

Smithville R-II School District
2012 Patron Telephone Survey
Executive Summary
October 4, 2012

In September 2012, a 10- to 12-minute telephone study was conducted with 400 randomly selected, head-of-household, registered voter patrons in the Smithville R-II School District to determine their views on the district's performance, to learn their support or opposition to a potential ballot issue (and their thoughts on the ballot issue's individual components), and to find out where they turn for school district information, among other topics.

Completed calls were divided into quadrants, identified by Highway 92 and 169 Highway, in quantities that match the general population pattern, according to district leadership. This means that the results contained in this survey for the entire survey group have a Margin of Error of plus or minus 5%. (The Margin of Error for the demographic and geographic subgroups is larger, because the number of respondents is smaller in each group. As such, it is best to look for trends, rather than for individual numbers, in the subgroup analysis.)

Generally speaking, the results suggest that patrons are very satisfied with – and interested in – their school district. They find favor with the idea of a bond issue and with each of the components being discussed, although they are modestly cautious at this time about the potential tax implications. Specifically:

- Respondents gave 14 of 15 different people, program, facility and district/patron relationship factors – plus the district's overall performance – a grade of “B” or better (or the statistical equivalent of a “B”) on the traditional A-F grading scale. Safety of students, quality of education and performance of district teachers were the three highest graded areas. The one area that fell short of a “B” – “The district's responsiveness to patron concerns” scored a 3.79. The statistical equivalent of a “B” in this survey is 3.80, meaning that this topic is not an issue that should cause serious concern.
- Fourteen of the 15 graded areas also qualified as “Patron Hot Buttons,” meaning that more than four out of every five survey respondents felt comfortable enough in their own knowledge about this topic to offer a grade, rather than say, “Don't know.” This further affirms that this is a very engaged patron population.
- Teachers, the district's strong curriculum/academics, its strong sports program and its good parental involvement were the most frequently mentioned strengths, while 159 of the respondents couldn't identify an area needing improvement, and 21 said it was “fine as is.” Those who did have an issue focused on the need to “emphasize academics over sports” and “reduce/don't raise taxes.”

- A total of 56% of survey respondents said they would either “Strongly favor” or “Favor” a generically described bond issue, before hearing the specific details.
- The bond issue components were each seen positively. When asked whether each one’s inclusion would make the respondent “more likely to vote in favor,” “more likely to vote against,” or “make no difference,” the highest percentage went to “more likely to vote in favor” in all cases, followed by “make no difference.” The most popular component was the new elementary school.
- After hearing the details, support for the proposal was 61% combined “Strongly favor/Favor” (which is encouraging, but statistically identical to the “pre-information” level of support).
- Not surprisingly, the level of support slid somewhat when the tax levels were mentioned. Support at the \$23.27 per month increase level (for a typical homeowner) was 51%. It was 53% at the \$21.85 per month level and 54% at the \$20.42 per month level. Again, given the Margin of Error of 5%, this means that support at the three tax levels was statistically identical.
- Additional information about the bond issue and its impact was also seen as mostly compelling. Specifically, 67% said that knowing the proposal would result in the removal of mobile classrooms would make them more likely to vote in favor. The fact that moving sixth-grade students back to elementary school would help relieve crowding and the fact that this proposal would eliminate the need for a second middle school also had a positive influence on a respondent’s voting decision. The fact that the district had not raised taxes since 1997, however, was not as important to survey respondents.
- Seven potential sources of district news are consulted frequently by at least 25% of the patrons, led by “friends and neighbors” and the local newspaper, but also including five district-affiliated sources.

The full report that follows contains a series of findings, discussion of each of those findings, and all the questions, answers and appropriate cross-tabulations. A brief summary closes the report.

**Smithville R-II School District
2012 Patron Telephone Survey
Final Report
October 4, 2012**

Finding 1: Patrons expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the district’s current performance, giving 14 of 15 different people, program, facility and district/patron relationship factors a grade of “B” or better (or the statistical equivalent of “B”) on the traditional A-F grading scale. Even more impressive: All but one of the factors qualified as Patron Hot Buttons, meaning that the community has a high degree of interest in all facets of school district life.

In September 2012, a 10- to 12-minute telephone study was conducted with 400 randomly selected, registered voter, head-of-household patrons in the Smithville R-II School District to learn their views on the district’s performance, to secure their thoughts on a potential ballot proposal being considered, and to determine where they turn for information about the district, among other topics.

Completed survey calls were divided based on the respondent’s residence location, with Highway 92 and Highway 169 being the cross-streets. The number of calls in each quadrant was determined by the school district, based on general population patterns. This means that the results contained in this report, reflecting the entire survey group, have a Margin of Error of plus or minus 5%. (The Margin of Error within the cross-tabulations is higher, because the number of participants in each subgroup is smaller. As such, it is best to review subgroup data looking for trends, rather than focusing on individual numbers.)

After addressing the qualification questions, respondents were asked to “grade” – A, B, C, D or F – 15 different people, program, facility and district/patron relationship factors, plus the district’s overall performance. The purpose of this exercise is three-fold.

First, it provides an opportunity to begin the interview with questions that don’t require any “inside information,” giving respondents the confidence that they can effectively participate in the research, whether or not they have a current, direct connection to the district.

Second, these rather uncomplicated questions allow the interviewer and the respondent to develop a level of rapport, which will be critical when the questions become more challenging later in the survey.

Third, the data collected through this process provides insight into how patrons feel the district is performing at the present time. This information is critical, because ballot box decisions are typically made on *both* the merits of the proposal and on the patrons' views regarding the quality of the district's performance.

