interviewee: 22 million to 29 million

Interview #6

Interviewer: How long have you been a superintendent? How long have you been a superintendent in this district?

Interviewee: I have been a superintendent for 18 years and 16 years in this district.

Interviewer: Please take a few minutes to describe your district.

Interviewee: This school district is a rural school district. There are about 1800 students. When I first got here there were 1200 students. We are 60% economic disadvantaged; 50% white and 25% African American and 25% Hispanic. We have been a property wealth district up to over 2 billion but now we are dropping. We are however, no longer property rich; I believe we are about at 1 billion in property wealth. All of that is in a coal power plant and utility plant in the district.

Interviewer: Do you think that is going to level off?

Interviewee: It's tied to natural gas, so it was most valuable when natural gas was high, as the price of natural gas goes down, which drops the price of electricity which drops the value of that plant. As long as the price of natural gas stays at around 2.50 to 2.80 it's going to stay low. As the price of natural gas goes up the value of that plant will go up.

Interviewer: How long had you been superintendent here before you attempted a school bond referendum?

Interviewee: Approximately 2 years.

Interviewer: Have you had prior experiences as superintendent in this district or another in attempting to pass a bond referendum?

Interviewee: In my previous superintendent position we tried a bond and it was defeated. It was defeated pretty soundly.

Interviewer: From your experience as a superintendent who successful passed on bond referendum, what factors do you think contributed to the successful passing of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: In this district we are about 87% favorable vote on the 6 we have had; but you know we are unique from the stand of chapter 41. The general thing is you involve the community real quick, identify your needs, communicate those things, you do your PR campaigns to get your information out. When you pass your first one you do what you say you're going to do, with in time, don't waste any money and have a good product in the end. So they can say our money was well spent.

Interviewer: You have done them where you don't have to increase taxes?

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: Because of the offsets.

Interviewee: Right

Interviewer: So you were able to take advantage of some laws?

Interviewee: Prior to '05-'06 we were having large increase in property values. The way the state system was working at that time we could pay anywhere from 4 to 10 million a year and not change the tax rate.

Interviewer: Were there specific strategies that the school district utilized that were successful in passing the school bond referendum? If so, what were they?

Interviewee: For us the biggest thing was communicating the concept of what was going on with finances. Anything that we were able to gain in that one year in a bond issue automatically became chapter 41 payments. We had one year to maximize the tax payment and to keep the money in the district. The second thing that helped us here, the

plant was 85% of our tax base. So they were paying 85% of our taxes for that bond. TXU came in and built a power plant and hadn't done much for the community, so this was one way to get the bond passed. Because you know what if you're going to pass the bond TXU is going to pay the taxes.

Interviewer: In thinking about your role as the superintendent during the successful passing of the bond referendum, how do you perceive that you influenced the community's will to vote in favor of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: I think because the district & the community knew that I knew what I was talking about as far as the financial part. I explained it to them in detail and they felt like I was knowledgeable in that area and they knew it was going to benefit us on the financial side.

Interviewer: Were there any processes that you found were effective in engaging the community in order to successfully pass the bond referendum? If so, what were they?

Interviewee: Make sure you have a committee that is a wide variety of people in your community. We used mass mailings. Community meetings really didn't work for us; people just didn't show up. The further we got into it we used social media. We would have informal talks; we were just getting out and talking to people. When you are open enough and approachable enough to where people felt comfortable coming up and talking to you.

Interviewer: What made these processes so effective in engaging the community?

Interviewee: What helped us the most was having the one tax payer that was going to pay the taxes, no one else the burden of the taxes. The second thing was the chapter 41 laws. Keeping more money here rather than sending it to the state of Texas.

Interviewer: Did these processes work for engaging *all* community stakeholders or were there specific ones that worked better with engaging certain groups?

Interviewee: No; you know just the 2 things I keep hitting on.

Interviewer: Were there any community barriers that you faced when attempting to pass a school bond referendum? If so, what were they?

Interviewee: Just getting the concept across to the community. Once that happened, it was a no brainer. They listened and believed and got to see it happen. Just getting out there and talking.

Interviewer: What advice would you give to another superintendent of a stable mid-sized school district who is considering passing a bond referendum?

