Smithville R-II School District
January 2015 Community and Staff Research
Final Report
February 11, 2015

Introduction

In an effort to provide a venue for members of the community and staff to share their input on district issues past and present, and their views on the best way forward, the Smithville R-II School District engaged Patron Insight, Inc. to conduct a multi-faceted research process during January 2015.

Community members were given the opportunity to comment via an online survey that was posted on the district's website, and a similar survey (with modest wording changes to reflect the different audience) was made available to district staff via a direct link. A total of 618 community members and 107 staff members completed at least a portion of their respective surveys. All responses were delivered directly to Patron Insight.

Additionally, representatives from various stakeholder groups across the community were invited to participate in one of four focus group discussion sessions. Individuals who took part included current district parents, past parents, business leaders, members of the faith community, current and past staff members, and local political leaders. Thirty-three individuals chose to participate in the focus group process, sharing their opinions on the same topics addressed in the online survey, but in the greater detail afforded by the focus group methodology.

The areas covered in this research – both online and in the focus groups – were:

- A review of the past ballot issue, seeking input on why the measure was unsuccessful
- The importance of each of the projects included in the proposal, as the district looks to the future, and other projects (if any) that should be considered for future proposals
- Counsel for the district on the future, both potential ballot box measures and in general
- Views on a potential for the district to offer a specialized, technology-focused elementary school, similar, at least somewhat, to the EPIC School in the Liberty School District and the Wolf School in Springfield.

While the online research did have questions whose answers can be reported statistically (in addition to open-ended opportunities to comment), it, by its very nature, does not draw a true cross-section of the community. As such, online results should always be viewed as more qualitative than quantitative, even with the numerical aspects.

Focus group data is truly qualitative. Even though the effort was made (successfully, in this case) to draw representatives from various segments of the community to participate, the objective is to hear those individuals discuss topics in detail, rather than seeking statistical findings.

In analyzing the results from these research processes, three primary and four secondary themes were consistently expressed through the answers to the online surveys and in commentary during the focus groups. These themes provide the basis for this report of findings, while the data from the two online studies is presented as an appendix.

It is important to note that many of these themes play a role in other themes on the list. This is to say that this list should not necessarily be viewed as seven distinct findings but, instead, as parts of a single story, reflecting the current views of key stakeholders within the district.

Additionally, while many of the factors identified in this report are under the district's control, some are not. Nonetheless, all the observations and insights from those who participated in the research is pertinent to the district, as it continues to determine how best to move forward.

Finally, the order of the themes presented within the two groupings (primary and secondary) in this report is random, and should not be taken as a rank order of importance.

Primary theme: The population growth and demographic evolution of the community has created conflict that has impacted the district.

The community of Smithville is struggling with an identity crisis, and it has clearly affected the residents' relationship with the school district, according to the feedback provided in the research.

To begin the conversation about that relationship, focus group participants were presented with a hypothetical situation: You are working in your yard when someone looking at the house that is for sale next door comes to ask you about the community, as he or she ponders whether to make an offer on the house. What would you tell that house hunter?

Among the most common answers were that the area had low taxes, minimal crime, a neighborly attitude, a sense of community pride, a great school district, and that it was a "small town close to everything in the big city" that the person would need or want. Yet, participants also said that Smithville lacked businesses and restaurants, meaningful local employment opportunities, and diversity. There were also some who said that the notion of "small-town feel" had its limitations, as some long-time residents said they still felt like a "newcomer" or an "outsider" at times.

Most important, however, was the belief that a level of meaningful conflict exists between those who see the benefits of strategic, sustained growth, and those who wish for things to remain small and, for the most part, unchanged.

The focus group participants were diplomatic about their views on this topic, preferring, instead, to see the wisdom of both sides (evidence of the neighborly attitude that they had talked about) and to discuss how it was causing tension in the community. That tension carried over when the subject turned to what the respondent might say – again, in the hypothetical discussion with the prospective new neighbor – about the school district.

