SUPERINTENDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF SCHOOL

CONSTRUCTION REFERENDUMS FROM 2008-2010 IN THE STATE OF INDIANA

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Department of Educational Leadership

Indiana State University

Terre Haute, Indiana

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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May 2012

Keywords: Referendum, School, Construction, Superintendent, Indiana

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of superintendents who have conducted both successful and unsuccessful school construction referendums in the state of Indiana from 2008-2010. This research will serve as a guide for superintendents who will undergo a school construction referendum, especially in Indiana. This study will guide superintendents to conduct the school construction referendum in a proscribed manner to increase the chances of having a successful outcome. The study used qualitative information from four superintendents who were successful with their school construction referendums and from four superintendents who were not successful with their school construction referendums. Common themes were found with this information and compiled to channel best practices for conducting a school construction referendum. The literature points to numerous items that should be done in order to increase the chance of being successful with the referendum. The findings of this study suggest that superintendents need to have a clear communication plan, a strong community committee, and a long range facility plan in order to be successful. The findings of this study continue to suggest that election strategies must be followed in order to be successful and an in depth knowledge of the community is needed to determine supporters and opposition to the referendum.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank a great many people who have helped me along the way with this goal. Hopefully I will acknowledge everyone who had an impact on my journey.

To my wife, Sally Rideout Lambert, first and foremost. You have put up with this long journey and let me follow this road at my own pace. I love you and I thank you for your unconditional support.

To my sisters who are my only family, Ellie Batdorf, Margo Lambert, and Amy Lambert. I am thankful that you all had a part in shaping me.

To my mother and father, may they rest in peace, Walter and Nancy. I am still guided by you each and every day on this journey.

To Tom Batdorf, my brother-in-law, you are my brother that I never had growing up and you have been patient and a guide for me throughout the years.

To my teachers and staff for you all have made a difference in my life and I am truly thankful to work with professional educators.

To my school corporation, Warrick County School Corporation, since they allowed me to take on this journey and they have been a major part of my educational career.

To the great people in the Department of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University. Without you, this acknowledgement page would not exist.

To Dr. Terry McDaniel, thank you for your patience and guidance throughout my long journey.

To Dr. Robert "Bob" Boyd, I will never forget the things you have taught me and I hope to impart your knowledge onto future generations of education leaders.

To Dr. Gina Berridge, you are the one that started my career and I am happy to have you at the pinnacle of my education experience. Thank you for your guidance.

To all my students I have had through the years. Each and every day you remind me as to why I do the job that I do. I hope I have set you on toward a terrific journey in life.

And lastly, to my shipmates, if it were not for you I would not be here on this day. I thank you for that and I will forever remember the sacrifices you all made.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Indiana between 2000 and 2009, 197 new schools were built (Indiana Department of

Local Government Finance [DLGF], n.d.; National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities,

2010), and in 2010 there were five new school projects were on the books. The total cost of

doing all these construction projects was $3,004,321,047 (DLGF, n.d.; National Clearinghouse

for Educational Facilities, 2010). This was the time period most school corporations could come

before the DLGF board to have their school construction approved if they had no remonstrance

filed against the school corporation by the community's taxpayers. The rules have changed since

this time and school corporations are now required to have a referendum as per House Enrolled

Act 1001, which was signed by Governor Mitch Daniels in March 2008. The 2005-2007 School

Construction Report that was produced by the DLGF in January 2009 stated,

> Voters in the local community will make the final determination regarding the approval
>
> of a school construction project. The DLGF no longer is required to approve construction
>
> projects initiated after July 1, 2008. School corporations still are required to hold a
>
> preliminary hearing of determination during which time the school board notifies the
>
> public of the intention to build, add on to or remodel and to borrow the money to fund the
>
> construction project. If community members do not object to the proposed project or they
>
> do not file enough signatures on a petition to initiate a referendum or petition and

remonstrance process, the school district can move forward with its construction project. If 100 or more registered voters or property owners sign a petition opposing a school construction project within the legal timeframe, the project is subject to either the petition and remonstrance process or referendum process. Elementary and middle school construction projects are subject to the referendum process if the projected cost is more than $10 million, and high school construction projects are subject to the referendum process if the projected cost is more than $20 million. Construction projects with projected costs less than these thresholds will be subject to the petition and remonstrance process. In either process, if a majority of the participating individuals are in favor of the project, the district may proceed with the construction process. (pp. 11-12)

An added dimension to the referendum process within the state of Indiana is the property tax cap referendum that was on the ballot in November 2010. This referendum asked voters to make it a part of the Indiana constitution to place a cap on certain pieces of property. Primary residences would be placed at 1% cap, other residential property such as apartments would be at a 2% cap along with agricultural land, and other real property such as businesses would be placed at the 3% cap. This constitutional referendum passed with an overwhelming majority of 72% to 28% in favor of adding these caps to the Indiana constitution. This significant change to determining property taxes will certainly play into the school construction referendum process in the coming years.

These property tax caps shift costs of delivering community services towards the agriculture and business sectors. Dr. Larry DeBoer of Purdue University conducted a study of 91 Indiana counties for the cost of community services (COCS) to compare local government

service costs by sector to the revenues that are collected to pay these costs. DeBoer's (2010) study found the following to hold true, stating,

> When counties and school corporations are combined, this study agrees with past results. The residential sector imposes more costs on counties and school corporations combined than it pays in revenues, for all counties under all assumptions about the allocation of costs and revenue among sectors. The agricultural and business sectors impose fewer costs on counties and school corporations combined than they pay in revenues, for almost all counties and allocation assumptions.
>
> These results are dominated by school corporations, which are units of government which spend five times as much as counties. COCS analysis assumes that all school costs are imposed by the residential category. Since property taxes fund a part of school costs, and property taxes are paid more by business and agriculture, and less by residential, the residential ratio for schools is greater than one. The agricultural and business ratios for schools are zero. (p. 40)

With the burden shifted to agricultural and business property the tax caps have lessened the revenue raised from residential units. Will they now provide greater support to schools through referendums?

The state has also shifted the education budgets of local school corporations from the property taxes to an increased sales tax, which went up one percentage point to seven percent. The only financial items of the school corporation's budget that is now attached to the property tax is capital projects and bus replacement. The state now sends money directly to school corporations from the general fund, meaning schools are mainly funded from income taxes and the increased sales tax since property taxes have been constitutionally capped.

Now that school corporations must obtain taxpayer support through a referendum process, it has made the task of constructing a new school facility all the more difficult. In the years prior to this new process of having a referendum, school corporations only had to perform increased work to get the money for a construction project if it was remonstrated by the taxpayers.

> Planning and building a school today is a very complex undertaking. Large numbers of federal, state, and local agencies, and a multitude of specialized individuals are involved both before and after the local governing board announces its intent to erect or rehabilitate a school plant. The time is past when the concerted efforts of a school board and local builders could bring about the completion of an adequate school plant within a short time. (MacConnell, 1957, p. 1)

This statement comes from a book published in 1957, a time that makes current approval processes for new construction look simple. The process of constructing a school has and will increasingly become more difficult in the future for school corporations in the state of Indiana.

As buildings age in Indiana there will be a constant need for new buildings, and as certain school corporations around the state continue to see growth, they too will need new buildings. The last major study about school building conditions was completed by the General Accounting Office (GAO) in 1995 when it published the *Condition of America's Schools* report. The GAO report (1995) stated,

> Older buildings often have a more sound infrastructure than new buildings. Buildings built in the early years of this century–or before–frequently were built for a life span of 50 to 100 years while more modern buildings, particularly those built after 1970, were designed to have a life span of only 20 to 30 years. (p. 18)

Although it is not readily apparent how old the school buildings are in the state of Indiana, there is a need to replace the older buildings for newer and smaller, more efficient structures. The rise of energy costs and the need for school corporations to cut those costs will inevitably require school corporations to look for ways to improve energy efficiency, and this can be easily done through the construction of newer facilities.

The supplement to the GAO (1995) report, profiled the individual states, found that Indiana had 29% of its schools with at least one inadequate building feature of any type, which equates to 553 school buildings of the 1,905 reported. The report continued to show that 67% of the schools had at least one unsatisfactory environmental factor, which could include lighting, heating, ventilation, indoor air quality, acoustics, space flexibility, energy efficiency, or physical security. Lastly, the report found that 56% of the schools in Indiana had at least one inadequate building feature, which could include roofs, foundations/floors, exterior walls/windows, interior finishes, plumbing, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, electrical power, electrical lighting, or life safety codes. The largest statistic that should cause alarm from a fifteen year old report is the 28% or 533 of the schools that had at least one inadequate building feature and one inadequate building type (GAO, 1995).

This supplemental report also stated a cost range for the amount needed to upgrade or repair a school to good overall condition. This range was from $1,800 to $75,155,500 per school building to bring them up to good overall condition. The report continued to show that 85% or 1,619 of the 1,905 schools reported a need to upgrade or repair on-site buildings to good overall condition (GAO, 1995). Indiana is similar in its need to upgrade its school facilities. The remonstrance process was the way to do it before 2008 when the referendum process came into law.

The 2008 year saw five total referendums, and four of those passed. In 2009, there were 15 referendums on the ballot that dealt with renovations to existing facilities. Only two of the 15 referendums passed. In May 2010, seven referendums were on the ballot for renovations to existing facilities and new construction projects. Three out of the seven referendums passed during this time period. Two that passed had new elementary school construction projects as well as some renovations to other existing facilities. The other one that passed was only for a new elementary school. Five referendums were on the ballot in the November 2010 election, and only two of those passed. Since 2008, there have been a total of 31 construction referendums in the state of Indiana with only 11 passing.

The superintendent of any Indiana school corporation needs to know what must be done in order to succeed at the polls when it comes to a new school construction referendum. Gone are the days where the superintendent and the school corporation do not need to act like a public relations machine or political campaign. Referendums are political campaigns and the school corporation must operate with public relations constantly at the forefront (Carroll & Carroll, 2000; Holt, 2002; Lifto & Senden, 2004).

In the research conducted by Lifto and Senden (2004), they stated the following about public relations:

Serving as a foundation for successful finance elections, the quality of public engagement and related communication strategies are evident throughout the research. The most successful districts achieve three key attributes when it comes to public relations:

- Outstanding quality
- Ongoing public relations

- Focused messages to different audiences emphasizing the proposal's purpose and benefits. (p. 4)

The ongoing public relations component is an area to which many superintendents are not accustomed. Only a handful of larger school corporations have a public relations expert on staff and much of this duty falls on the shoulders of superintendents in smaller districts.

