



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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CASE STUDY: West Bend Joint School District #1

OVERVIEW

West Bend Joint School District had extensive space and renovation needs in their large, geographically-diverse community. After a \$112 million comprehensive referendum failed in 2007, they needed a plan to rebuilt community support after a contentious election, combat negative and misleading information being disseminated, educate the community on the complex issues they faced, and clearly present alternative solutions for their building needs. The original vote was scheduled for Fall of 2008, and then postponed to Spring of 2009 due to economic concerns.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY AND DETAILS

Many residents had a lack of trust in the public school system, and after the original referendum was proposed, felt that their views were not being heard. District leadership also had to contend with persistent, vocal naysayers that demanded a great deal of attention. The level of knowledge and interest in the referenda was high, and public information meetings drew attendees.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS

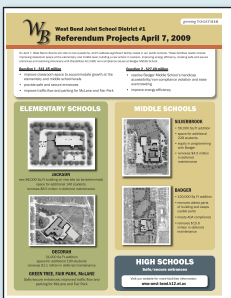
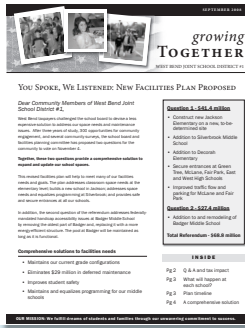
We took a step away from the contentious details, and developed a campaign to remind the community that schools are a community-wide resource, benefiting everyone. A video was developed to remind residents of the value of safe, up-to-date schools for the entire community. Respected business and community leaders were invited to participate, talking about the good things that our schools were doing, and why an investment in them was a sound fiscal decision. Videos were distributed community-wide in banks, grocery stores, and the YMCA.

PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

With so many changes to the building plan, clear communication was vital. Graphical, easy to read information was developed to reduce confusion and present the plans as clearly as possible.

RESULTS

In April 2009, the community passed a \$29 million referendum for middle school renovations, but declined to pass a referendum to build a new elementary school. However, the district was able to move from 72% of voters saying no to any kind of referendum, to 50% saying yes - in an extraordinarily difficult economic market. With good management of continued public communications, we are hopeful they will continue to build positive community goodwill and be able to go before voters with additional plans as needed.



TOOLBOX

- Mail / online community survey
- Referendum identity
- Comprehensive plan
- "Growing Together" theme
- "Growing Together" video
- Posters for renovations
- District-wide newsletter and post-card mailings
- Community engagement opportunities
- Voter reminder postcards