All the grades for all the factors are displayed below. However, to simplify the analysis, a 5-point weighted scale is also used. In this scale, each grade of "A" is worth 5 points, down to each grade of "F" being worth 1 point. The points are totaled and then divided by the number of respondents offering a grade (rather than saying, "Don't know") to arrive at a number between 1.00 and 5.00.

Recognizing that an "A" (or 5.00) is impossible – because it would require all those willing to offer a grade to say "A" – a "B" (or 4.00) is typically the dividing line between areas of strength and those which may need attention. However, taking into account the Margin of Error, a score as low as 3.80 is still a "B," statistically speaking.

Under this formula, the Smithville School District scores very strongly with its patrons. In fact, 14 of the 15 graded areas – plus the district's overall performance – scored at the statistical equivalent of a "B" or better. Among the leaders:

- Safety of students – 4.71
- Quality of education – 4.58
- Performance of district teachers – 4.54
- Performance of school principals – 4.49
- Quality of technology available to students – 4.48

The only area that fell short of the 3.80 mark was "The district's responsiveness to patrons concerns," which scored 3.79. This suggests that any concerns about this area are extremely minor.

The other analysis associated with the grading exercise is the determination of "Patron Hot Buttons." These are areas that are graded by at least 81% of the respondents, suggesting that they are factors that most typical patrons feel comfortable evaluating. A high number of "Hot Buttons" suggests a very connected patron population, because its members feel confident offering commentary on many facets of district life. In the case of the Smithville School District, that was certainly the case.

In fact, a rather stunning 14 of 15 areas achieved this status. Even factors that tend to have a high number of "Don't know" responses in other districts (because they are more nuanced issues, such as "The district's record on making and fulfilling promises" and "The district's responsiveness to patron concerns") achieved this status within the Smithville School District population.

In fact, the only item that fell short was “Class sizes” – and it was graded by 79%, further affirming that patrons in the Smithville R-II School District are connected and, as mentioned above, very satisfied.

Questions 1-3 confirmed that the respondent was a head of household (male or female), a registered voter, and aware that he or she lived within the boundaries of the district. All this was known to be true for each individual that was contacted. But, each potential respondent was required to confirm this information before continuing. All responses reported as percentages may add to more or less than 100%, due to rounding. All verbatim comments represent one comment by one person. Had they been indicative of a trend, they would have appeared in sufficient quantity to be placed in the chart associated with the question.

- 4. To make certain that we have people from all parts of the district participating in this survey, can you tell me if you live north or south of Highway 92? Do you live east or west of Highway 169? Number of completed interviews per quadrant identified by the school district’s leadership as being indicative of the general population pattern. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below.**

Response	Number
North of 92 and east of Highway 169	168
North of 92 and west of Highway 169	57
South of 92 and east of Highway 169	145
South of 92 and west of Highway 169	30

As you know, students in school are usually given a grade to reflect the quality of their work. Those grades are usually A, B, C, D or F. Based on your experience, the experience of your children, or things you have heard about the Smithville R-2 School District from others, please tell me what grade you would give the Smithville School District on each of the following items. Let’s start with...Questions 5 through 19 were rotated to eliminate “order bias.”

- 5. Class sizes, meaning the number of students in each classroom**

Response	Percentage
A	15%
B	40%
C	19%
D	4%
F	1%
Don’t know (not read)	21%

6. Value received for the tax dollars spent

Response	Percentage
A	19%
B	48%
C	22%
D	6%
F	1%
Don't know (not read)	6%

7. Performance of district teachers

Response	Percentage
A	62%
B	27%
C	7%
D	1%
F	<1%
Don't know (not read)	2%

8. Quality of education

Response	Percentage
A	64%
B	26%
C	6%
D	1%
F	0%
Don't know (not read)	3%

9. Preparation of students for college, vocational training or employment

Response	Percentage
A	43%
B	33%
C	11%
D	1%
F	0%
Don't know (not read)	12%

10. Quality of technology available to students

Response	Percentage
A	47%
B	30%
C	6%
D	<1%
F	0%
Don't know (not read)	17%

11. Quality of school facilities

Response	Percentage
A	53%
B	37%
C	7%
D	1%
F	0%
Don't know (not read)	2%

12. Safety of students

Response	Percentage
A	71%
B	20%
C	4%
D	0%
F	0%
Don't know (not read)	5%

13. Performance of school principals

Response	Percentage
A	57%
B	31%
C	9%
D	<1%
F	0%
Don't know (not read)	3%

14. Performance of the superintendent and district administrators

Response	Percentage
A	33%
B	39%
C	13%
D	2%
F	1%
Don't know (not read)	14%

15. Performance of the Smithville Board of Education

Response	Percentage
A	38%
B	35%
C	12%
D	2%
F	0%
Don't know (not read)	13%

16. Efforts of the district to involve citizens in decision-making

Response	Percentage
A	24%
B	38%
C	22%
D	7%
F	1%
Don't know (not read)	8%

17. The district's record on making and fulfilling promises

Response	Percentage
A	20%
B	36%
C	24%
D	4%
F	1%
Don't know (not read)	14%

18. The district's responsiveness to patron concerns

Response	Percentage
A	23%
B	31%
C	21%
D	4%
F	3%
Don't know (not read)	18%

19. The district's efforts to report its plans and progress to patrons

Response	Percentage
A	27%
B	41%
C	18%
D	3%
F	1%
Don't know (not read)	11%

20. Overall, what grade would you give the Smithville R-2 School District?

Response	Percentage
A	48%
B	42%
C	8%
D	1%
F	0%
Don't know (not read)	1%

Cross-tabulation: 5-point weighted scale rating for each factor, plus the district’s overall performance. In this exercise, a score of 3.80 or higher is the statistical equivalent of a “B.” Items in bold are “Patron Hot Buttons,” which are factors in which at least 81% of the respondents offered a grade (rather than saying, “Don’t know”). These are the factors that are of most interest to the typical patron in the district.