Interviewee: Educate your board and community right off the bat. Identify things that are truly needed, as much face to face as you can have to show the need. Then also how are you going to pay for it.

Interviewer: How much time had passed since previous bond attempt?

Interviewee: 30 years.

Interviewer: How many dollars were requested in this bond election?

Interviewee: The first bond was somewhere between 4 and 6 million.

Interview #7

Interviewer: How long have you been a superintendent? How long have you been a superintendent in this district?

Interviewee: I have been a Superintendent 9 years total and 7 years here in this district.

Interviewer: Please take a few minutes to describe your district.

Interviewee: This district is a 4A district. We have about 2,700 students. We are 60% economic disadvantage, 19% African American, 4 or 5% Hispanic and the rest are white.

Interviewer: How long had you been superintendent in this district before the bond referendum election?

Interviewee: I had been here for 5 years.

Interviewer: Have you had prior experiences as superintendent in this district or another in attempting to pass a bond referendum?

Interviewee: No, I was a principal at my prior district and became superintendent while the end of a school bond effort was already underway. It had already been passed and we were in the process of building.

Interviewer: From your experience as a superintendent who successful passed on bond referendum, what factors do you think contributed to the successful passing of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: I believe getting the right community members behind the bond and on the political action committee.

Interviewer: Were there specific strategies that the school district utilized that were successful in passing the school bond referendum? If so, what were they? Why do you think they were successful?

Interviewee: The way that I started it, we had just had a bond that failed. I called a public open forum and specifically invited people that I knew had voted against the previous bond. So we could discuss why we needed this and where to go and get suggestions. From that, we just started out going and renovating what we had. We started out with 10 million to fix what we had, then wait another 10 years down the line, maybe. That was really where we were going to head. We brought the architects in and started looking at things. Through the process we found out the cost of a 10 year bond for 10 million as opposed to a 15 to 20 year bond wasn't going to be that much different for the voters. We could get something new with a longer pay out, so we brought that back to the committee and the committee felt like that was a better idea. We went forward with recommending the full bond for new building as opposed to renovations. The second thing that I did was I sent out about 50 letters to churches in the district inviting their pastors in for a meeting; trying to get pastor involvement and church involvement in my schools. While I had them there I talked to them about where we were headed and why. I knew that they would have influence with their congregations and could answer questions when they were asked.

Interviewer: In thinking about your role as the superintendent during the successful passing of the bond referendum, how do you perceive that you influenced the community's will to vote in favor of the bond referendum?

Interviewee: Any opportunity I had to go and speak, I would, whether it was Rotary, Lions Club, public forums, where we invited people in, the political action committee that they got formed. If they invited me I would go and talk to them. There was never an anti-bond committee formed. I just tried to get out there and talk to everyone and

anywhere people invited me to come. As a follow up, I even had some of the churches invite me to come and talk to them. The biggest part is just being visible and being a spokesman. Just be truthful, tell them the needs, which is all we can do. We can't campaign for the bond we can only go out and give the facts.

Interviewer: Were their liars out in the community?

Interviewee: yes, you know there is always going to be those out there. The biggest thing in the community was the economy. People didn't want their taxes to go up. That was the biggest thing.

Interviewer: Were there any processes that you found were effective in engaging the community in order to successfully pass the bond referendum? If so, what were they?

Interviewee: You know it just piggybacks on what we just talked about; being visible, go anywhere, where they will let you speak. The architect firm we used had a PR person that came down and met with the pack committee. We had some real go getters on that committee and let me tell you they would go out and beat the bushes, they got the signs out, they promoted it, put articles' in the paper, they were a true blue political action group. I think to that even though the African American population is small in the school, in the community it is about 40%. I got them behind the bond, I don't know of any of them that were against the bond. They were out in full force.

Interviewer: What made these processes so effective in engaging the community?

Interviewee: I think the processes worked because we had a bond that failed. We knew where we needed to change; we knew what processes we needed to incorporate. Making sure we got the churches involved, that was one of the processes I did not do the first time. Getting them actively involved was big; they could talk to their congregation if I

was not around. The other thing was getting that active political action committee. They took it and ran with it. I think those two processes were key; getting the churches involved and the political action committee.