While touting the district's great teachers, strong academic performance, multiple opportunities for extracurricular involvement for students, personal attention to students' academic needs, and history of fiscal responsibility, respondents also struggled with the impact of student population growth, the perceived lack of a broad connection with the community (particularly with those who do not have children in school right now), and the changing dynamics of the district/community relationship.

One key example of this was the appreciative conversation about the campus approach, which has created a hub for students, parents and the community at the secondary level, mixed with angst over the fact that it is crowded now (and getting worse), there isn't enough parking, expansion on the current property would be difficult, and so on. The district's issues are, therefore, a microcosm of the community, as it struggles with its own evolution.

Recognizing this, the district should seek to take more of a servant leadership role, as the community sorts through its changes. Doing so would offer the district a greater opportunity to share its story as being one part of the systemic challenges facing the community, changing the conversation away from bricks and mortar, and toward what is best for the students and for Smithville, as a whole.

Primary theme: Communication appears to be primarily responsive, rather than strategic, missing out on opportunities to build the knowledge base among stakeholders about school district needs and challenges.

Without a doubt, the nuances of public school funding are enough to baffle even the most careful observer. For example, it is not at all uncommon to hear a segment of patrons say, "Didn't we just vote on that?" when presented with an operating levy increase proposal several years after the passage of a bond issue, and vice versa.

These kinds of details are not something that typical patrons care to keep front and center in their busy lives, making it the responsibility of school districts to frame their communications in patron-focused terms. It is also critical to recognize one immutable law of communication: Simple, repetitive messages are essential to building understanding.

In both the focus groups and the online surveys, two district/community disconnects were evident:

First, while the district may be making an effort to communicate at a strategic level, it is being received mostly episodically by key stakeholders. In other words, there isn't always a clear connection – in the minds of some of those individuals that the district is trying to reach – from one message to the next, meaning that the details are being lost.

One example of this was the detailed discussion by participants in both research formats about the football field improvements and the construction of the Performing Arts Center. Respondents spoke about these as individual decisions that might have been unwise, "*considering the other needs that the district knew it would be facing*," rather than seeing these facilities as being part of an overall plan.

Another example was the belief by many research participants that the need for roof replacements and a new communications system was a failure on the district's part to adequately budget for these as routine maintenance expenses. Dialogue about the roofs and communications system upgrades had not been part of routine conversations with patrons over several years (according to the research participants), thereby, creating fertile ground for the view that this was a failure to plan.

Second, outbound communication by the district on weighty matters tends to be so complex – at least, according to the research participants – that they have a difficult time understanding what it means to them and to their children. Given the limited time they have to digest such information (and, as mentioned earlier, their somewhat limited interest), their default is more likely to question, rather than to trust, if the material is not communicated in a relatable fashion.

This is particularly evident in ballot issue communications from the district, which, of course, must be informational and not promotional. The findings suggest that the district's efforts to disseminate all the details to everyone may have been overwhelming. Comments in spoken and written form in the research were frequently inaccurate assessments of the projects, the process used to identify them, the costs and other details.

In the future, the district should endeavor to structure its communications at two levels.

Level one is the basic information that most typical residents are interested in hearing more about. What do I need to know about what you are telling me? How will this affect me? When does it start? Does it cost anything? And, most importantly, *Why should I care?* (a particularly important question for individuals who have no students in the district at the present time).

Level two is the details, for those residents who have an interest in digging below the surface. The district's website is an ideal location for such information, because those who want this level of depth will likely start there. This is not to say that some printed materials should not have details beyond the basic facts. It just seems evident from this research that most typical patrons will feel more connected to the district's news and information, if it is structured in such a way that it relates to the aspects that matter most to them – the reader, viewer and listener – not to the district.

Complex information – such as facility plans, the reasons behind them, and what they will mean to typical residents – must be presented simply, consistently and over a longer period of time than what it appears has taken place in the past (based on the misunderstandings about some nuances of this proposal). An old maxim of the advertising world should be the touchstone, "When you have grown weary of saying things over and over again, the people you are trying to reach are finally beginning to realize that you are talking to them."