Factor	5-point scale rating
Safety of students	4.71
Quality of education	4.58
Performance of district teachers	4.54
Performance of school principals	4.49
Quality of technology available to students	4.48
Quality of school facilities	4.46
Overall grade	4.38
Preparation of students for college, vocational training or employment	4.35
Performance of the Smithville Board of Education	4.26
Performance of the superintendent and district administrators	4.16
The district’s efforts to report its plans and progress to patrons	3.98
Efforts of the district to involve citizens in decision-making	3.84
The district’s record on making and fulfilling promises	3.82
Class sizes, meaning the number of students in each classroom	3.81
Value received for the tax dollars spent	3.81
The district’s responsiveness to patron concerns	3.79

Finding 2: Respondents applauded the district’s teachers, its strong curriculum and/or “academics,” its sports programs, and its parental involvement, while close to half either couldn’t identify a shortcoming or said the district was “fine as is.”

The evaluation section of the survey closed with two simple questions: What are the strengths of the district, and where could it improve?

Teachers were the most frequently mentioned area of strength, as 136 respondents noted them in answer to this open-ended query. Following teachers was “Strong curriculum/academics” (74 mentions), “Strong sports programs” (49 mentions) and “Good parental involvement” (40 mentions).

When asked to identify an area where the district could improve, 159 respondents said, “Don’t know,” while 21 said the district was “Fine as is.” Those with a concern focused on the need to “Emphasize academics over sports” (86 mentions), “Reduce – or don’t raise – taxes” (43 mentions) and “Need better communication with patrons” (37 mentions).

The fact that 45% of the respondents either couldn’t identify an area of need or thought the district was “fine as is” is further confirmation of the patrons’ overall level of satisfaction with the district’s performance.

21. What do you think are the greatest strengths of the Smithville R-2 School District?

Responses below were coded from open-ended comments, based on common words, phrases or ideas. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below.

Response	Number
Its teachers	136
Strong curriculum/academics	74
Strong sports programs	49
Good parental involvement	40
Community support	35
Variety of activities/programs for students	24
Other (see below)	17
Strong leadership	15
Good reputation	10

Verbatim “other” comments

School facilities.

Teachers have good rapport with students, mostly due to small class sizes and the ability to get to know the students well.

The district has strong ties to the community.

Credibility, parent participation and strong academics.

Good community support, and strong overall relationship between administration and patrons.

The facilities are good, and they provide a good quality education.

Ability to adapt to a growing population and staying up with technology.

It is growing.

Strong administrators, strong academics and good quality teachers.

They have a good arts department and computer lab.

Relatively small school district.

Our sports and music programs are good.

Their high standards and community support.

They do a good job building character.

My kids go to private school, but I have heard the teachers are pretty good. The leadership at the district wants to do well.

It's their good discipline and loyalty to students.

I just moved here, but see their schools are very nice.

22. Where could the district improve? Responses below were coded from open-ended comments, based on common words, phrases or ideas. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below.

Response	Number
Don't know	159
Should emphasize academics over sports	86
Reduce/don't raise taxes	43
Need better communication with patrons	37
Manage the budget better/lower spending	28
Other (see below)	26
It's fine as is	21

Verbatim “other” comments

Maybe stop building and focus on just updating facilities.

Could improve on busing. Kids are on the bus too long.

Probably try and curtail the funding as much as possible.

They lack in getting the help for Special Needs kids.

More technology, like Smart Boards and iPads, especially in the elementary school. But, all grades could use them.

Reduce class sizes.

Get better teachers.

Could use some more buildings to handle the growth.

Reduce class sizes and get better technology. I think the schools are somewhat outdated with their equipment. I need to be able to give technology an “A” grade.

Better sports teams.

Less federal involvement.

The scheduling for the high school students is difficult to figure out.

Eliminating the temporary classrooms.

To maintain a focus on academic achievements.

Pay the teachers more, and make sure that the students can read well.

Raise the test scores.

Managing growth.

We need another elementary school. The old school is overcrowded.

I think they need more buses.

Could use smaller classrooms, as far as the number of students in each one.

It would be nice to see the cost to build or renovate go to those that use the facilities. I know that's not feasible, but not having kids in the school system and still having to pay taxes is somewhat irritating.

Offer more variety of classes at the middle school and high school levels. Be more specific in career-type classes.

The district needs the ability to remove certain teachers that are not performing up to standards.

Get a youth center.

The School Board needs to make sure decisions are made with the good of the students in mind, not what makes them look good or what is nice to have.

I'm only going by what I have been told, but many are saying the district needs to do a better job of managing the money and that it could pay teachers more.

Finding 3: Initial support for the idea of a generically described bond issue is encouraging, as 56% said they would either “Strongly favor” or “Favor” such an issue, “if the election were held today.”

To begin the conversation about a ballot proposal, respondents were presented with a generic description of a potential bond issue and asked how they would vote if an election on such an issue were held “today.”

The purpose of this question is to see what the general level of trust is in the district’s decision-making. An encouraging level of support for such a generically described proposal is positive, because it suggests the presence of a notable contingent of patrons who believe “if the district thinks it’s a good idea, then I’m in favor of it.”