Holt (2002) continued this belief about the superintendent when it comes to public relations. "It is the responsibility of the superintendent to translate the aspirations of the community and its school board concerning educational environments into goals that can be understood as realistic plans for action" (Holt, 2002, p. 30). The superintendent is a visionary and must be able to communicate to the community, teachers, and students. Each and every piece of communication must be well crafted.

School corporations can handle public relation machines and there are many business corporations as well as non-profit organizations that do public relations rather easily. Many of these non-profit organizations do public relations very well. Carroll & Carroll (2000) stated,

Successful nonprofit organizations, such as the Girl Scouts and the United Way, and profitable corporations, such as Disney and L.L. Bean, have learned the secret to capturing and then retaining customer support. They focus on a single strategic objective at all times: serving their consumers or customers well, time after time, with attention to small, significant details. This strategy is elementary and inexpensive to implement, yet it pays off in the establishment and maintenance of strong relationships with the groups they serve. (p. 2)

School corporations can learn from the bigger organizations, but they can also look to groups within their community such as Kiwanis, Red Cross, and even local churches to see how they can attract, build and retain support through their public relations campaigns.

Statement of the Problem

Gaining community support for any new building project will be paramount in the future if a school corporation is to see its population growth properly housed or its deteriorating facilities reborn. The recent economic difficulties have caused significant taxpayer concern over the construction of new buildings. There are several data bits from the census that point to an older age group who are paying the bulk of the taxes for schools. The older adult population, ages 45 to 64, made up 25.8% of the population estimate in 2008, and seniors, age 65 and older, made up 12.8% of the population estimate in 2008 (Stats Indiana, n.d.). The number of households with children in them is low and this points to the rest of the households paying the bulk of the taxes to fund education. In 2000, Indiana had 2,336,306 households, but only 556,113 or 23.8% of them had children within the household. Since the state of Indiana has enacted the new law as to how school corporations ask for funds for construction projects (Appendix A), there will be considerable difficulty in the future to pass referendums for new construction projects.

Financing new school buildings is still a local responsibility, but the issue is convincing local taxpayers to support a proposed building project. What factors enable the local community to support a project, and can a school corporation control any of these factors? There are a lot of factors working against local school corporations responsible for new school construction. Some districts have a population willing to tax themselves, but building a new school is probably

mathematically impossible since their assessed valuation might be lower than the entire cost of the building project (Brimley & Garfield, 2002).

Research Questions

This study explored superintendent perceptions about school construction referendums and look at their perceived views of what made their particular referendum successful or unsuccessful. It also examined demographic factors in regards to the success or failure of the referendums. The specific research question for this study is,

1. What perceptions do superintendents have about gaining and losing public support for a school construction project through a referendum?

The secondary questions for this research asked directly of the superintendents are,

1. What issues did the superintendents perceive as having the greatest impact on the referendum and why?

2. How did the superintendent perceive their roles during the referendum as well as after the result was finalized?

3. What advice would the superintendents give to leaders of those districts preparing for a school construction referendum?

The research in the field today deals mainly with quantitative items and looks at bond elections. The major researchers on the referendum process and bond elections, such as Holt (2002), Kraus (2009), Lifto & Senden (2004), and Lode (1999) developed similar questions to those stated above in order to extract more information after the quantitative research was completed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what school corporations can do to gain public support for a school construction process, particularly during these economically difficult times. This study investigated a set of variables that can impact a referendum process negatively and positively as well as perceptions within the school corporation that might impact the outcome of this process. The negative and positive variables need to be determined by looking at the various school corporations that have gained public support for a construction project. Lastly, the study compared the variables to determine the relationship.

Significance of the Study

A critical analysis was conducted to how school corporations gain public support for vital building projects to alleviate growing populations and replace deteriorating facilities. The study may serve as a blueprint for school corporations who wish to start building projects by gaining public support. Since Indiana has changed its way of granting building projects by putting the decision into the hands of the voting taxpayers it will be critical for school corporations to understand the process and know how to tilt the odds of success in their favor. The main implication of this study is to provide school corporations a fighting chance at getting their building projects approved by the voters.

Definition of Terms

Assessed valuation is the total value of taxable property within the school district as determined by state and county auditors.

Building project is a new school construction that takes place in the state of Indiana.

Community is the geographic locale of the school corporation as well as the inhabitants of the school corporation.

Demographics are the statistical characteristics of human populations (such as age or income) used especially to identify markets.

Public is the persons that make up the community who can have an impact upon a school construction project.

Referendum is the request of a school corporation to have a construction project and its bonding or raising taxes to be placed on a ballot at a specific time usually during the primary or main election periods.

Remonstrance is the process in which the public gathers signatures to move against a proposed project while those in favor can sign a petition in support of the project. The number of qualified persons determines the success or failure. If more sign the remonstrance than the petition the project fails and vice versa.

School board is the elected or appointed governmental body that oversees the operations of the school corporation and who votes on major items that come before the board such as teacher contracts, tax rates, and construction/renovation projects.

School corporation is the entity in the state of Indiana that ensures the children living within its geographic boundaries attend school and obtain a good education. The school corporation leadership can make suggestions to the school board to move forward on a school construction project.

Superintendent is the leader of the local school corporation who reports directly to the school board. The superintendent is given latitude to run the day-to-day operations of the school corporation and he or she may in turn make recommendations to the school board for construction projects.

Taxpayer is a person who pays property, income, sales, or any other taxes in the state of Indiana that helps support public education through these revenues.

Limitations

1. This study was limited solely to the perceptions of the superintendents in public school corporations in Indiana that were involved with a building project in the years 2008, 2009, or 2010. The generalization of such findings for other states and their respective school corporations may not be known on the basis of this particular study.

2. The majority of this study was qualitative from the interviews of superintendents in the selected school corporations within Indiana.

3. Some public school superintendents may not want to be involved in a qualitative study such as this, since there are a limited number of school corporations that have gone through this process.

4. The data for this study is only specific to Indiana public school corporations who have had referendums between 2008 and 2010.

5. Some of the variables derived were from a previous study.

Delimitations

1. Data for new school construction was limited from the Indiana DLGF and data obtained from McGraw-Hill/Dodge Analytics, a company that collects and analyzes current construction data in various sectors.

2. Only public school districts in the state of Indiana were studied.

Organization and Summary of the Dissertation

This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is composed of an introduction of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, definitions of

related terms, limitations, and delimitations of the study. The second chapter presents a review

and dialogue of the related literature available for this topic. The third chapter presents the

methods and procedures used to collect and analyze the relevant data for this study. The fourth

chapter of this dissertation presents the statistical results as well as the qualitative information of

this study as they relate to the hypotheses presented in Chapter 1. The fifth and final chapter

summarizes the overall study and includes the discussion, final statements, connections to the

research, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of related literature will serve the purpose of examining several areas of interest as it relates to the topic of gaining or losing community support for a school construction referendum. This review will look at several areas such as the need for school construction referendums, the variables which contribute to the success or failure of these school construction referendums, the ways that community members and stakeholders can be influenced during this process, and lastly, demographic factors which might influence voters in a referendum.

This review of related literature also focuses on what process or plans should be in place in order to obtain community support for a school construction project since some of these items may be a part of the variables that determine the success or failure of the referendum. This can range from communication plans to demographic studies of the community as well as identifying stakeholders within the community.

Current and Future School Construction Needs

The average school year for an Indiana student is 180 days with approximately seven hours spent each day in the school building. When a student attends school for 13 years he or she will spend approximately 16,400 hours inside a school building. Numerous studies have been conducted and cited that point to school facilities positively affecting students' success and

educational facilities do impact students and can do so in a positive way (Holt & Smith, 2002;

Jago & Tanner, 1999; Lyons, 2002; Schneider, 2002).

Many different perspectives need to be looked at when it comes to educational facilities.

In a policy brief for the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, Lyons, who is a

facilities consultant with the U.S. Department of Education, stated it best in his conclusion:

> The classroom is the most important area within a school. It is here that students spend
>
> most of their time, hopefully in an environment conducive to learning. Learning in the
>
> classroom requires a reasonable level of concentration, listening, writing, and reading.
>
> Individual classrooms and entire facilities need to be evaluated, not only on how they
>
> meet changing educational requirements, but also how they meet the environmental
>
> requirements for health, safety, and security. (Lyons, 2002, pp. 5-6)

The need to evaluate educational facilities should be happening consistently in order to ensure

the best facilities for students to have a favorable learning environment.

MacConnell (1957) talked about the tremendous amount of school construction that had

taken place. "There has probably been more school construction since the end of World War II

than during any other period in American history" (MacConnell, 1957, p. 9). Move the calendar

45 years into the future, and there is still more discussion about the conditions of America's

public schools from education experts.

Indiana has an evident need to improve its school facilities if the report from the

GAO(1995) has any relevancy. This report found that 29% of the schools in Indiana had at least

one inadequate building of any type whether it was the original part of the building, an addition,

or temporary building and 67% of the schools had at least one unsatisfactory environmental

factor. The report went on to show that 28% of the schools in Indiana had at least one inadequate

building feature and one inadequate building type (GAO, 1995). Although the report from the GAO is 15 years old, it still points to the deficiencies schools face in Indiana.

A recent report developed by the 21st Century School Fund and National Clearinghouse for Education Facilities (2002) on state capital spending on PK-12 school facilities showed that Indiana school corporations spent $2.4 billion in "capital outlay for school construction and for acquisition of land and existing structures in fiscal years 2005 through 2008," (Filardo, Bar, Cheng, Ulsoy, & Allen, 2010, p. 28). Indiana is one of 14 states that do not use state funds for school construction. The report also showed at the end of 2008 Indiana had an outstanding long term construction debt of $12.2 billon, whereas the interest payments for 2008 on this debt were $252 million.

In 2005, Indiana Governor Daniels issued Executive Order 05-19 that gave the DLGF the power to develop guidelines when it came to school construction. Within just three short years, the governor moved the DLGF out of the equation, but until then, schools had to follow the governor's focus on limiting school construction within the State of Indiana.