Primary theme: A confluence of issues – highlighted by, but not limited to, the personnel issue last fall – has measurably impacted the patrons' default level of trust.

In this day and age of the "eight-second sound bite" news attention span – now, more accurately, the quick scan of Facebook, blogs and Twitter, etc. – the timing of the district's decision regarding its former high school principal was not favorable for the ballot issue. Research participants said that the events surrounding that situation caused some residents to cast a negative vote or to just not vote at all, because they were unsettled by the events that had taken place (no matter how they may have felt about the decision itself).

In the focus groups, discussion of this issue then led to other questions, concerns and doubts, focusing on another high-profile personnel issue that took place this fall, the decisions to upgrade the football stadium and to construct a Performing Arts Center, and the way in which the Board of Education meeting where the high school principal's status was to be discussed, was managed, among others. These topics were also prevalent among the issues expressed in the online surveys with the community and staff.

Individually, these decisions and situations might have caused a short-term blip in the district's relationship with the community. However, the community's own evolutionary struggles, the communication challenges defined above, the previous loss at the ballot box, and these incidents appear to have created a situation where the benefit-of-the-doubt level of trust in the district seems to have waned.

The confidentiality of online research and the dynamic found in the focus group process led to a greater number of dramatic pronouncements about this situation than would likely be found among a cross-section of typical residents. (Those who participate in online research, and those who consent to be part of focus groups, tend to be more passionate members of the target audience.) Yet, even recognizing that fact about these processes, it seems likely that the district should take steps to re-establish its position among typical residents.

Based on the comments from research participants, simplified and stepped up communications would be an important part of this process, as would strategically building stronger relationships with the disparate types of individuals and groups that are the current face of Smithville. These are just preliminary ideas for consideration, as it will be important for the school district to think of this as a long-term strategic challenge, rather than one that can best addressed through quick tactical adjustments.

Secondary theme: While many of the proposed projects were viewed as having merit, concerns (many unrelated to the projects themselves) were still prevalent, casting doubt on the entire proposal.

Part of both research processes was a review of the previous proposal, to determine what role – if any – the projects themselves might have played in the proposal being defeated. The results would suggest that while the support for the projects on the list was certainly varied, it would be inaccurate to contend that one or more of them was so disliked that it (or they) led to the loss.

In fact, participants said that, for the most part, the ballot issue lost, because of the cost, the fact that it was a levy rather than a bond, and concerns about the district, based on the issues with the high school principal.

When asked to discuss whether or not the district should include the existing projects in a future proposal, there seemed to be little quarrel about including the roofs, the entrance renovations for security purposes and the new elementary school. The communications system and the redoing of the bus loop and drop off at the Primary Elementary School were less enthusiastically supported but, again, were not seen as being a major concern that caused the ballot issue to fail, in and of themselves.

Yet, each project (with the exception of the entrance renovations) underwent a higher than normal degree of what might be called "dissection," because of the surrounding views about the district itself.

As mentioned earlier, the roofs and the communications system projects were questioned, because some saw their inclusion as being evidence that the district had not adequately planned for their replacement. The bus loop and drop-off reconstruction was seen as a cosmetic expense, rather than a major issue, by those who brought it up as a concern. And, as will be discussed below, the new elementary school was seen as much more life-changing for families in the district, than simply being a relief to overcrowding.

Most of these concerns, taken individually, would seem to be modest enough that they could be effectively addressed through strategic communications that presented the benefits and answered questions. In this case, however, a bit of a domino effect appears to have taken place – begun by the issues involving the district's recent decisions, and then continued by questions about the projects themselves.

Secondary theme: The proposed change to the neighborhood schools has created a meaningful divide in the community, with a diverse group of residents on both sides expressing opinions on many nuances of this potential realignment, from its possible impact on property values, to whether it will create "have" and "have not" schools.

One of the most difficult conversations any school district has with its patrons is on the subject of reorganizing which students attend which school. Students, families and the community become accustomed to a certain flow of students from one school to the next, and a change to that familiar pattern is typically met with some measurable opposition.