Not surprisingly (given the strong grades seen earlier), such is the case for the Smithville School District, as 56% of respondents said they would either “Strongly favor” or “Favor” such a ballot issue.

Within the subgroups, support was highest among current student families, those who are 18 to 34 years old, those who live north of Highway 92 and west of Highway 169, and those who have lived in the community more than 15 years. In fact, only one group (the small number of respondents who had lived in the district up to five years) had an initial support percentage below 50%.

This means that the district begins any ballot issue discussion on solid footing, with a high level of trust within the community.

23. The Smithville School District is considering asking voters to support a ballot issue in 2013 that would be used to fund the construction of a new school, along with some expansion and renovation projects at the existing schools in the district. If an election on such a proposal were held today, would you strongly favor it, favor it, oppose it, or strongly oppose it? “Lean favor,” “Lean oppose,” “Would depend on what it includes,” “Would depend on what it costs” and “Don’t know” were not read, but were noted if mentioned – unaided – by the respondent.

Response	Percentage
Strongly favor	21%
Favor	35%
Lean favor (not read)	1%
Lean oppose (not read)	3%
Oppose	19%
Strongly oppose	6%
Would depend on what it costs (not read)	8%
Would depend on what it includes (not read)	3%
Don’t know (not read)	5%

Cross-tabulation: Combined “Strongly favor/Favor” percentage on a generically described bond issue by location of respondent’s residence and by the length of time living in the district. Note: “n” equals the number of respondents in each subgroup.

Response	Overall	N of 92/E of 169 (n=168)	N of 92/W of 169 (n=57)	S of 92/E of 169 (n=145)	S of 92/W of 169 (n=30)	Up to 5 years (n=46)	5 to 15 years (n=99)	More than 15 years (n=255)
Strongly favor/Favor	56%	57%	61%	54%	53%	46%	52%	60%

Cross-tabulation: Combined “Strongly favor/Favor” percentage on a generically described bond issue by age, and by presence of a current or past district student in the household (or no district students ever in the household). Note: “n” equals the number of respondents in each subgroup, and age percentages will not square with “overall,” because three respondents refused to answer this question.

Response	Overall	18 to 34 (n=81)	35 to 54 (n=179)	55 or older (n=137)	Student yes (n=143)	Student past (n=140)	Student never (n=117)
Strongly favor/Favor	56%	62%	56%	54%	64%	50%	53%

Finding 4: All five ballot issue components drew a high percentage of individuals saying that including these elements in the proposal would make them “more likely to vote in favor.” In fact, in each case, “more likely to vote in favor” was the most popular answer, followed by “it would make no difference.”

The survey then turned to a series of questions that presented the proposal components, using very matter-of-fact language. After each was presented, the respondent was asked whether its inclusion in a final proposal would make him or her “more likely to vote in favor,” “more likely to vote against,” or would it “make no difference.”

In each case, “more likely to vote in favor” was the top choice, with the new elementary school being clearly the most popular idea (68% saying its inclusion would make them “more likely to vote in favor”). The security system upgrade was the second-most popular (53% “more likely to vote in favor”), with the other elements ranging from 44% to 49%.

In all cases, the second-most frequent answer was “it would make no difference.” In fact, “more likely to vote against” percentages ranged from a low of 3% (the new elementary school) to a high of just 13% (the additional parking at the high school).

The cross-tabulation results reveal that while there were certain demographic and geographic subgroups that found some ideas more exciting than others, “more likely to vote in favor” was the most popular answer (or was tied with “make no difference”) in most cases. Patrons whose students have already graduated and patrons who are 55 or older were not overly enthusiastic about extra parking at the high school. Patrons whose students have already graduated also were not excited about adding classrooms at the high school.

These results continue a pattern of satisfaction with the district – in this case, with the ideas being considered.

I’m now going to share some information about the ideas that are being considered for a potential ballot issue. *Questions 24 through 26 were rotated, then 27 and 28 were asked in that order, because the information contained in those questions needed to be presented sequentially to make sense to the respondents.*

24. The ballot issue could include funds that would be used to add eight classrooms at Smithville High School, plus expand and renovate the cafeteria at the high school. If these projects were included in the final proposal, would you be more likely to vote in favor of the ballot issue, more likely to vote against, or would it make no difference to you?

Response	Percentage
More likely to vote in favor	49%
More likely to vote against	8%
It would make no difference	41%
Don't know (not read)	3%

25. The ballot issue could include funds that would be used to add 114 parking spaces at the high school. If this project were included in the final proposal, would you be more likely to vote in favor of the ballot issue, more likely to vote against, or would it make no difference to you?

Response	Percentage
More likely to vote in favor	47%
More likely to vote against	13%
It would make no difference	40%
Don't know (not read)	1%

26. The ballot issue could include funds that would be used to upgrade the security systems at the main entrances of all the district's schools. If this project were included in the final proposal, would you be more likely to vote in favor of the ballot issue, more likely to vote against, or would it make no difference to you?

Response	Percentage
More likely to vote in favor	53%
More likely to vote against	5%
It would make no difference	36%
Don't know (not read)	7%

27. The ballot issue could include funds that would be used to construct an additional elementary school that would have a capacity of almost 450 students. If this project were included in the final proposal, would you be more likely to vote in favor of the ballot issue, more likely to vote against, or would it make no difference to you?

Response	Percentage
More likely to vote in favor	68%
More likely to vote against	3%
It would make no difference	26%
Don't know (not read)	3%

28. Would knowing that the construction of this additional elementary school would lead to the conversion of the district's elementary schools to neighborhood schools – meaning the additional school, and Smithville Primary Elementary and Smithville Upper Elementary schools would all shift to a Kindergarten through sixth-grade format – make you more likely to vote in favor, more likely to vote against, or would it make no difference to you?