A statistical analysis report (2007) conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics for the U.S. Department of Education (United States Department of Education, 2007) found school capacities was the main issue which needed to be addressed with school construction. This report compiled for the U.S. Department of Education by Chaney, Lewis, and Greene (2007) stated,

> There continues to be a mismatch between enrollment and capacity in many schools, but
>
> problems with overenrollment [*sic*] have decreased somewhat: the percentage that were
>
> underenrolled [*sic*] by 6 to 25 percent increased from 33 percent in 1999 to 38 percent in
>
> 2005, and the percentage that were overenrolled by 6 to 25 percent decreased from 14

percent to 10 percent. Further improvement is anticipated in those schools experiencing

overcrowding: 40 percent of the principals in these schools anticipated that overcrowding

would be substantially reduced or eliminated within the next 3 years. (p. 17)

This still leaves 60% of the schools that are overcrowded with future problems and needs that

should be addressed through construction projects. The report found that larger schools in the

West and Southeast faced the overcrowding issues, and these were predominantly located in

urban areas.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (2009) produces an annual report that grades

the infrastructure of America's important assets such as bridges and roads. The report found that

schools received a letter grade of a D when it came to their overall condition. The report also

stated that schools in the U.S. would fall a projected $35 billion short over five years for the

estimated need of $160 billion to fix America's schools (American Society of Civil Engineers,

2009). The overall grade does not bode well for the school infrastructure in America. The *2009*

Report Card for America's Infrastructure from the American Society of Civil Engineers stated in

its conclusion,

A significant problem in determining the condition of the nation's schools is the lack of

reliable information. No comprehensive, authoritative data have been collected in 10

years. Spending on school construction and modernization, for which data do exist, has

trended positive for much of the last 10 years, increasing from $17 billion in 1998 to a

peak of $29 billion in 2004. The trend since 2004, however, has reversed and was down

to $20.7 billion in 2007. Barring dramatic change in economic conditions, this downward

trend will likely continue, coupled with the known needs of 10 years ago and increasing

student enrollments, gives little hope for improvement. (p. 131)

The continuation of the economic slump will exacerbate the school construction problem especially now that Indiana has moved towards the referendum process, forcing school corporations to look for ways to get taxpayers to vote in favor of their proposed and much-needed construction projects.

Variables that Contribute to the Success of School Construction Referendums

Several studies have been conducted to pinpoint variables that contribute to the success of school construction referendums with essential items researchers have identified that increase the success rate of referendums. This section and the following section will review some of the common themes that flow through the research as it pertains to school construction referendums.

One of the preeminent researchers with school bonds is Carleton Holt. In his dissertation (1993) he laid out several recommendations based on his research. His recommendations were, (a) the board be unanimous when requesting a bond, (b) members of the board and administrators for the school maintaining a low profile during the bond campaign while allowing promotional activities to be lead by a community support group, (c) creating a diverse community group to look at all viewpoints, (d) activities around the bond should focus on maintaining yes support as well as seeing yes voters go to the polls, (e) allowing local media and school staff to be involved in the planning stage for the referendum, (f) developing personal contacts to enable sharing information about the needs of the students, (g) allowing consultants and architects to educate support groups as well as the community, and (h) using print materials to disseminate pertinent information and proper campaign techniques to educate the voters and get the yes voters to the polls (Holt, 1993).

One of the first items Holt (1993) pointed to is a unanimous school board. The school board for the corporation is usually an elected body that is representative of the community. This

unanimous position of the school board as well as the school staff is important to the success of

the referendums (Bauscher, 1994; Fairbank, 2006; Graham, Wise, & Bachman, 1990; Holt,

1993). "If these groups send mixed messages to the public about the architectural design or the

need for the bond issue, most voters will develop a concern about the advisability of the project"

(Holt, 2002, p. 19). It is only logical that not having a unanimous decision from the school board

will hurt the prospect of passing a school construction bond easily.

The school board has an important role in the referendum process. Not only should the

members be unanimous with their support for the referendum, but they need to be involved in the

overall process. "The board should consider every campaign as one that belongs to the people"

(Graham et al., 1990, p. 42). The school board has to mobilize community support for the

referendums they need and become even more political or support dries up for referendums (Wirt

& Kirst, 2005).

A school board can be critical with their support if they know about the facility master

plan for the district and helped to develop one when it comes to construction projects that may be

needed in the future. "A facility master plan should serve as a resource guide for administrators

and board members" (Kowalski, 2002, p. 88). Kowalski stated that a lot of districts fail to

produce facility master plans. Many of the reasons for these failures are related to two key issues

as to why a master plan is not created. The first is the assumption of the board and

superintendent that they know what is needed without a documented plan. The second is that the

board relies upon crisis management and only deals with problems when they cannot be avoided

any longer (Kowalski, 2002).

The school board has the final decision on several areas when it comes to the building

project, and they are the final group to accept or to deny the building's design, the costs, and a

variety of other issues (Kowalski, 2002). One of the biggest reasons that the school board

becomes involved and needs to have the final say is due to the protection of public funds and

property (Brimley & Garfield, 2001). School officials should be prepared for possibilities such as

property loss, lawsuits, accidents, and construction delays (Kowalski, 2002). Lastly, the school

board is responsible for hiring a competent superintendent to take on such a project as

constructing a new school and getting all of the key stakeholders involved and supportive of the

project.

The creation of a diverse community support group is paramount to the success of the

school construction bond (Bauscher, 1994; Holt, 1993; Kraus, 2009). "To be most effective, the

committee needed representation from a broad range of citizens, including members of the four

small towns included in the school district and members of different segments of the population"

(Bohrer, 2000, p. 72). This support group can get large, but there are often sub-committees

created within this diverse support group to make it more manageable.

Bohrer had success with a school construction bond in the late 1990s and found that

creating sub-committees helped move the community support group along its way. In his 1998

paper presented to the Invitational Conference on Rural School Facilities, Bohrer laid out what

these sub-committees did. The local board of education suggested some supporters to attend the

election planning committee meeting and from this group the sub-committees were born. The

four sub-committees laid out were: Voter Registration, Ways & Means, Information Central, and

Community Relations:

> The Voter Registration committee target unregistered patrons, sent letters to Central High
>
> School graduates in college and 18-year-old high school seniors and coordinated phone
>
> calls prior to the election. The Ways & Means Committee was responsible for raising

money to pay for any functions that were forbidden expenses of the BOE and to control

the expenditure of the funds in a coordinated budget and record keeping process.

Information Central was responsible for brochures, information sheets, newspaper

articles, and coordination of letters to the editor, and advertisements. Community

Relations was assigned public meetings, civic group presentations, and door to door

visits. (Bohrer, 1998, p. 8)

Bohrer also created a steering committee out of this group to help with larger decisions for

certain projects and where to send issues when they needed to be handled by a sub-committee.

The diverse community support group has an appearance of effectiveness "when its

members take the leadership roles in the campaigns" (Holt, 2002, p. 18). School administrators

need to take a back seat to this community support group, especially when they are the ones that

are educating the public about the need for the school construction bond. Holt (2002) gave a little

story that drives this point home:

While serving as superintendent of the Plainfield, Illinois, school district, Dr. Roland

Smith convinced the chief priest of the largest church in the community to become a key

member of the citizens committee even though his church operated a parish school. That

priest wore a high school letter jacket over his clergy garb as he promoted the tax

increase all over the community. He invited the superintendent to address the Knights of

Columbus. That tax increase referendum was successful. (p. 32)

This diverse community support group needs to lead all efforts to educate the public

about the school construction bond issue and raise funds for the campaign. Research has shown

that this grassroots campaign is a necessary and tool to craft messages for the public. One

research report found that "the grassroots campaign produced two messages: 1) the benefits-

based message, and 2) the consumer message" (Kelly & Zieper, 2001, p. 28). In this research the benefit message shows what will be derived by passing this bond and the consumer messages ensure voters that the governing body of the bond does not have free reign over all aspects.

Researching this issue showed that some states have published guidelines to help schools pass bonds. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction produced a document (Henry, n.d.) outlining the steps needed to plan for a successful bond campaign. In this document, found in the total community involvement section, the state gave the advice that "the administration and board certainly may work in the campaign, but the community must play the major role" (Henry, n.d., p. 5). This document outlined the sub-committees that researchers such as Holt and Bohrer discussed, as well.

Some of the main factors that influence the school construction referendum campaigns are citizen participation, community relations programs, consultants, unity of purpose, voter turnout, endorsements, opposition groups, tax increase limitations, and timing and length of campaigns (Holt, 2002). Each of these items impacts the success in a different way.

Citizen participation hinges on the development of a broad-based citizens' volunteer committee (Holt, 2002, p. 18). This group is especially important when it becomes an integral part of the school construction project whether they are helping gather demographic information (Carroll & Carroll, 2000) or building support for the overall project. Some of these citizen groups can be part of sub-committees such as facilities, voter registration, ways and means, information central, community relations, and steering committees (Stauffacher, 2000).

In a study conducted by Holt, Wendt, and Smith (2006), they found overwhelming need for a community task force. They stated that,

The task force, provided with the opportunity to make recommendations, present findings to the community, and communicate the message is imperative for school districts looking for community support. This study suggest the task force include community patrons less likely to follow the mainstream who represent disenfranchised members of the community, and be provided with the opportunity to influence decisions. (p. 17)

Research shows that a diverse community group is needed to pass referendums and diversity is key as research points to this fact. Berkman and Plutzer (2004) looked at the issue of elderly populations supporting educational expenditures. Their research found that as long as the elderly constituents are not new arrivals, they are more likely to support the local schools if they have referendums. "The results are consistent with the idea that loyalty–an emotional bond between residents and their community's institutions–competes with and often trumps instrumental self-interest" (Berkman & Pultzer, 2004, p. 1190). Looking at this research closely, it points to involving all community members when seeking a referendum for a school construction bond.

This diversity of the community group includes all aspects and groups. Another piece of research looked at three different school corporations who failed to gain the passage of their referendums the first go around, but succeeded on the second try. Hickey (2006) concluded:

The district leadership in the failed attempts did not get the teachers involved with the bond election process. This alienated a demographic that should have been the biggest supporter of the bond election. Teachers not only have the most to gain from the capital improvements, but they also have significant influence in the community. Two, the district leadership in failed attempts did not heed the warning signs from the community in general. As concerns about the bond proposal began to arise, the district leadership

either ignored the warnings, or did not have a system in place that provided information

on the sentiment of the public. (p. 7)

The teachers are another group that needs to be involved in this diverse community support

group and the research above proves that it is necessary to include the teachers in all the steps of

a school construction referendum.

Research gives a variety of answers when it comes to identifying the stakeholders and

these researchers agree on several of the groups almost immediately. However, there are still

some groups of stakeholders that are overlooked when it comes to the building projects. The

most noted groups of stakeholders throughout the building process and the review of literature

are the school board, superintendent/central office staff, community, teachers, and students

(Castaldi, 1987; MacConnell, 1957).