The research results – particularly with the focus group participants – would suggest that the school district likely underestimated the reaction a proposed change from graded centers to neighborhood schools would stimulate. Blended in with the general concerns about how the Smithville community is changing, because of growth, the idea to switch from the familiar to something new was met with a notable level of consternation.

This is not to suggest that all participants were in opposition. Some saw it as a natural progression for a school district that is dealing with growth, and many of them even commented on their own positive experiences in neighborhood schools when they were children.

Each of these arguments was, however, met with a rebuttal from those who prefer graded centers, pointing out concerns about how the school populations will be allocated, how "old" and "new" schools could impact the learning experiences of students and property values for homeowners, and even sadness over the loss of "all students in one grade knowing each other." (Interestingly, in one group, this idea was politely dismissed by a teacher participant, who spoke about the large number of sections in the grade she teaches, saying, "They really only know the students in their class and maybe a few others. We really don't spend much time with the entire grade.")

To the research participants with a concern, the negative impacts of changing a system that they believe works – graded centers – far outweigh the extra space and long-term solution benefits of constructing a new building and moving to a neighborhood school concept.

As the district looks to the future, the temptation would be to provide data point after data point to make the case for neighborhood schools as the best solution to the overcrowding issue. Doing so in a way that is purely didactic will only make the situation worse for those in the community who feel that their genuine concerns are not being heard. Once again, the goal should be to field a strategic communications program on this topic – one that encourages dialogue and reports the results of that dialogue, to keep the conversation moving toward a solution.

Secondary theme: The cost aspects of the proposal – the amount, the fact that it was a levy rather than a bond, and the expected length of time before sunset – made things more difficult, given the general tone in the community.

It is important to note that the size of the requested increase in the operating levy (79 cents) was not insignificant, in terms of why the ballot issue was defeated. In fact, it was seen as the number one reason in both online surveys. The total cost also received frequent mentions in the focus groups, with many participants suggesting that it would be a "tough sell" to those on a fixed income and/or those without a direct connection to the school district (such as being a current district parent), who may feel that they have already fulfilled their responsibility to support the schools financially.

Yet, it is also clear that the concerns about the cost went deeper, for some, than just the 79-cent price tag. The fact that it was a levy, rather than a bond, was seen as the third-most important reason that the ballot issue lost, according to both community and staff online research participants. Several focus group members talked about this as well, questioning the motives behind the decision and even wondering if the district was "so burdened with debt" that this was the only way to move projects forward.

To a lesser extent, there was conversation about the length of time before this tax would sunset, with many who had that concern talking about this being a "long-term obligation" that required more thought before there would be a willingness to commit to it.

While concerns about a proposal's price tag are found in any community that is considering a ballot issue where there would be a cost to taxpayers, Smithville's current state of mind involving the school district certainly appears to have added fuel to these concerns, suggesting that the district's presentation of the cost proposal may have not resonated with typical patrons.

Secondary theme: The idea to create a specialized elementary school generated confusion over its inner workings, concerns about the fairness of the selection process, and commentary about the timing being less than ideal, given all the other needs in the district.

The focus groups and online surveys closed with a brief description of a specialized kind of elementary school, with a strong focus on technology, a significant amount of both individual and team work, and a place where students would "propose and defend solutions to real-world issues." Students and families who were interested in such a school would be entered into a lottery, where the selections would be made at random. After reading this description online, or hearing it in the focus groups, respondents were asked to share their open-ended thoughts on this concept.

While there was some appeal to the focus on technology and the more personalized educational approach, the overall concept drew more skepticism than support.

Participants found the idea to be a diversion when, "The district has much more significant issues to deal with right now." They thought it strayed too far into technology and away from providing a basic foundation for each student. They also worried about how these students would blend into a more traditional setting, once arriving at middle school.

Most significantly, however, they found the entire concept of a lottery to make the selection of students to be rife with potential problems – from competition among parents, to students feeling snubbed, to the risk that such a system could be manipulated – making such a proposition unlikely to generate a notable level of support for the time being.