Interviewer: So were there certain processes that worked better in engaging certain groups. Interviewee: Trying to engage everybody, we tried to find names in churches that were against the bond, and looked at the church members we could get involved in committees. I even went and talked with the major, who use to be sitting right here in this chair, he is the one who built the high school. He was against the first bond, when I met with him and explained what we wanted to do and why, he then became a vocal Supporter. He has been here all his life, so getting him on our side was a big help. What really hurt me was my chamber of commerce president was against this bond, vocally against the bond. That was the one battled I had the whole time because he was against the bond.

Interviewer: Did these processes work for engaging all community stakeholders or were there specific ones that worked better with engaging certain groups? Explain.

Interviewee: For the most part. As I stated; as I stated, the president of the chamber of commerce was opposed to the bond and he never came around. He was influenced by his best friend who is the owner of a lot of land. He would have been exempt because of his age, but we could never help him understand the exemption due to his age.

Interviewer: Were there any community barriers that you faced when attempting to pass a school bond referendum? If so, what were they? (Research Question #5)

Interviewee: The biggest barrier at the time was the economy. You know we kept hearing if you'll just wait; but we couldn't, the buildings were just too bad. We were fixing to

have to spend 4 million dollars just to get the AC units up to standard and working. Do we waste that money now or put it towards a new school. We just couldn't wait. You know we had to get the information out to the community either we are going to have to do a small bond and then turn around and do another larger one down the road. You know it's like I told you earlier we had a chamber of commerce who was not for the bond. It wasn't really the chamber it was more of a personal thing because he was friends with people in this community who could afford to pay the taxes but didn't want their taxes to go up. There was also in very large influential church in the community that out in full force against the bond. I even had lunch with the pastor, we sat down and talked and tried to get him to understand. I knew I wasn't going to change his mind but maybe make him understand, but it didn't do any good. You know explained to him we can do the 10 million now and put a band aide on the problem and have to come back for a larger bond later on. A local pastor was strongly opposed to the bond. When it all came down to it he just didn't want the money coming out of his church goers pockets.

Interviewer: So how did you overcome the barriers?

Interviewee: The biggest thing, we just had let them know and see the need for this bond. Some of the barriers we just never could overcome. Even though they knew why it came down to it they didn't want their tax rate to go up. It was a matter of getting to the ones who would vote positive to get them to come out and vote. We had the largest turn out in the history of the district for this bond. Just simply by getting the word out to the community

Interviewer: Were there any community barriers that you faced when attempting to pass a school bond referendum? If so, what were they?

Interviewee: Based on challenges other than what we have already talked, there is a lot of distrust in this community. One of the biggest barriers was the distrust from the high school bond. There were several things that they were promised that they didn't get and they wanted to know where the money went.

Interviewer: How did you overcome that?

Interviewee: Before we ever decided to go to the community with a bond, we agreed we would bring in a third party; to be our set of eyes and ears. To track every penny; to oversee what was going on with the architect. We also said we would bring in architect who had experience in building schools. The buildings that were going to stay we made sure we brought them up to secure standards. We have project managers that looked at everything we do.

Interviewer: So serious checks & balances.

Interviewee: Serious check & balances. It's expensive, but well worth it.

Interviewer: You have paved the way for the next bond or whoever comes in to do another bond. Interviewee: We kept our promise and it is going to stand the test of time. There is not going to be anyone saying where is that money that you said you spent. In addition to that we also brought our auditors in too.

Interviewer: How did you overcome these barriers?

Interviewee: You have to get the information out and know that there are going to be people out there who don't want the bond and there is nothing you can do to change their minds. Do all that you can to get the information out to everybody. Make sure you cover everyone; not all people read newspapers. We had someone set up a Facebook page, they got it out there and it's amazing the comments that would come on there from the nay-

sayers. Get the community members that you know are influential in the community; get them roped in soon. Those that you know are against the bond go talk to them don't avoid them, at least they'll know the information, and they'll know what is going on. You need to go full force, get the word out. Get your churches involved; just make sure the people know. We did satellite voting also at the schools that were going to be torn down.

Interviewer: How much time had passed since previous bond attempt?

Interviewee: 6 months

Interviewer: How many dollars were requested in this bond election?

Interviewee: 29.9 million