Determining the stakeholders is often a difficult task. Some may only think about the

school board, the superintendent, the teachers, and the community, but there are more groups to

think about. Reeves (2009) expanded the list of possible stakeholders. He listed the above

mentioned stakeholders as well as adding local government units, business leaders, and students.

The stakeholders are an important part of the process.

In his research MacConnell (1957) did not list pupils as one of the main stakeholders in

the building process, but he does make mention of them. He stated that "a major portion of a

child's day is passed in school; securing his suggestions might benefit him in many ways" (p.

84). He only suggested what the students can gain from being involved in the process through

their own education and maturation process, but did not state that they, too, should have a voice

or be a part of the stakeholders.

Castaldi (1987) continued to look at stakeholders and divided them into two distinct teams such as the executive planning team and a team that acts as an advisory panel to the executive planning team called an institutional planning team. The executive planning team consists of the chief school administrator, one of his or her assistants, the architect, the educational consultant, and a faculty member who is a member of the institutional planning team (Castaldi, 1987). Castaldi expanded on his concept of the institutional team and stated,

> The institutional planning team is viewed as a central advisory committee. It is usually
>
> composed of a cross-sectional representation of faculty and nonprofessional persons
>
> employed by the institution. The group may also include one or two students whenever it
>
> is felt that their thinking will contribute to imaginative planning. (p. 148)

Again, the issue of pupils or students was raised, but Castaldi (1987) took it one step further to state that they may have some greater input beyond just the learning process that MacConnell considered some 30 years earlier. Students were involved more so in the development of an elementary school in Japan. This process interviewed and surveyed students to help create the ideal new school to be built within their community (Yanagisawa, 2007). Students offer different perspectives and should be involved on school planning committees. If they are given an equal vote it will help establish their legitimacy within the school planning committee (Borden, 2004).

One of the other components for a successful referendum is to know the people who support the issue and to make sure they get to the polls. Identifying these supporters and ensuring these supporters get to the polls to vote yes is important to the success of a referendum (Gallagher, Bagin, & Kindred, 1997; Henry, n.d.; Holt, 1993; Kelly & Zieper, 2001). Several

research pieces give step-by-step processes for school corporations to use to find the yes supporters and to get them to the polls.

Identifying supporters is the first process that must be conquered. Finding demographic information about the community of the school corporation and its taxpayers is an important first step to find supporters. "Although demographic homework is neither easy nor fun, its absence in the public school sector has contributed to the diminished support of public education nationwide" (Carroll & Carroll, 2000, p. 43). The demographics of the population of a school district can be described as the study of human populations, which can look at its growth or decline, the composition, and distribution.

Holt (2002) stated,

The targeted group in this marketing campaign is those persons who will vote in the election. Some people believe that if they can convince the parents within the district, the election is won. Nothing is farther from the truth. In most districts, if every parent in the school district voted "yes" and no one else did, parents would not constitute a large enough number to even come close to passing the issue. (p. 113)

Looking at the demographic information about Indiana shows that only 23.8% of the households have children in them. Even with low voter turnout in an election, this number would not exceed the number of households without children if they all went to vote.

Knowing who votes in a typical election is important. Looking at voter information usually finds those who are 45 years of age and older vote more often than those between the ages of 18 and 45 (Holt, 2002). "Unfortunately, those in the community with the most to gain from school building projects, namely parents, fall into the age group that typically votes the least often" (Holt, 2002, p. 113). Holt continued with this information and laid out two basic

plans that must be done; find a way to appeal to the senior citizens and conduct voter registration drives for those people between the ages of 18 and 45 (Holt, 2002).

As stated before, the research shows that an appeal should be made towards the younger voters. Local high school graduates (alumi) should be found and registered to vote along with students in the high school who are 18 years of age (Bohrer, 1998). This is where the Voter Registration committee plays a big role and demonstrates that the high school should, and could, keep better track of their graduates to lean on them for support. "A well-developed, well-maintained database should play an integral role in a school's ability to market itself" (Carroll & Carroll, 2000, p. 83).

In the year 2030, people over the age of 65 will outnumber those under the age of 20, reversing the demographic profile of the nation (MacManus, 1995). Research shows that getting senior citizens to support a school construction referendum is important. Senior citizens should be a part of a school corporation's communication/marketing plan. Carroll and Carroll (2000) gave four guidelines to follow when it comes to marketing to senior citizens. These four guidelines are to keep the message as simple and concrete as possible, repeat the message, favor print media over TV and radio, and lastly make full use of message (Carroll & Carroll, 2000).

The senior citizens of the school community need to be found and catered to in order to get their support. Gallagher et al. (1997) stated,

Quite popular with a number of school districts are the Gold Card Clubs for senior citizens. Usually, the member must be a resident of the school district and be sixty-five years of age or older. Each member who registers with the school district is issued a card annually, which entitles him or her to free admission to all athletic events, adult school, concerts, plays, and other public school activities. (p. 167)

Keeping senior citizens connected to the schools is always beneficial. "There are indications that people who have been inside a school within the last year tend to be more favorable toward the schools" (Gallagher et al., 1997, p. 139). Continuing this strategy of connecting senior citizens to the schools and keeping them involved is to offer them passes that are good for free admission to all sporting events and plays (Crader, Holloway, & Stauffacher, 2002).

Generally, it is believed that senior citizens will not support higher taxes for educational expenditures, but some research has shown this is not always the case. Deller and Walzer (1993) found the following:

The general hypothesis advanced by most researchers and educators is that retirees will tend not to support raising local taxes for local education and indeed may favor school expenditure reductions. The results presented here do not support this hypothesis in the dramatic fashion often advanced. Our results show that retirees favor strategies that support local education and disagree with expenditure reductions. However, retirees have a weaker conviction about reducing costs or expanding programs than non-retirees. (p. 113)

Berkman and Plutzer (2004) echoed this conclusion with two caveats. They stated,

The grey peril hypothesis, like many hypotheses concerning self-interest in politics, must be rejected and replaced with a more qualified-but more theoretically interesting-conclusion: that elderly concentrations are a financial asset for a school district, unless the senior community includes a large number of new arrivals. Second, the design of tax policy can have enormous impact on the depth of political cleavages and their ultimate impact on public policy. (p. 1189)

Understanding the voters, such as the senior citizens, of a community is an important aspect of successfully passing a school construction referendum. The majority of the researchers agree that knowing the voters within the school community is an important part of the success of the school construction referendums (Carroll & Carroll, 2000; Graham et al., 1990; Holt, 1993; Holt, 2002; Kelly & Zieper, 2001; Kraus, 2009; Lifto, 1995; Lode, 1999). Each and every school corporation should have a strong understanding of their voters and the issues that matter before they take on a school construction referendum. This understanding or information can be gleaned from surveys and other data sources.

Research in the area of school referendums has provided lots of information for school corporations to work with when planning their own referendum. Holt (2002) stated,

> Voters within a community can be classified into four groups: those who are absolutely opposed to building anything, those who are undecided but leaning toward voting "no," those who are undecided but leaning toward voting "yes," and those that support the bond issue. Individuals within these four categories do not necessarily fall into any specific age, socioeconomic, or political group. (p. 114)

School corporations need to know these four categories of voters and plan their campaigns accordingly. The committees formed for the school construction referendums can focus on these four groups and campaign in a positive manner, emphasizing the cost/benefit ratio of the design, showing that the corporation is maintaining its commitment to providing mandated program facilities, and lastly by recognizing how the school corporation administration and school board took a conservative approach to the entire project (Holt, 2002).

A researcher in the field of school bond success put it simply that "the successful districts seemed to deal more proactively with these (controversial) issues than the unsuccessful districts

did" (Kraus, 2009, pp. 109-110). If a school corporation knows its voters and knows the controversial issues, it is able to deal with them head on. "Schools must make every effort to project a strong image, and such efforts come naturally with a customer orientation" (Carroll & Carroll, 2000, p. 70). This leads this research and this chapter review of literature to the area of communication.

Communication as a Starting Point for a School Corporation

Proper communication with the community of a school district should be a constant endeavor (Carroll & Carroll, 2000; Holt, 2002). Communication should not be an afterthought, especially when a school corporation is about to undertake a school construction referendum. There are many different aspects of the school corporation's communication plan that need to be considered and conducted well in advance of starting a referendum. Holt (2002) stated,

> Most school administrators find that an ongoing community relations plan is essential to the eventual passage of bond referendums. This type of program can provide invaluable information about public perceptions of the school's needs, the attitudes of individuals who might oppose bond issues, and the enthusiasm of individuals who would likely support a bond issue. (p. 63)

The research gives numerous approaches to how this is done effectively with a great deal depending upon how receptive the local community is to these approaches.

"Public schools must switch from a product- to a customer-centered mentality" (Carroll & Carroll, 2000, p. 22). A good communication plan that is open and honest can help move school corporations from the idea that education is a product to the more acceptable idea that education is about its customers. There are many factors and items that go into a communication plan, and the research gives a good look into what is needed.

Research from several key education experts who deal with school and community relations break down the communication process into four steps. This research helps a school corporation build a proper public relations plan that should be in place even before a school construction project is considered. These experts offer this information as a guide to school corporations who need to create or improve their public relations plans.

The first part of the communication process is the source of the information or idea that is formed (Fiore, 2002; Gallagher et al., 1997). This step of the process is important in that a lot of ideas start with a person or a group. Since the building project is a part of a master building plan, the idea most likely evolves from this overall plan developed by the school district.

The second part of the communication process is the idea being encoded (Fiore, 2002; Gallagher et al., 1997). This is the step where the idea is put into words so the message can be conveyed properly. "The opportunities for a communication breakdown are great at this stage of communication" (Fiore, 2002, p. 69). The message must be strong and concise during its development at this stage.

The third part of the communication process is the communication channel (Fiore, 2002; Gallagher et al., 1997). Gallagher et al. (1997) stated that,

> The channel may be a word-of-mouth conversation; an oral presentation on radio or television; a written document in the form of a letter or a memorandum; printed matter like a newspaper, a book, a magazine, or a brochure; or a combination of words and pictures through the medium of motion pictures, videotapes, slides with sound tracks, and the like. (pp. 72-73)

This list of communication channels can now include emails, blogs, or any other method using the Internet.