Summary

The results from the three-part research process that concluded in late January in the Smithville School District can be distilled into three clear recommendations, based on the feedback from the 107 staff online participants and the 651 community members (33 in the focus groups and 618 in the online survey) who took part.

First, communication should move from more of a tactical, episodic approach to a strategic level.

With the limited attention spans of typical residents in any community – particularly on subjects that they believe don't immediately affect them or require action – the days when school districts can "rally the community" to support a ballot issue are long gone.

Communication on needs, benefits, expectations and concerns must be a full-time assignment, seeking to educate key stakeholders at every step. The objective is to build awareness and familiarity to the point that when it comes time for a ballot issue, its arrival is expected in the community and the needs that it will address are already well-known. Such a strategic approach does not guarantee success, of course, but it does bring patrons more into the conversation, showing them the plan along the way.

A strategic approach also includes more well-publicized opportunities for two-way communication with those in the community. Every comment or criticism shared by a constituent is an opportunity for dialogue, and a chance to better understand and respond to misunderstandings (such as the belief that major roof replacements can be addressed through the "maintenance budget"), before they become widespread. Even the venues that may not (at least initially) stimulate much feedback should be promoted and celebrated, as a way to say, loud and clear, "We are listening."

Second, "overcommunicate" on issues, and in situations, that fall under the general categories of "trust" and/or "transparency."

The concept of trust shares a lot with the familiar expression that every communicator knows well, "Perception is reality."

A person, a company or a school district can build up a reservoir of trust through good works, following through on promises, and actively responding to concerns. The biggest risk to trust, however, is assuming that that reservoir will be sufficient to navigate more difficult situations without active attention.

It is during those times when the district should commit to overcommunicating – in essence, overwhelming the community (or whatever audience is affected) with easy-to-understand information about the topic at hand, disseminated in many venues and regularly updated. Even if the topic is uncomfortable, or the news that must be delivered is unfortunate, taking the lead in getting the information out early, clearly and consistently, and being responsive as the situation changes, provides proof to the pledge to be transparent.

The district can likely already demonstrate, chapter and verse, how it has made it a practice to share important information with key stakeholders. For whatever reason, some of that information has either not been received, or has not been understood, leading to the perception that the district may not be being completely transparent.

Changing that perception will require a change in approach, particularly when the subjects to be covered are difficult or complex.

Third, seek additional leadership opportunities as Smithville, the community, deals with its own growing pains.

The district's challenges with its student population growth are a direct result of its history of solid academic performance, the draw of a mid-size district for families seeking opportunities for their children, and the appeal of Smithville as a destination.

As the district grows, so grows the community, and vice versa, creating needs beyond the current class size count that offer leadership opportunities for the school district. Taking an active role in helping the community effectively manage growth will send a strong message: The school district is "all in" for Smithville, and wants to be part of maintaining what we cherish about our community, while also addressing the growth we are experiencing.

What that leadership looks like will need to be the subject of discussions within the district and with city leaders, but it should go beyond membership and participation in various local civic and business groups. Because of its status as a major employer, and as the educator of local students, the district has a right and a responsibility to claim such a leadership role. Doing so will assure the district that its needs are part of the conversation about the ongoing evolution of Smithville.

Appendix – Online survey results

For a two-week period in January, an online survey was made available to residents (via a link on the Smithville School District website), while a separate, but nearly identical, survey was made available to district staff via a direct link sent to them.

A total of 618 area residents and 107 staff members chose to take part, by answering some or all of the questions on their respective surveys. The results shown below make use of weighted scales, where appropriate, to help provide sharper clarity in terms of the views of all participants. Where there were differences in wording, the question language from the community survey is displayed below. In cases where there is a top-to-bottom rank order, the community responses are used as the basis for the way the order is shown.

Additionally, responses to open-ended questions were coded, meaning that common words, phrases and ideas were gathered together to provide a clear picture of the opinions of each specific audience. The notation "other" in the charts references the number of answers that were not mentioned in enough quantity to appear in the chart.