Response	Percentage
More likely to vote in favor	44%
More likely to vote against	9%
It would make no difference	36%
Don't know (not read)	10%

Cross-tabulation: “More likely to vote in favor” and “Make no difference” percentages on each project component by location of respondent’s residence and by the length of time living in the district. Note: “n” equals the number of respondents in each subgroup.

Response	Overall	N of 92/E of 169 (n=168)	N of 92/W of 169 (n=57)	S of 92/E of 169 (n=145)	S of 92/W of 169 (n=30)	Up to 5 years (n=46)	5 to 15 years (n=99)	More than 15 years (n=255)
Add SHS classrooms/favor	49%	48%	58%	45%	53%	46%	46%	50%
Add SHS classrooms/no difference	41%	40%	33%	45%	37%	43%	41%	40%
Add SHS parking/favor	47%	45%	51%	46%	53%	46%	42%	48%
Add SHS parking/no difference	40%	41%	37%	41%	33%	37%	42%	39%
Security upgrade/favor	53%	55%	47%	51%	60%	39%	49%	56%
Security upgrade/no difference	36%	32%	46%	39%	33%	37%	42%	34%
Elementary school/favor	68%	68%	70%	61%	87%	59%	64%	71%
Elementary school/no difference	26%	25%	21%	33%	10%	30%	30%	24%
Neighborhood schools/favor	44%	46%	40%	43%	47%	37%	38%	48%
Neighborhood schools/no difference	36%	36%	39%	37%	33%	33%	37%	36%

Cross-tabulation: “More likely to vote in favor” and “Make no difference” percentages on each project component by age, and by presence of a current or past district student in the household (or no district students ever in the household). Note: “n” equals the number of respondents in each subgroup, and age percentages will not square with “overall,” because three respondents refused to answer this question.

Response	Overall	18 to 34 (n=81)	35 to 54 (n=179)	55 or older (n=137)	Student yes (n=143)	Student past (n=140)	Student never (n=117)
Add SHS classrooms/favor	49%	56%	51%	43%	57%	42%	46%
Add SHS classrooms/no difference	41%	37%	41%	43%	36%	44%	42%
Add SHS parking/favor	47%	53%	49%	41%	55%	39%	44%
Add SHS parking/no difference	40%	32%	41%	44%	34%	46%	40%
Security upgrade/favor	53%	54%	51%	55%	57%	49%	52%
Security upgrade/no difference	36%	33%	41%	33%	36%	39%	34%
Elementary school/favor	68%	65%	68%	70%	73%	62%	68%
Elementary school/no difference	26%	27%	27%	25%	24%	30%	24%
Neighborhood schools/favor	44%	44%	41%	49%	50%	41%	41%
Neighborhood schools/no difference	36%	37%	38%	34%	38%	35%	36%

Finding 5: Support for the idea of a bond issue, after the details had been shared, remained strong (61% “Strongly favor/Favor”). That support slipped, once the potential tax levels were shared, but still showed encouraging signs.

Having heard about the components being considered for a potential bond issue, respondents were asked once again how they would vote “if the election were held today.”

A total of 61% said they would either “Strongly favor” or “Favor” such a ballot issue. This 5% increase is within the Margin of Error and, as such, is statistically identical to the 56% who offered one of these two answers before the ballot issue details had been revealed. Nonetheless, maintaining support after sharing the information suggests strongly that patrons find favor with the ideas.

Further study revealed that there were 171 respondents who were negative or uncommitted when they were asked about their level of support before the details had been shared. Fifteen of them moved to either “Strongly favor” or “Favor,” after hearing the details. While all the projects were somewhat influential in that decision, all 15 who changed their minds (or who had been undecided and then made a decision to support the proposal) said that the inclusion of a new elementary school would make them “more likely to vote in favor.” This is critical data, because it pinpoints for the district the project that will be of most interest to patrons, as they consider their votes.

At this point, the survey then presented three possible tax increase scenarios, and asked respondents to, once again, share their level of support or opposition.

This set of questions began with a tax increase of \$23.27 for the owner of a \$150,000 home in the district. A total of 51% said they would either “Strongly favor” or “Favor” such an increase.

Those who were opposed (or undecided) at that level were then asked about a potential \$21.85 per month increase instead. Combined with those who supported the higher level, total support at \$21.85 stood at 53%. The process was then repeated for ongoing opponents with a \$20.42 per month increase instead. Following that question, total support was 54%. Remembering, again, the Margin of Error, these results mean that there was no statistically significant movement from tax level to tax level.

There is one additional important aspect in questions such as these: The percentage of undecided voters. That percentage was only 5% to 6% on the three tax levels, suggesting that patrons in the district move quickly to make a decision, meaning that the district’s ongoing educational effort may face a bit of an uphill challenge, as it seeks to inform the electorate.

Within the subgroups, the support levels for the three tax options varied, with long-term (more than 15 years) residents and current student families being the most supportive. Newer and mid-term (up to 15 years) residents were less enthusiastic – particularly newer residents – as was the small group of respondents living south of Highway 92 and west of 169 Highway. In the other groups, a support level greater than 50% was seen at least once in the set of three tax options.

These numbers are encouraging, but would still require the Margin of Error to work in the district’s favor to reach the required percentage for passage – if the election were held today. As such, it is clear that there is work to be done to continue to build awareness and understanding to help those currently in favor affirm their support, secure many of the few patrons who are currently undecided, and try to move some of those who are currently in modest opposition.