The final step of the communication process is called the receiver decoding (Fiore, 2002). This is the step in which the person receiving the message either interprets the message correctly or not. There is a loss of control at this stage since the person or persons decoding the message may not perceive the message as it is meant to be, even though the encoder performed the first steps of the communication process to the best of their ability (Fiore, 2002; Gallagher et al. 1997).

Following these steps in the communication process can help the building project get off to a successful start and lay the groundwork for open communication from the school corporation to the taxpayers and community at-large. These steps are just the first in a series that needs to take place to get a building project moving forward. These steps should not be minimized or flippantly attacked while planning the communication for a school construction project.

Schools and school corporations have different goals with their communication plans or public relations. Kowalski (2004) stated that there are approximately eight different reasons for public relations programs at the schools. The list includes improving the quality of public education, encouraging open political communication, enhancing the image of the school or district, building support for change, managing information, marketing programs, establishing goodwill and sense of ownership, and lastly providing evaluation data. The question that needs to be answered is where does a school construction project fall within these eight different public relations goals for schools? The research shows that all eight public relations goals deal with getting community buy-in for a school construction project.

The school construction project usually is in need of funds to get the project going, and a school corporation must not first turn on its public relations when it needs this funding or

approval. The public relations efforts must be ongoing (Kowalski, 2004). The public relations

that schools do must understand the difference between selling and marketing what they have. In

Graham and Wise's article (2004) they stated,

> In the former (selling) posture, the focus is on the product (the program, the curriculum,
>
> the levy campaign) in an effort to convince the market (students, parents, voters) that they
>
> must accept or vote for that product. In the latter (marketing) posture, the focus is on the
>
> market. Here the primary efforts are devoted to determining what constitutes "value" to
>
> that market: what are its needs, wants, desires? What perceptions and expectations does
>
> that market have? Then and only then does the school that practices a marketing approach
>
> attempt to put together its product. This revised focus allows the astute marketer to
>
> combine the resources he or she controls into a bundle of satisfactions that has the best
>
> chance of gaining acceptance from the market. (p. 320)

Graham and Wise discussed the four P's of marketing which are product, price,

promotion, and place (as cited in Kowalski, 2004). Each of these items helps a school

corporation understand what needs to be watched, discussed, and evaluated as a school

construction project moves forward. One of the biggest things a school corporation must take

care of initially is their marketing or public relations plan (Carroll & Carroll, 2000).

Determining the needs and desires of the community at large can be a complicated task,

but is something that should be done ahead of time when taking on a school construction project

or a referendum/bond to pay for a project. The use of a survey is a priceless instrument to

discover what the taxpayers and community members want when it comes to their schools and

school construction projects. The survey instruments can be conducted in numerous ways in

order to find out the necessary information.

The goal of the survey is to obtain objective data that is usable by the school corporation to make proper decisions (Holt, 2002). There are essentially four different types of surveys and the school corporation can decide which one to use. There are person-to-person surveys, telephone surveys, forms delivered through the mail, and lastly electronic forms through email or the Internet (Kowalski, 2004). These different types of surveys have their strengths and weaknesses, and again, determining which type to use is up to the school corporation who must weigh the pros and cons.

A school corporation should avoid the face-to-face type survey since it has some limitations to its effectiveness. Kowalski (2004) listed three distinct issues that cause face-to-face surveys to have problems. First and foremost, the survey interviewer must be trained properly or the data is unreliable. The second is that the interviewee feels that they need to give socially acceptable responses during a face-to-face survey. Lastly, the environment in which the data is collected has an impact on the answers. If at all possible, a school corporation should avoid using a face-to-face survey method in order to circumvent these three issues.

> The purpose of the survey needs to be appropriately defined. Holt (2002) stated,
>
> The committee should determine what information it wants and/or needs to obtain from the survey. They should be cautious to limit the purposes to no more than three. If there are too many types of information, the survey gets too long and studies have shown that accuracy of comments goes down the longer the survey goes on. The committee should determine what its priorities are at the time. (p. 142)

Keeping the survey short and focused is a must if the proper information is obtained. If a corporation is looking for support for a school construction project that should be the main

purpose of the survey and then the priorities based around this project should be made known around the survey.

The surveys conducted must be nonthreatening with no indication of a right or wrong answer. There should also be survey questions that check for reliability to make sure the information being obtained is accurate. If the surveys are being conducted face-to-face or over the telephone they must be done so in the same manner so as to not influence the patron (Holt, 2002).

When conducting a survey it should be done with a scientific random sample to help ensure its accuracy. "A true random sample is free of bias or predetermined purpose that would skew the results" (Kowalski, 2004, p. 302). This random sample hopefully reaches all aspects of the community at large to obtain the desired information and get to the truth of the matters that are affecting a possible school construction project.

The sample size must be large enough to obtain good results and information. The size of a sample is important, but the return rate of the survey is even more crucial in the interpretation of the results. "Educators often seek return rates of 60-80% or more so that the known outweighs the unknown" (Kowalski, 2004, p. 304).

Once surveys are collected, the data must be analyzed and inferences must be made from the data on hand. Since the information is gathered by the school corporation, it becomes part of the public domain and it should be given consideration on how the data is analyzed and reported before the information is collected (Kowalski, 2004). The raw data and the findings should be presented to the public whenever possible. In doing this, a trust is built between the community and the school corporation even when the outcome does not meet the expectations as to why the survey was conducted in the first place.

The last significant task that a school corporation must do is to get the voters who support the school construction bond issue to the polls on election day. Part of this task is to find these positive voters and make sure they are registered to vote. The surveys should have identified a lot of the positive voters and supporters. There are also other tactics that researchers have found that have success.

Graham et al. (1990) found that targeting renters in a community was one way to help push a referendum to its passage. Renters are usually unregistered and a property tax increase does not usually affect the cost of their rent, thus allowing an organizing committee to state to these renters that if they voted yes on a referendum they could help support the schools without much impact on their own pocketbook. In this article the authors gave some ideas on how to approach this group and they stated,

> In approaching this significant voter segment, the ideal arrangement is to have a two-person team consisting of a member of the campaign organization and a neighborhood voter registration volunteer, who ideally is a resident of the apartment complex. People tend to feel more comfortable talking to this team, and it provides an opportunity to explain the need for the levy or bond issue. They tend to be cooperative and are relatively easy to register if the procedure is explained. To be able to assist others at no cost to themselves is a combination that few will turn down. Turning out this voter segment on election day can make the difference in a close election. (Graham et al., 1990, p. 29)

Election Day is a vitally important date, so a lot of organization needs to go into this final day to see the referendum turn out successfully. The research shows there are several things that can be done to help insure the success of this final stage of the referendum. Holt (2002) suggested that a referendum campaign organize volunteers to be poll watchers, telephone bank

callers, and drivers. Each of these various jobs work together to get the yes voters to the polls using the survey and demographic information.

Many referendum campaigns today focus only on the yes voters. Wirt and Kirst (2005) stated,

> Many California districts have overcome demographic restraints by focusing campaigns solely upon likely voters, and by not trying to persuade fence-sitters or opponents. The strategy uses volunteers to deliver a surgical strike and is crafted to likely "yes" voters.
>
> (p. 127)

Most voters go into the referendum campaign with their mind made up as to how they will vote for a school construction project (Carroll & Carroll, 2000; Graham et al., 1990; Holt, 2002). This is an important piece of research information that should be heeded. Careful consideration should be used when planning a referendum campaign to just focus on those that will vote yes on the project.

Variables That Contribute to the Failure of School Construction Referendums

Most of the literature relating to the topic of variables that contribute to the failure of school construction referendums deals with not doing many of the items listed in the section about variables that contribute to the success of school construction referendums. Many of the items in the previous sections are common sense, especially if a school corporation needs to pass a referendum, and not doing many of these items would most likely result in a referendum failing.

Beal, Lagomarcino, and Hartman (1966) published perceived reasons for failure of a bond.

The superintendents of unsuccessful districts were not as certain about why the issues

failed as the successful superintendents were about why the issues passed. Most of the

reasons given as influential were related to economic variables; i.e., increased taxes,

distribution of tax load and opposition from the retired. When the economic situational

variables were examined by chi-square statistics for differences between the successful

and unsuccessful districts, no significant differences were found between these districts.

The traditional reasons for failure, often suggested in the literature, such as disputes, type

of construction and community conflicts were not mentioned as important factors by

many superintendents. Four superintendents mentioned specific conflicts between

committees, adjoining towns and within the district. Others mentioned factors such as no

attempt was made to pass the issue and the proposal was a "stop-gap" measure. (Beal,

Lagomarcino, & Hartman, 1966, p. A-16)

In another qualitative research piece Carter (1995) gave a plethora of reasons as to why

school corporations fail to pass a school referendum. A key reason given that lead to failure was

focusing on winning over the parents in order to win the battle, which is not effective on several

levels since the parents only make up a small portion of the voters, and they are usually the yes

voters that you need to do little work to obtain their vote (Carter, 1995). Carter (1995) went on to

state that a corporation can fail if they distribute lists that are long but simple in scope,

suggesting instead that "trifold flyers with lots of graphics are always good. The voters don't

want to be burdened with a lot of detail. Avoid cost figures" (p. 2).

Not making adjustments to the proposed plan due to the hard work done by the sub-

committee also leads a school corporation to ruin (Carter, 1995), pointing back to

communication and listening to the community. A school corporation that is not listening to its

voters and relying only upon the sub-committee that spent many hours putting together the initial plan surely leads to failure.

School corporations that do not have a marketing plan already in place are subject to failure of a referendum at a later stage. The marketing plan for a school corporation should be done ahead of time, not just in a time of need. It is essential that a school corporation knows what is going on within their district in order to know if a new construction project is possible with the political climate. Carroll and Carroll (2000) stated it eloquently when they said the trend for public education support is waning.

> Voter support for public education has dramatically declined since the 1960s as taxpayers, squeezed by rising property taxes and the cost of living, have become increasingly unwilling to pay for something they believe has declined in quality. Even more significant than the perception of quality, however, is the shrinking market of users and the growing market of nonusers- many of whom do not see any direct benefit from public education and would rather invest their tax dollars elsewhere. (Carroll & Carroll, 2000, p. 5)

One New York study looked into budget referendums where school districts have to present the budget to the public and allow them to vote on it each year, some interesting findings were discovered that could be useful for school corporations looking to pass referendums in their own districts for school construction. Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Smith, and Zhang (2003) stated,

> Perhaps our most important finding, which prior research has not addressed, is that the length of terms of the school board member is an important predictor of budget vote passage. Other factors held constant, voters in school districts whose board members have longer terms have a lower probability of rejecting budget proposals. The implication

here is that having board members with longer (but staggered) terms increases the

likelihood that the board is "tuned" into the preferences of the voters. (p. 25)

This implies that school corporations with higher board turnover may not be successful with the

passage of a school construction referendum due to the possibility of community turmoil and/or a

school board that does not reflect the concerns of its voters.