In terms of demographics, the following information was provided by survey participants:

Community Online Survey

Number of respondents – 618

Student status:

Number of respondents with a current district student in the household – 465
Number of respondents who do not have a current district student in the household – 92
(Individuals who chose not to answer this question – 61)

Where students attend school:

Smithville High School – 201
Upper Elementary School – 197
Smithville Middle School – 185
Primary Elementary School – 162
Early Childhood Center – 14
(Individuals who chose not to answer this question – 157)

Location of residence:

North of Highway 92/East of Highway 169 – 273
South of Highway 92/East of Highway 169 – 149
North of Highway 92/West of Highway 169 – 85
South of Highway 92/West of Highway 169 – 41
(Individuals who chose not to answer this question – 70)

Staff Online Survey

Number of respondents – 107

Staff status:

Certified staff – 70
Classified staff – 20
Administration – 4
(Individuals who chose not to answer this question – 13)

Location of residence:

Inside the boundaries of the Smithville R-II School District – 50
Outside the boundaries of the Smithville R-II School District – 45
(Individuals who chose not to answer this question – 12)

Since the election in November, the school district has heard from a lot of residents about why they believe the proposal was defeated. The reasons we have heard are listed below. Please indicate how important you think each reason was. *Response options were "Very important," "Somewhat important," "Neither important nor unimportant," "Not very important" and "Not at all important." Results are shown as the combined "Very important/Somewhat important" percentage.*

Reason	Community survey (n=618)	Staff survey (n=107)
The cost (a 79-cent levy increase) of the proposal	76%	90%
That it was a levy increase, rather than a bond issue	64%	66%
Concerns about the district, based on the issues with the high school principal	57%	64%
The proposal included building a new Kindergarten through 6th grade elementary school	56%	65%
The proposal included renovations to the entrances at the district's existing schools to upgrade security	51%	48%
A lack of information about the proposal provided by the district	48%	40%
Doubt in the community about the student population numbers/growth projections	46%	46%
The plan to upgrade the district's communications system	40%	38%
The messages from the opposition that arrived in the mail and via telephone calls	36%	54%
The roofing projects that were included in the proposal	35%	39%
The plan to redesign the bus loop and drop off area at the Primary Elementary School	31%	33%

Of this list, which one do you think was the most important reason the levy proposal lost? Second-most important? Third-most important? *Results are shown using a 3-point weighted scale, with 3 points for each "Most important" response, down to 1 point for each "Third-most important" answer.*

Reason	Community survey point totals (n=618)	Staff survey point totals (n=107)
The cost (a 79-cent levy increase) of the proposal	1,127	201
Concerns about the district, based on the issues with the high school principal	540	126
That it was a levy increase, rather than a bond issue	533	73
The proposal included building a new Kindergarten through 6th grade elementary school	293	26
Doubt in the community about the student population numbers/growth projections	216	43
A lack of information about the proposal provided by the district	197	27
The messages from the opposition that arrived in the mail and via telephone calls	173	49
The proposal included renovations to the entrances at the district's existing schools to upgrade security	123	7
The plan to upgrade the district's communications system	55	10
The plan to redesign the bus loop and drop off area at the Primary Elementary School	51	1
The roofing projects that were included in the proposal	50	3

If you think there were other reasons that the proposal lost, please note them here. If not, please skip this question. *A total of 181 community members and 24 staff members chose to respond. Their answers were coded, based on common words, phrases and ideas. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below. Only most frequent answers displayed.*

<u>**Community responses**</u>

Response	Number
Image of district leadership/need changes in administration	55
Don't want tax increase/feel it is a waste of money	47
Poor budget management/wants vs. needs	40
Poor voter turnout/high opposition	27
Need to narrow project scope/prioritize most critical	22
Poor communication/campaign/education about needs	21
Personnel hiring/firing/discipline practices	20
Don't like idea of neighborhood schools/don't want new elementary school	18
Lack of transparency/honesty	11
High school projects more critical (parking, classrooms)	5
Length of levy/number of years	3
Other	3
Not joining Suburban Conference	2