29. Earlier, I asked you how you would likely vote on a ballot issue, if the election were held today. Now that I have shared with you some of the ideas being considered by the school district, do you think you would strongly favor it, favor it, oppose it, or strongly oppose it, if the election were held today? “Lean favor,” “Lean oppose,” “Would depend on what it costs” and “Don’t know” were not read, but were noted if mentioned – unaided – by the respondent.

Response	Percentage
Strongly favor	22%
Favor	39%
Lean favor (not read)	1%
Lean oppose (not read)	2%
Oppose	17%
Strongly oppose	8%
Would depend on what it costs (not read)	7%
Don’t know (not read)	5%

30. What if the ballot issue resulted in a tax increase of about 23 dollars and 27 cents a month for the owner of a \$150,000 home in the school district? Knowing that this tax increase would sunset – meaning it would go away – after 20 years, because the projects would be paid off, do you think you would strongly favor it, favor it, oppose it, or strongly oppose it, if the election were held today? “Lean favor,” “Lean oppose,” and “Don’t know” were not read, but were noted if mentioned – unaided – by the respondent.

Response	Percentage
Strongly favor	10%
Favor	41%
Lean favor (not read)	1%
Lean oppose (not read)	2%
Oppose	26%
Strongly oppose	15%
Don’t know (not read)	5%

31. What if, instead, the ballot issue resulted in a tax increase of about 21 dollars and 85 cents a month for the owner of a \$150,000 home in the school district? Again, knowing that this tax increase would sunset – meaning it would go away – after 20 years, because the projects would be paid off, do you think you would strongly favor it, favor it, oppose it, or strongly oppose it, if the election were held today? “Lean favor,” “Lean oppose,” and “Don’t know” were not read, but were noted if mentioned – unaided – by the respondent. Positive responses below reflect the combined totals for questions 30 and 31, under the assumption that a respondent who supported a higher tax level would support a lower one as well.

Response	Percentage
Strongly favor	10%
Favor	43%
Lean favor (not read)	1%
Lean oppose (not read)	0%
Oppose	25%
Strongly oppose	15%
Don’t know (not read)	6%

32. What if, instead, the ballot issue resulted in a tax increase of about 20 dollars and 42 cents a month for the owner of a \$150,000 home in the school district? Again, knowing that this tax increase would sunset – meaning it would go away – after 20 years, because the projects would be paid off, do you think you would strongly favor it, favor it, oppose it, or strongly oppose it, if the election were held today? “Lean favor,” “Lean oppose,” and “Don’t know” were not read, but were noted if mentioned – unaided – by the respondent. Positive responses below reflect the combined totals for questions 30, 31 and 32, under the assumption that a respondent who supported a higher tax level would support a lower one as well.

Response	Percentage
Strongly favor	10%
Favor	44%
Lean favor (not read)	1%
Lean oppose (not read)	1%
Oppose	25%
Strongly oppose	15%
Don’t know (not read)	5%

Cross-tabulation: Combined “Strongly favor/Favor” percentage for the proposal, after all the project details had been shared, and for each of the three tax levels presented by location of respondent’s residence and by the length of time living in the district. Note: “n” equals the number of respondents in each subgroup.

Combined “Strongly favor/Favor”	Overall	N of 92/E of 169 (n=168)	N of 92/W of 169 (n=57)	S of 92/E of 169 (n=145)	S of 92/W of 169 (n=30)	Up to 5 years (n=46)	5 to 15 years (n=99)	More than 15 years (n=255)
Bond issue/general	61%	61%	65%	58%	63%	52%	54%	65%
\$23.27 per month tax increase	51%	52%	54%	49%	47%	37%	47%	55%
\$21.85 per month tax increase	53%	55%	54%	51%	47%	39%	49%	57%
\$20.42 per month tax increase	54%	56%	54%	52%	47%	39%	49%	58%

Cross-tabulation: Cross-tabulation: Combined “Strongly favor/Favor” percentage for the proposal, after all the project details had been shared, and for each of the three tax levels presented by age, and by presence of a current or past district student in the household (or no district students ever in the household). Note: “n” equals the number of respondents in each subgroup, and age percentages will not square with “overall,” because three respondents refused to answer this question.

Combined “Strongly favor/Favor”	Overall	18 to 34 (n=81)	35 to 54 (n=179)	55 or older (n=137)	Student yes (n=143)	Student past (n=140)	Student never (n=117)
Bond issue/general	61%	65%	61%	58%	69%	54%	58%
\$23.27 per month tax increase	51%	54%	51%	50%	55%	48%	50%
\$21.85 per month tax increase	53%	55%	53%	53%	57%	51%	50%
\$20.42 per month tax increase	54%	55%	53%	55%	57%	52%	51%

Finding 6: Additional information about nuances of the proposal or the district’s current situation were mostly compelling to patrons, as the fact that the proposal would relieve crowding at the middle school, that it would mean the district would not have to build a second middle school, and that it would mean the removal of trailers caused between 47% and 67% to say that it would make them “more likely to vote in favor.” The fact that the district had not had a tax increase since 1997 was not as compelling, however.

Having secured the level of support for the ballot issue at each of the three tax levels, the survey then presented additional information and asked respondents whether or not this information would impact their vote. In three of the four cases, that impact was compelling.

Specifically:

- Knowing that this proposal would allow for the removal of trailers – or portable classrooms – caused 67% to say they would be “more likely to vote in favor.”
- 53% said the same thing about the fact that the plan would keep the district from having to build a second middle school.
- 47% said the same thing about the fact that the shift to neighborhood schools (and the move of sixth grade back to elementary school) would relieve the crowding.