A study conducted by Kraus (2009) found that districts unsuccessful in the passage of

their referendums had used more of the common strategies for referendum passage than districts

that were successful. "On average, the unsuccessful districts reported using 21.75 campaign

strategies as opposed to 17.42 for the successful districts, for a difference of 4.33 strategies per

district" (Kraus, 2009, p. 116). Even using the common strategies that lead to successful

outcomes does not always guarantee a friendly result for a school corporation.

This same study (Kraus, 2009) also looked at the communication of successful and

unsuccessful districts as well.

Based on participant responses, patrons of unsuccessful districts appeared to have a

greater mistrust of district administration and board members than patrons of successful

districts. Respondents from unsuccessful districts stressed the importance of an ongoing

public relations campaign prior to the resolution calling for a bond election so that it

would not be perceived that the district only communicated with the public when they

wanted money. Additional evidence of mistrust in unsuccessful districts is that they also

stressed the importance of not making promises that could not or would not be kept,

because voters would remember those broken promises 'for generations' [*sic*]. Whether

those allegations of broken promises were real or perceived was not within the scope of

the present study. It was also common to hear from respondents in unsuccessful districts

that there were lingering ill feelings among older residents of the district concerning

consolidations that happened during the 1960s. (Kraus, 2009, p. 117)

The communication process as stated in the variables of successful referendums should be an

ongoing process no matter what is happening within the school corporation. Rebuilding any and

all mistrust is something a school corporation must consistently do to have any chance of success

even if it dates back some fifty years before.

Common themes and threads within the research for referendum failures are not known.

The uniqueness of each school corporation plays a factor as well as the history of these districts.

Some main points are lack of communication and mistrust of the school corporation leadership,

whether it is the school board or the superintendent. Worldly and local events can even impact a

referendum (Lifto, 1995). Sometimes they are things that are beyond a school corporation's

control, but it is known that doing the opposite of the strategies of successful referendum

campaigns will likely cause defeat at the polls.

Demographic Factors that Might Influence Voters in a Referendum

The research looking at demographic factors that might influence voters in a referendum

is wide in its scope and range. This qualitative study did not look too heavily into demographic

data, but some views will be necessary in order to make connections between certain

demographic pieces and the outcome of a referendum. Demographic influences do happen and it

will be good to have an understanding of which ones might have an influence on the entire

process.

Wirt and Kirst (2005) stated it best when looking at the need for demographic

information.

A citizen's vote on a secret ballot does not tell us much about his or her motivation. However, that knowledge is important for officials who must cater to the diverse feelings of citizens. Policy events in schools move voters – at least some – to turn out to pass or reject referendums. How a citizen votes may be affected by his or her own characteristics, by the school district or site, or by school events. Personal influences may lean heavily on the voter as the "rational actor," that is, one who evaluates what is gained or lost by a vote. Or, voters may lean heavily on the reinforcing nature of the district, so that, as research shows regularly, a wealthy district reinforces support while less wealthy districts may not. (Wirt & Kirst, 2005, p. 122)

Do demographics play a part in a person's vote on a referendum and what sort of things should a school corporation be looking for when making the push to get the referendum passed? "Demographic characteristics can influence many areas of public policy" (Bondo, n.d., p. 3).

Lifto and Senden (2004) listed 11 factors associated with successful school finance elections. One of these factors is for a school corporation to have a comprehensive and effective campaign that is focused on current research, best practices, and looks closely at the demographics of the community at large. "The ability to understand and effectively apply election research in a particular context is critical and positively correlates with success" (Lifto & Senden, 2004, p. 3).

Having students in school is one demographic factor that should be looked at by school corporations that want to pass school construction referendums. One recent study by Faltys (2006) recommended,

The demonstrated relationship between currently having children in the district and the success of the school bond referendum should cause district officials to focus efforts on

getting information regarding bond plans to parents of school children. Officials should

also make themselves available at school functions to answer factual questions regarding

bond plans. (p. 121)

Parents who have children in school have a higher level of interest in a referendum and are more

likely to support this referendum since their children receive a direct benefit of these facility

upgrades (Piele & Hall, 1973; Theobold & Meier, 2002).

The age of constituents in the school community is one factor that has been researched

several times to determine if senior citizens are apt to vote down a referendum. One such study

conducted by Deller and Walzer (1993) used the 1990 census data to determine the retirement

population of a given area and then look at the referendums throughout the state of Illinois from

1988 to 1991. Their study found,

Of the 788 referendums examined, 39.7% (313) passed. For the typical area in which a

referendum passed, 23.9% of the area's households were defined as retired in the 1990

Census. For the typical area in which a referendum did not pass, 23.3% of the area's

households were defined as retired. In essence, communities with a large retirement

population were just as likely to pass a referendum as those with smaller retirement

populations. Indeed, if the small difference were accepted as statistically significant, the

data would predict stronger referendum support in communities with a larger share of

retired households. (p. 112)

The study continued to look at the effects of an aging population on rural communities when it

came to referendum passage.

Rural schools face tougher obstacles when it comes to referendum passage due to the

aging population and the out-migration of young people from rural communities (Deller &

Walzer, 1993). Even though the study did not find a significant difference in the passage or failure of school referendums they do offer some words of caution for rural school districts. "Conventional wisdom suggests that retirees will tend to fight most, if not all attempts to increase funding of local schools" (Deller & Walzer, 1993, p. 112).

Deller and Walzer's (1993) study looked directly at some rural areas where there were large numbers of retirees. They stated,

> Several general observations can be drawn from the analysis. First, a much greater percent (51.2%) of retirees have the opinion that local schools are adequately funded. Approximately one in three (36.5%) non-retirees believe schools are in this category. As the retirement population in rural areas increases, a growing proportion of the total rural population may support this position. This result supports conventional wisdom. (p. 112)

Many school districts rely on local property taxes to operate. With retiree numbers growing in rural areas they may be unwilling to pay increased taxes to support the schools.

Socioeconomic status plays a part in the passage or failure of school construction referendum. Many studies were conducted early on in the 1970s on socioeconomic status and the success of referendums. The main finding was the higher the socioeconomic status, the more likely the referendum would pass. Piele and Hall (1973) found that out of eight studies, seven of them had the above stated conclusion. Another group of researchers stated that "in operational terms, then, we would expect the amount of education and income to be positively related to a propensity to vote in favor of the tax levy" (Cataldo & Holm, 1983, p. 621). Recent research has been directed toward looking at minority groups when it comes to the passage of school referendums.

45

One study looked at race as a part of the referendum process in the Houston Independent

School District and also at age and self-interest (Tedin, Matland, & Weiher, 2001). These

researchers discovered that support for a school bond decreased with increasing age among

White voters of the school district, but this was not the same for Black and Hispanic voters. The

research found Black and Hispanic voters over the age of 65 were more likely to support the

referendum. This study showed a positive correlation between higher levels of education and

higher levels of support for the bond among White voters that does not hold true for minorities.

"Minority voters have a more positive impression of government in general and the school

district in particular" (Tedin et al. 2001, p. 287).

Demographics are not something a school corporation can control nor is it something

they can change. School corporations need to have an understanding of local demographics,

which allows the school to plan a referendum campaign with pinpoint accuracy. This

understanding that demographics play a small part in the success or failure of a referendum takes

a school corporation much further in the overall process.

Summary

The review of literature and research was divided into four sections. The first section

discussed the research and literature regarding current and future school construction needs. It

discussed the needs that school corporations face when it comes to school construction and

renovations. It continued to look at changes that continue to take place in the State of Indiana

when it comes to financing school construction. The overall future needs of schools were

examined within this section showing the possible trouble that lies ahead for school corporations.

The second section of the review of literature examined the variables that contribute to

the success of a school construction referendum. This section pointed to the studies that have

been done to delineate the factors that help a school referendum pass. Several of the studies

within this section work in conjunction with one another to help pinpoint the many variables that

might help a school corporation have some success when it takes a referendum through the

voting process. This section listed many of the items that must be done in order for a school

corporation to be successful with a school construction referendum.

The third section of this chapter investigated variables that can contribute to the failure of

a school construction referendum. Several researchers in this chapter stated that not doing the

things in the previous section will surely cause a referendum to be defeated at the polls. Most of

the items within this section dealt with lack of communication of a school corporation to the

parents and the community at large as well as not marketing what kind of product they deliver to

the general public.

The final section of this review of literature looked at the demographic factors that might

influence voters when it comes to a school construction referendum. This section pointed to

demographic issues that can and will impact a referendum. This section explored age, race, and

socioeconomic status when it comes to voting in a referendum.

The research is resoundingly clear about what should be done to help increase the

chances of success of a school construction referendum. Developing a long range plan for

facility construction and renovation as well as communication/marketing plans are essential to

the overall success of a school construction referendum. The game is changing, and gone are the

days with little or no voter approval of school construction projects. School corporations need to

do their homework to have a fighting chance to have success at the polls. The overall primary

purpose of this study is to examine what superintendents feel are the issues that contributed to

their success or failures at the polls when it came to school construction referendums in the state

of Indiana.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine what superintendents felt were the issues that contributed to a school construction referendums' success or failure. This study looked mainly at superintendent perceptions as well as demographic information for each school district including, but not limited to, total assessed valuation, per capita income, median housing value, race, total amount sought for school construction referendum, tax rate increase, and when the election took place.

Interviews were conducted with the superintendents to find common perceived themes between the school leaders who had successful and unsuccessful school construction referendums. These interviews are the basis for this study to determine trends between the school corporations that have had success passing construction referendums and those school corporations that did not have construction referendums approved by the voters.

This chapter presents the procedure utilized in the study. I utilized a qualitative method of inquiry to obtain information about the success and failure of school construction referendums throughout the state of Indiana between 2008 and 2010. This time period in Indiana is important since the new referendum process is put into place and schools are just now using the referendum to pass bonds for school construction.

Research Questions

1. What perceptions do superintendents have about gaining and losing public support for a school construction project through a referendum?

The secondary questions for this research that were asked directly of the superintendents were,

1. What issues did the superintendents perceive as having the greatest impact on the referendum and why?

2. How did the superintendent perceive his role during the referendum as well as after the result was finalized?

3. What advice would the superintendents give to leaders of those districts preparing for a school construction referendum?