<u>**Staff responses**</u>

Response	Number
Distrust of/lack of consistency – leadership	7
Other	6
Don't want tax increase	2
Lack of information/misinformed	2
Poor budget management	2

As the district looks to the future, how much of a priority do you think these projects are? *Answer options were "High priority, "Medium priority" "Low priority" and "Not a priority." Results are shown as the combined "High priority/Medium priority" percentage.*

Project	Community survey (n=618)	Staff survey (n=107)
New elementary school	86%	100%
Roofing projects	83%	94%
Renovations to the entrances to the existing schools to upgrade security	79%	91%
Upgrading the district's communications system	64%	83%
Redoing the bus loop and parent drop off at the Primary Elementary School	46%	52%

Please rank order these, from "1 – Most important" to "5 – Least important." If you said that one or more projects was/were "Not a priority," please leave the line blank for that/those projects. *Results are shown using a weighted scale, with 5 points for each "1 – Most important" response, down to 1 point for each "5 – Least important."*

Project	Community survey point totals (n=618)	Staff survey point totals (n=107)
New elementary school	2,159	437
Roofing projects	1,854	325
Renovations to the entrances to the existing schools to upgrade security	1,657	283
Upgrading the district's communications system	1,211	223
Redoing the bus loop and parent drop off at the Primary Elementary School	926	140

Are there other projects that you think should be priorities? If so, please list them here. If not, please skip this question. *A total of 79 community members and eight staff members chose to respond. Community answers were coded, based on common words, phrases and ideas. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below. Only most frequent answers displayed. Staff answers were so few in number, that all eight verbatim comments are displayed.*

Community responses

Response	Number
Improve traffic flow/parking – all schools	17
Build new/add on to high school first	12
Add on/improve athletic/fitness facilities	10
Renovate elementary, not build new	8
Add on/new classrooms at the middle school first	7
Better safety measures	7
Budget more wisely/fiscal responsibility	7
Narrow scope of projects list, focus on those that address overcrowding	7
Better lunch program/facilities	5
Need changes in administration/staff/hiring practices	5
Improve classroom resources/quality of education	4
Bigger middle school/high school band room	3
Better after-school programs	2
Explain the plan better	2
Other	2

Staff responses

These are not ballot issues, but things I feel are important that I have wanted to share. Now that schools are getting more computer carts, I suggest getting rid of computer labs and converting them back into classrooms to help with space issues. Cosmetic upgrades: repaint schools' main entrances and hallways. Buildings are looking rundown. We need to show that we take care of our buildings, and provide a warm, safe environment, not an institution. First impressions matter and this is what people see when they enter our buildings.

Putting more technology in our students' hands, one to one.

The middle school is in need of additional classroom space, specifically, the band program. The high school is in need of extended cafeteria space. I also feel that the class sizes are getting very large. If we want to offer quality educational experiences, smaller class sizes are a must.

There is a need for a specific plan for an Early Childhood space that includes consideration for the needs of that population as a priority.

Textbooks and computers.

Teachers' salaries should be included on the next levy.

Please consider adding an initiative to add on to the high school. This building has the highest student population. Existing parents are likely to vote in favor of it as well as parents of younger children, because it affects them in the future.

Practice facility for wrestling, dance team, etc.

It is likely that the district will return to the voters at some point in the future with a revised proposal. Whether or not you think you would vote for such a proposal, what advice would you give the district as it considers its next steps? *A total of 391 community members and 48 staff members chose to respond. Their answers were coded, based on common words, phrases and ideas. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below. Only most frequent answers displayed.*

<u>**Community responses**</u>

Response	Number
More/better/focused communications/campaign	98
Get community involved/out to vote, especially younger/older voters	68
Improve image of district leadership/need changes in administration	67
Explore lower cost/no-tax-increase option	59
Narrow scope of projects list, focus on those that address overcrowding, safety	58
Manage budget better/research other funding options	55
Educate public better/invite to schools – overcrowding issues	52
Be more transparent/honest	34
Manage personnel issues better	21
Consider alternatives to new elementary school/neighborhood schools	16
Keep trying/don't give up	16
Propose a bond issue, instead of levy	16
Focus on safety issues	10
None/I don't know	8
Focus on middle school/high school needs	7
Wait before trying again/during national election	7
Provide tax comparison data, other districts	5
Other	4
Set reasonable sunset/end date	2