In each of these cases, “It would make no difference” was the second-most popular answer.

The one factor that was not compelling was the news that the district had not raised taxes since 1997. In this case, only 34% said this news would make them “more likely to vote in favor,” while 58% said it would “make no difference.”

The subgroup data once again showed some modest variations. However, the most interesting data was seen in determining which of these news items had the greatest positive impact on those respondents who were still in opposition (or undecided), after they had heard the details, but before the tax information had been shared.

Of the 156 respondents who were negative or non-committal after hearing the details:

- 63 said that the removal of trailers would make them “more likely to vote in favor.”
- 24 said the same thing about the fact that no second middle school would be needed.
- 16 said the same thing about the move of sixth-graders back to elementary school and how that would relieve crowding.
- Only seven said the same thing about the fact that the district had not had a tax increase since 1997.

This analysis – plus the earlier data about the new elementary school being the most compelling project for initially negative people – suggests which project and which message (in this case, the removal of the trailers) are of most interest to patrons, as they consider their support or opposition to the proposal being discussed.

- 33. Would knowing that this shift to all neighborhood schools, each with Kindergarten through sixth grade, would help relieve crowding at the middle school by moving sixth grade back to the elementary schools make you more likely to vote in favor, more likely to vote against, or would it make no difference to you?**
Questions 33 through 36 were rotated.

Response	Percentage
More likely to vote in favor	47%
More likely to vote against	10%
It would make no difference	34%
Don't know (not read)	11%

- 34. Would knowing that the Smithville Middle School property has no room for additional expansion, meaning that the district's only other option besides shifting to Kindergarten through sixth-grade neighborhood schools would be to build a second middle school make you more likely to vote in favor, more likely to vote against, or would it make no difference to you?**

Response	Percentage
More likely to vote in favor	53%
More likely to vote against	9%
It would make no difference	31%
Don't know (not read)	7%

- 35. Would knowing that this ballot issue would allow for the removal of the portable classrooms – which some people call “trailers” – meaning all students would be taught inside school buildings, make you more likely to vote in favor, more likely to vote against, or would it make no difference to you?**

Response	Percentage
More likely to vote in favor	67%
More likely to vote against	4%
It would make no difference	28%
Don't know (not read)	1%

36. Would knowing that the district had not had a tax increase since 1997 make you more likely to vote in favor, more likely to vote against, or would it make no difference to you?

Response	Percentage
More likely to vote in favor	34%
More likely to vote against	7%
It would make no difference	58%
Don't know (not read)	2%

Cross-tabulation: “More likely to vote in favor” and “Make no difference” percentages, based on additional information by location of respondent’s residence and by the length of time living in the district. Note: “n” equals the number of respondents in each subgroup.

Response	Overall	N of 92/E of 169 (n=168)	N of 92/W of 169 (n=57)	S of 92/E of 169 (n=145)	S of 92/W of 169 (n=30)	Up to 5 years (n=46)	5 to 15 years (n=99)	More than 15 years (n=255)
K-6 neighborhood schools relieve crowding/favor	47%	49%	42%	45%	47%	39%	42%	49%
K-6 neighborhood schools relieve crowding/no difference	34%	28%	39%	38%	33%	30%	27%	36%
Keeps district from having to build second MS/favor	53%	58%	47%	52%	40%	46%	51%	55%
Keeps district from having to build second MS/no difference	31%	27%	39%	31%	37%	37%	27%	32%
Removes mobiles/favor	67%	67%	63%	68%	67%	57%	67%	68%
Removes mobiles/no difference	28%	27%	35%	28%	27%	35%	24%	29%
District has not raised taxes since 1997/favor	34%	38%	23%	32%	33%	26%	30%	36%
District has not raised taxes since 1997/no difference	58%	53%	74%	59%	47%	61%	58%	57%

Cross-tabulation: “More likely to vote in favor” and “Make no difference” percentages, based on additional information by age, and by presence of a current or past district student in the household (or no district students ever in the household). Note: “n” equals the number of respondents in each subgroup, and age percentages will not square with “overall,” because three respondents refused to answer this question.

Response	Overall	18 to 34 (n=81)	35 to 54 (n=179)	55 or older (n=137)	Student yes (n=143)	Student past (n=140)	Student never (n=117)
K-6 neighborhood schools relieve crowding/favor	47%	51%	47%	44%	51%	41%	47%
K-6 neighborhood schools relieve crowding/no difference	34%	26%	34%	38%	32%	38%	30%
Keeps district from having to build second MS/favor	53%	53%	55%	51%	55%	48%	56%
Keeps district from having to build second MS/no difference	31%	26%	31%	36%	29%	35%	30%
Removes mobiles/favor	67%	69%	65%	69%	69%	64%	68%
Removes mobiles/no difference	28%	23%	30%	29%	27%	30%	28%
District has not raised taxes since 1997/favor	34%	40%	30%	35%	35%	29%	37%
District has not raised taxes since 1997/no difference	58%	47%	64%	58%	58%	59%	55%

Finding 7: Patrons consult seven of 18 different potential sources of district news “frequently.” “Friends and neighbors,” the local newspaper, and outdoor marquees were the most frequently consulted sources.

The substantive portion of the survey closed by presenting respondents with a list of 18 different potential sources of district news, and asking them which ones they consulted “frequently.”