Qualitative Research

"Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matters. A complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surround the term *qualitative research*" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 1). In the book *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mix Methods Approaches*, Creswell (2003) gave a good definition of qualitative research:

> A qualitative approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives (i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue-oriented, collaborative, or change oriented) or both. It also uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies.

The researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing

themes from the data. (p. 18)

This study entailed qualitative analysis of information provided by stakeholders in the

construction process, namely the eight superintendents out of the 27 school corporations that

have conducted a school construction referendum between 2008 and 2010. Qualitative research

is "an umbrella term to refer to several research strategies that share certain characteristics. The

data collected have been termed soft, that is, rich in description of people, places, and

conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 2).

Inside qualitative research there are many different types such as ethnographies, case studies,

phenomenologies, and narrative research. This study will use the grounded theory as described

through what Strauss and Corbin (as cited by Creswell, 2003) described,

> *Grounded Theory*, in which the researcher attempts to derive a general, abstract theory of
>
> a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study. This
>
> process involves using multiple stages of data collection and the refinement and
>
> interrelationship of categories of information. Two primary characteristics of this design
>
> are the constant comparison of data with emerging categories and theoretical sampling of
>
> different groups to maximize the similarities and the differences of information.
>
> (Creswell, 2003, p. 14)

Procedures

The design of this study used the following procedures:

1. Using the Center for Evaluation and Educational Policy (2010) database of Indiana

school referendums, 27 school corporations were identified which held referendums for school

construction between 2008 and through the fall of 2010 (31 actual school construction

referendums took place, but four corporations had two different referendums each during this time). During this time period nine referendums passed and 18 failed. In 2008, four out of five school corporations had their school construction referendums pass. In 2009, only two out of 15 school construction referendums passed and in 2010, by the May primary, three of seven school construction referendums passed. In the fall election of 2010, two referendums passed out of five that were held.

2. Out of these 27 school corporations, eight were selected for this study; four that had school construction referendums that passed and four that did not have school construction referendums pass between 2008 and 2010. The school corporation referendums that passed were added to a spreadsheet with demographic data as well and the same was done for school corporations that did not have the referendum pass. These spreadsheets were then used to randomly select which school corporations would be used for this study. In each spreadsheet each school corporation was assigned a number at random using the RAND function within Microsoft EXCEL. The four lowest numbered school corporations in each spreadsheet were used for this study. Since the numbers are random there is a chance for duplicate numbers. These may be used as long as the randomization only produces four school corporations for each spreadsheet. The randomization did produce four school corporations using the formula and it did not have to be run again since there were no duplicate numbers. Since this research relies upon the perceptions of the superintendents, only those superintendents will be interviewed that dealt directly with referendum since some may have moved on to other jobs or retired during this studies scope. The eight total school corporations will remain nameless throughout this research project in order to protect the identity of the superintendents in order for them to speak freely about their perceptions.

3. The superintendents of the selected school corporations were interviewed on-site with interview questions that looked for common themes that have an impact on the success or failures of the new school construction referendums. These interview questions are derived from several research studies conducted by Faltys (2006), Holt (1993), Kraus (2009), Lifto (1995), Lode (1999), and Stauffacher (2000), dealing with referendums that looked for superintendents to give clarification. The research showed that there were several questions asked time and time again for each of these different research studies. The questions are in Appendix B. The superintendents were also sent the Consent To Participate In Research form in Appendix C.

4. Demographic information were analyzed for the eight school corporations studied as well as the additional school corporations which were not looked at specifically. Census data as well as data from the Indiana Department of Education were used to see if surface commonalities existed between the successful and failing school corporations.

Data Sources

In order to identify the data needed for this study it was necessary to find the school corporations within Indiana that have dealt with construction projects and referendums. There are a limited number of school corporations in the state of Indiana between 2008 and 2010 that had new school construction referendums. There were 31 total school construction referendums and four of these corporations had multiple referendums in this time period.

Several of these corporations only requested money for renovations instead of new school construction. This study focuses on new school construction only. The demographic information examined all the corporations regardless of whether the money was used for renovations or new school construction in order to determine if trends emerge, such as increased success during a certain election cycle.

The Center for Education and Evaluation Policy housed at Indiana University keeps an extensive database on school referendums in the state of Indiana dating back to the year 2008 and continuing to the present. This database helped identify the school corporations which were studied for this research project. The database also keeps track of the amount sought in each referendum as well as how the vote total ended up on that election day.

The other demographic data used for this research was taken from the U.S. Census Bureau (Stats Indiana, n.d.) as well as the Indiana Department of Education. This demographic data provided a brief overview of the school corporations. The Center for Education and Evaluation Policy also looks at demographic data in their synopsis of school referendums, but this includes corporations that had referendums for not only school construction, but also general fund requests.

The principle source of data came from the structured interviews which were conducted with the superintendents of the school corporations who were and were not successful with their new school construction referendums. The interviews allowed for common themes to arise as well as gave me a chance to confirm previous research on how to conduct successful referendum campaigns with what was actually done with the referendum campaigns in the state of Indiana.

Data Collection Process

Data were gathered through on-site, structured interviews with superintendents of four school corporations that were successful with their new school construction referendums and four school corporations that were not successful with their new school construction referendums. The interviews lasted approximately two hours and followed a standard procedure to balance the structured parts of the interview process with further questions to allow for better understanding using some unstructured follow-up questions. "Unstructured interviewing

provides a greater breadth than the other types, given its qualitative nature" (Fontana & Frey,

1994, p. 365).

The questions were developed by me and were asked in the same order and manner to all

of the superintendents. The interviews were recorded by electronic means as well as through

typed notes in order to preserve all of the information. Confidentiality was ensured by deleting

the names and locations of the superintendents during the transcription process. Since the study

was limited in its scope due to the few number of school corporations which were successful and

unsuccessful the actual names of the corporations were not used in the research to further help

maintain confidentially.

Letters were sent directly to the superintendents requesting their involvement within the

study in Appendix D. Follow-up phone calls were made to set up meeting times with the

superintendents as well as to allow for any preliminary questions or concerns to be addressed.

The interviews were conducted at the offices of the superintendents in the districts and conducted

off-site of these districts if the superintendent who was involved in the referendum is no longer

with said school corporation. If a superintendent refused to be a part of this research project, the

next corporation on the randomly generated list was contacted to become a part of this research.

The demographic data were collected using the U.S. Census Bureau's website as well as

the Indiana Department of Education's website. I reserved the right to delete demographic

information if it was necessary to keep the confidentiality of the superintendents. This allowed

me to get the best and most openly honest answers from them since this demographic data could

connect comments directly back to the school corporation.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data from the interviews was the most difficult aspect of this research.

Denzin (1994), in his article, "The Art and Politics of Interpretation", stated,

> In the social sciences there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself. Confronted
>
> with a mountain of impressions, documents, and field notes, the qualitative researcher
>
> faces the difficult and challenging task of making sense of what has been learned. I call
>
> making sense of what has been learned *the art of interpretation*. This may also be
>
> described as moving from the field to the text to the reader. (p. 500)

The use of the superintendent interviews as well as some of the demographic information were

used for the research purposes of this study.

In the qualitative field of research, the use of numbers such as the demographic

information has been a source of controversy (Maxwell, 2010). The data or numbers that were

used for this research project are not hard numbers and are only used to make inferences or

connections which could be explored further. Maxwell (2010) stated,

> Despite this polarization over the relative legitimacy and value of quantitative and
>
> qualitative methods and data, prominent qualitative researchers such as Becker (1970),
>
> Erikson (2007), Hammersley (1992), and Miles and Huberman (1984) have supported the
>
> inclusion of numerical data in qualitative research practices and reports. (p. 476)

Maxwell (2010) went on to state:

> In summary, the use of numbers is a legitimate and valuable strategy for qualitative
>
> researchers when it is used as a complement to an overall process orientation to the
>
> research. The inclusion of quantitative data does not inherently make the research a

mixed-method study. However, it does have some potential dangers and should be used with a clear awareness of these. (p. 480)

The data analyzed for this research focused on the superintendent interviews and only a small part of the research looked at the demographic data that had been captured.

The interviews conducted used the grounded theory method and were accomplished by collecting the data and placing it into categories using open and axial coding. A cross comparison of both groups were utilized to identifying themes within the findings of the interviews. The interviews of successful and unsuccessful superintendents had common themes and ideas that were looked at closely.

Using Glaser and Stauss's perspective (as cited by Tesch, 1990), they describe grounded theory construction the best.

Rather than considering the field collection of naturally occurring data sufficiently phenomenological, Glaser and Strauss advised researchers to discontinue their practice of bringing theories to the field and gathering data with the goal of disconfirming or verifying those theories. Instead, they described a method in which the process would be reversed: While the researcher suspended all prior theoretical notions, data relevant to a particular sociological problem area would be collected, and then inspected to discover whether any theory or at least hypothesis could be developed directly from the patterns found in the data. The method for discovering such patters was called by Glaser and Strauss "constant comparison." This term refers to the fact that data are ordered into preliminary categories according to their conceptual context, and then constantly compared within a category to establish consistency, and across categories to establish clear boundaries. The concept in each category could be refined into a theoretical notion,

and the researcher could then explore whether several concepts were connected which

(*sic*) each other, thus forming hypotheses, based on or "grounded in" the data. (pp. 23-24)

Validation

Validating the study, especially a qualitative study, is difficult, but several strategies were

used to verify the accuracy of the information. Creswell (2003) listed eight different strategies

which can be utilized from most-often used to least-often used. Creswell (2003) summarized

Lincoln and Guba's 1985 work:

- *Triangulate* different data sources of information by examining evidence from the

  sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes.

- Use *member-checking* to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings

  through taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to

  participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate.

- Use *rich, thick description* to convey the findings. This may transport readers to

  the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences.

- Clarify the *bias* the researcher brings to the study. This self-reflection creates an

  open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers.

- Also present *negative* or *discrepant information* that runs counter to the themes.

  Because real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always

  coalesce, discussing contrary information adds to the credibility of an account for

  a reader.

- Spend *prolonged time* in the field. In this way, the researcher develops an in-

  depth understanding of the phenomenon under study and can convey detail about

  the site and the people that lends credibility to the narrative account.

- Use *peer debriefing* to enhance the accuracy of the account. This process involves locating a person (a peer debriefer) who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher.