Staff responses

Response	Number
More/better communications/campaign	15
Other	14
Get community/staff/students involved in promotions	10
Educate public better – overcrowding issues	7
Improve relationship/image of district leadership	7
Invite community to tour schools – see issues	5
Be more transparent/honest	4

One idea that has been discussed for the future is to create a specialized kind of elementary school, similar to the EPIC School in the Liberty School District, and the Wolf School in the Springfield, Missouri, School District. This school would be for the elementary grade, and would have a strong focus on technology in the classroom. Students would work independently, and in teams, at a personalized pace, and would identify, propose and defend solutions to real-world issues. Families who would like their children to attend this school would be placed in a lottery system to determine who is enrolled. What aspects of this concept are most appealing to you? *A total of 377 community members and 59 staff members chose to respond. Their answers were coded, based on common words, phrases and ideas. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below. Only most frequent answers displayed.*

Community responses

Response	Number
Don't like/nothing/back to basics/doesn't address current needs	140
Focus on technology	103
Personalized pace/specialized/independence	63
Real-world/hands-on learning/team environment	50
Great idea/innovative/forward thinking	30
Don't know/need more information	20
Beneficial to gifted/advanced students	15
Create new school/address overcrowding issues	5
Technology should be equal district-wide	2

Staff responses

Response	Number
Focus on technology	27
Don't like at all/none/nothing	17
Personalized pace/independence	15
Other	7
Real-world/hands-on learning	5
Focus on EPIC	2

What, if anything, about this concept would concern you? *A total of 375 community members and 70 staff members chose to respond. Their answers were coded, based on common words, phrases and ideas. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below. Only most frequent answers displayed.*

<u>**Community responses**</u>

Response	Number
Lottery/not all can attend/parent competition	205
Doesn't emphasize basics – math, reading, writing	43
Don't know/need more information/nothing	37
Cost/maintenance	36
Need more/better technology/resources district-wide	22
Lack of structure/regular interaction with teacher	22
Better suited for middle school/high school	16
Challenge of transitioning to middle school/too specialized	16
Smithville too small/segregation	15
Staffing/teacher support/training	13
How return to regular classroom, if not right fit	4
Need changes in administration	3
Need to research more/data to support	3
Other	3
Technology support	2

<u>**Staff responses**</u>

Response	Number
Lottery/not all can attend/parent competition	34
Other	17
Getting community buy-in	10
Doesn't emphasize basics – math, reading, writing	6
Personalized pace/working independently	6
How meet standards/testing	5
Need more/better technology district-wide	5
Nothing	2
Teacher support/training	2

What else would you like to know about this concept – either for your own children, or just in general? *A total of 251 community members and 38 staff members chose to respond. Their answers were coded, based on common words, phrases and ideas. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below. Only most frequent answers displayed.*

<u>**Community responses**</u>

Response	Number
More information/enough research to back up	78
Nothing/good idea	46
Bad idea/against	28
Curriculum/class structure/requirements	26
Cost/funding	19
How lottery works/open to everyone/how qualify	19
How assess/transition students to secondary schools	11
Why just one school/why not district-wide program	11
Why at the elementary level only	9
Staffing/teachers' roles/training	8
Class sizes/student population size	7
How long is each student in program/opt-out option	7
Does this replace the school on the bond levy proposal	6
How will technology be used	6
Other	5
Core/basics still taught	4
Which grades participate	3
Location/transportation	2

<u>**Staff responses**</u>

Response	Number
Other	17
More information/details on how school will work	6
Enough research/data to back up	3
How it will affect teachers/curriculum	4
Cost/funding	2
How affect technology district-wide	2
How determine student makeup/caliber	2
Student accountability/standards	2