Seven sources – a fairly healthy number – topped 25%, which is typically seen as the dividing line between sources that should be the focus of the district’s communication efforts and those which may require less attention:

- “Friends and neighbors” – 74%
- *The Smithville Herald* newspaper – 52%
- Outdoor marquees – 46%
- The school district’s website – 37%
- Teachers in the district – 31%
- Individual school newsletters – 31%
- *The Warrior Wire*, which is the district’s printed newsletter – 26%

The high number of district-affiliated sources that made this list suggests strongly that while word of mouth and the local newspaper are the top sources, so, too, is the school district and its personnel.

37. I have just a few more questions. I'm wondering where you turn for information about the Smithville School District, BESIDES news about weather-related school closings. I'm going to read a short list of people and places where you might turn for district news. If you consult this source frequently, say, "Yes." If you consult it only every so often, or you don't consult it at all for district news, say, "No." Let's start with... List was read and rotated.

Response	Percentage
Friends and neighbors	74%
<i>The Smithville Herald</i> newspaper	52%
Outdoor marquees	46%
The school district's website	37%
Teachers in the district	31%
Individual school newsletters	31%
<i>The Warrior Wire</i> , which is the district's printed newsletter	26%
School principals in the district	22%
Local television stations	20%
The School Board, either in person, or when a member of the Board is quoted in the news media	18%
The district's administration, either in person, or when a member of administration is quoted in the news media	15%
The conversation at Lowman's Café	14%
The Chamber of Commerce	12%
The Parent Teacher Organization, also called the PTO	8%
Social networking sites, like Facebook and Twitter	8%
Athletic booster clubs	5%
Local radio stations	3%
Band booster clubs	2%

Finding 8: The survey group tilted toward more long-term residents, but did include 36% who had lived in the area 15 years or less. A blend of ages – with 64% being between 25 and 54 – and a good mix of respondents with different types of student status, made the survey group a solid cross-section.

While respondents had to be a head of household, a registered voter, aware that they lived in the district, and living in a region where there was still room under the quota when they were contacted, the rest of the demographic information was collected, but not subject to quota.

As is always the case, this random selection process leads to a representative sample of respondents. For the Smithville School District study, the group had a high percentage of longer-term residents, a good mix of ages (with close to 2/3 being between 25 and 54), and included 143 current student families, 140 past student families – meaning all the students in the household had graduated – and 117 “never” student families.

My last few questions will help us divide our interviews into groups.

38. How long have you, yourself, lived within the boundaries of the Smithville R-2 School District? Is it...*Choices were read to respondents.*

Response	Percentage
Less than 2 years	4%
2 years to 5 years	7%
More than 5 years to 10 years	9%
More than 10 years to 15 years	16%
More than 15 years	51%
I've lived here all my life	13%

39. In what age group are you? Is it...*Choices were read to respondents.*

Response	Percentage
18 to 24	2%
25 to 34	19%
35 to 44	24%
45 to 54	21%
55 to 64	20%
65 or older	15%
Refused (not read)	1%

40. Are you, or is anyone in your immediate household, employed by the Smithville School District?

Response	Percentage
Yes	2%
No	98%

41. In what capacity is this person employed? Is it... *Asked only of the nine respondents who answered question 40 “yes.” General job titles were provided, and respondents were able to add their own. Only those job titles with at least one mention are displayed below. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed.*

Response	Number
Classroom teacher	4
Food service staff	2
Administrative staff	1
Secretarial staff	1
Building maintenance staff	1

42. Do you have any children or grandchildren who attend school in the Smithville School District right now? *Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below.*

Response	Number
Yes, children	138
Yes, children and grandchildren	5
Yes, grandchildren	65
No	192

43. Do you have any children or grandchildren who previously were students in the district, but who have graduated? *Asked only of the 257 respondents who did not answer question 42 either “Yes, children” or “Yes, children and grandchildren.” Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below.*

Response	Number
Yes, children	135
Yes, children and grandchildren	5
Yes, grandchildren	3
No	114

44. RECORD GENDER

Response	Percentage
Female	55%
Male	46%

Summary

The September 2012 survey of 400 head-of-household, registered voter patrons in the Smithville R-II School District reveals a population that:

- Is very happy with the performance of its school district, giving 14 of 15 people, program, facility and district/patron relationship factors a grade of “B” or better (or the statistical equivalent of a “B”) on the traditional A-F grading scale.
- Is very interested in its school district, with all but one of the 15 factors achieving “Patron Hot Button” status, meaning that more than four out of five patrons felt confident enough in their knowledge of this particular area to offer a grade, rather than to say, “Don’t know.”
- Applauds the work of its teachers, likes the curriculum/academics, appreciates the sports programs and likes the high level of parental involvement, but struggles to find an area that needs attention in the district.
- Supports the idea of a bond issue that would include “construction and renovation,” and finds each of the ideas for that bond issue compelling – particularly the new elementary school.
- Is more enthusiastic about the bond issue, after hearing the details, but becomes somewhat cautious – though still more positive than negative – after hearing the potential tax implications.
- Is positively influenced by most of the additional information about the bond issue (particularly that it would mean the removal of the trailers), but is mostly unmoved by the news that the district’s last tax increase was 1997.
- Consults seven different sources of district news frequently, led by “friends and neighbors” and the local newspaper, but also five different district-affiliated sources.

The sum total of all this data suggests a very happy patron population that likes the ideas being considered – particularly the removal of the trailers and the addition of a new elementary school – but is just being a bit cautious about the potential cost right now.

The challenge for the district going forward is to step up the communications on the project components and – most importantly – the benefits to students and their families, using simple repetitive messages that can help patrons understand the challenges and how this proposal will solve them.