- Use an *external auditor* to review the entire project. As distinct from a peer debriefer, this auditor is new to the researcher and the project and can provide an assessment of the project throughout the process of research or at the conclusion of the study. The role is similar to that of a fiscal auditor, and specific questions exist that auditors might ask (as cited by Creswell, 2003, pp. 196-197).

This research project utilized triangulation as well as parts of the thick description and bias methods to help validate the overall research piece.

Summary

This chapter presented and described the design components of the overall research project that was conducted. This chapter discussed: the research questions, methodology, procedures, data sources, data collection process, data analysis, and validation. The main purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions the superintendents held about the success or failures of their new school construction referendums and whether or not they matched up with what the review of literature states makes for successful and unsuccessful referendum processes.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This qualitative study investigated the perceptions of superintendents in the state of

Indiana who conducted successful and unsuccessful school construction referendums. This

study's purpose was to examine which variables had an impact on the outcome of the referendum

based upon superintendent perceptions regardless of whether their referendum failed or passed

during an electoral outcome between 2008 and 2010.

The research study was designed to answer several questions:

1. What perceptions do superintendents have about gaining and losing public support for

   a school construction project through a referendum?

2. What issues did the superintendents perceive as having the greatest impact on the

   referendum and why?

3. How did the superintendent perceive his role during the referendum as well as after

   the result was finalized?

4. What advice would the superintendents give to leaders of those districts preparing for

   a school construction referendum?

Eight school corporations out of the 27 (31 actual school construction referenda took

place, but four corporations had two different referenda each during this time period) school

corporations which conducted a referendum between 2008 and 2010 were selected at random to

participate in this study. Four school corporations were selected from the group of nine

successful school corporations that passed their school construction referendums and four school

corporations were selected from the group of 18 school corporations that failed with their school

construction referendums.

The superintendents who conducted these referendums were interviewed for this study,

using the questions in Appendix B, and they were allowed to expand upon any unique situations

that occurred during their school construction referendum process. I used the responses of the

superintendents to look for trends and themes that linked each of these interviews from the

questions asked of the superintendents. The superintendents were allowed to expand on how they

perceived their own school construction referendums in order to get a clearer picture of what

took place.

The interviews of the superintendents took place during the early fall of 2011, well before

the next general election. Each of the superintendent interviews was conducted at the school

corporation offices or at neutral locations throughout the state of Indiana. The interviews were

digitally recorded with hand-written notes used to collect commonalities that spread across

several of the interviews. The interview process lasted anywhere from one and one-half to two

hours long. After the interviews were digitally recorded I transcribed the material into a useful

computer document in order to obtain direct quotes when necessary. Since the information

obtained within these interviews describes very sensitive topics, the superintendents of this study

will and shall remain anonymous.

Presentation of the Data

The following section contains the findings from the interviews which were conducted

with the individual superintendents. The interview findings are presented in the order as they

were conducted. A brief synopsis will be given about the particular referendum without presenting specific data in order to retain the anonymity of the superintendents who submitted to these interview questions. Several themes emerged throughout these interviews and are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Throughout these interviews the word "he" will be used in order to recognize the superintendent. Many of the superintendents in Indiana are women. In order to retain anonymity this research will use the pronoun of "he" throughout the interviews when referring to the superintendent.

Superintendent #1. The first stop on the tour of Indiana led me to a superintendent who conducted a school construction referendum, but failed to get it passed by the voters. Several interesting items came out of this first interview that would later become trends with other superintendents and school districts that failed to pass their school construction referendums. Each question asked of the superintendent will be discussed in full as to how this superintendent perceived the referendum process.

The first question asked of this superintendent was, "What issues did you perceive to have the most impact upon the school construction referendum?" The superintendent didn't point out one major item that had an impact, but several items which worked in conjunction to defeat the school construction referendum. The superintendent stated,

> The tax rate is so low in our school district that people have moved here for retirement
> purposes and they have no affiliation with our schools, so they simply went against us at
> the polls in order to keep their tax rate one of the lowest in the state.

The interviewee went on to discuss the issue of the local Farm Bureau working against the school corporation at every step of the process. It was stated that the school corporation tried to

develop a relationship with this group and even get them to come in and view the dilapidated buildings, but that never came to fruition. The group even formed a Political Action Committee (PAC) to aggressively work against the school construction referendum and many of the wealthier farmers in that community made significant contributions to that effort.

The superintendent went on to discuss how this PAC used glossy mailings and newspaper ads a week and a half before the election. The superintendent stated, "They manipulated the information, which was easy with financing in Indiana, to confuse the issue. It was done with mailers, newspaper advertisements, and a phone service that pushed and misinformed the public." The superintendent stated that the school corporation had done a good job educating the public, but this PAC organization hit at the right time to cause a defeat at the polls. The referendum was compared to a campaign running for Congress, yet the school corporation had to fight and inform on a different level than the PAC organization.

When asked about election strategies that were used, the superintendent said he created a broad-based planning committee to help organize the campaign and get information out to the public. The committee conducted as many as 50 small informal get-togethers to have a more personal approach to those that had no affiliation to the schools in order to help them understand the issue at hand. The school corporation created a PAC, but there was very little money given to the group since the community had very few industries. A lot of the committee members went door knocking and made phone calls to help inform the public at-large. The flyers that were produced were not glossy, but they did inform the public of the need for the referendum. The superintendent stated that he tried to make one flyer glossy with a lot of color, but he got chastised for spending taxpayer money on it and then when he went to the simple one those same people complained about how it looked. On Election Day the committee supporting the

referendum did make phone calls to get people to the polls, but the opposition PAC had a better organization and they got the opposition out in greater numbers as perceived by the superintendent.

The third question was, "Did you perceive demographic issues played a factor in the referendum?" This superintendent was quite clear on this issue, believing that it did impact the overall results. He felt that the lower education levels of the citizens combined with the corporation being a predominantly rural area with more farms than industry definitely played a role in the election outcome. The superintendent was quick to point out, though, that not all farmers were against the project, since a couple of them who served on the school board pulled in their friends and family to vote in favor of the referendum.

The fourth question asked the superintendent about his perceptions of the one best item that was used to gain or lose public support for the referendum. The superintendent for this district discussed the issue of building an auditorium with this school construction referendum as well as football bleachers. The auditorium seemed to be the one item that most people did not want and it may have been the one item that lost them some support. The football bleachers were pegged as a safety issue to the community, but many community members did not see it as such. The superintendent stated,

> We had a community member after the election tell us they did not vote in favor of the
> referendum, but that the football bleachers needed to be fixed due to safety reasons and
> the corporation should go out and get a 90-day equity loan to get it done.

The superintendent went on to discuss how school construction finance in Indiana caused a great deal of confusion with the general public. It was even joked that once someone knew or understood school finance in Indiana that they needed to change it quickly.

The superintendent was asked as to how he perceived his role as he went through the school construction referendum process. He stated he had a little different view of his role since he was able to watch his former boss go through a remonstrance process. The interviewee stated the district was able to see the process be successful and what needed to be done in order to get to that triumphant point. The superintendent stated, "I took it upon myself to educate the board about the process and ready them for how they needed to approach the community with this school construction referendum." The message was created and shared so that each of the board members as well as the central office team had the same message to take to the public. The superintendent felt that this was very important to do. He felt the group needs to take the lead position on this issue and be out in front of it with the public. The superintendent also felt he needed to get his staff and board members up to par with every aspect. The interviewee felt that this was accomplished.

The sixth question asked of the superintendent was, "How did you perceive your role after the results were finalized (win or lose)?" The superintendent shared that he wanted to leave his position and move on. He was devastated by the results. The first thing he did was draft a letter to the staff encouraging them to not give the appearance that they were defeated and to set a positive tone. This letter was ready and waiting for staff members when the teachers and staff walked in the door the very next morning.

The superintendent wanted to keep the staff positive since many of them worked in conditions that were unbearable. He stated that, "some of the rooms in several of the schools had to use pencils to keep the air conditioning vents in an open position to let the air flow properly." The staff was crushed at the defeat, but the message reminded them that they would still take

care of kids in spite of this setback. The superintendent put on a positive and strong public face, but "licked his wounds" behind closed doors.

After it was all over the board and the superintendent did not discuss the matter for several meetings. They finally developed a plan to fix the building issues in small increments, which would cost the taxpayers more in the long run. The superintendent felt it was the next best plan, even though the school board knew the associated costs of fixing the buildings using this band-aid method. The board and the superintendent had to create this plan that would fit into the budget.

The last question asked of the superintendent was, "What advice would you give other superintendents who are looking at conducting a school construction referendum?" The first thing stated was that another superintendent wishing to go through this process needs to go into it with their "eyes wide open," to become educated about the process, and to talk to other superintendents who have experienced it firsthand. "The superintendent needs to set the tone and gather the entire staff and school board together to back the referendum." The superintendent needs to be transparent and to ask for help from the board. The interviewee also stated that the message that is put forward must be consistent from the beginning to the end.

The interviewee was also given the opportunity to expound on the questions that were asked and to add anything he felt was relevant to the research. The superintendent felt that the process the state of Indiana put together for schools did not allow for a fighting chance. The process created allowed for an organized opposition to control the message and has the impact of taking the superintendent out of the equation since they were not allowed to make certain statements during the referendum. This superintendent felt that those more affluent communities would pass their projects and the rest would be scratching and clawing to get even a penny for

what was truly needed. The superintendent felt that in 10 to 20 years the condition of buildings in Indiana would be greatly diminished and it will be too late to fix all of the issues when buildings start to fall down.

The superintendent of this district also stated that the governor should have gone after the one school corporation that abused its powers in constructing a football stadium built for a small college instead of punishing the rest of the corporations for doing what was necessary. The superintendent stated the same went for the tax caps since those that lived around the governor's mansion saw some of the biggest increases to their property taxes since for many years they never paid their fair share, yet "the rest of us get punished." The superintendent felt it all came down to politics and yet the schools were not ready or equipped to handle this new reality.

Superintendent #2. The second stop took me to another community that lost their school construction referendum. The community was very different from the first, but with some differences that may have contributed to the school corporation losing at the polls. The same questions were asked of this superintendent and he, too, was allowed to expand and add items at the end in order to allow the researcher a good glimpse into his perception of the school construction referendum.

The first question asked of the superintendent dealt with what he perceived as having the most impact upon the school construction referendum. The superintendent stated without hesitation that his legal advice was very conservative, since this was one of first school corporations to attempt a school construction referendum under the new law. The corporation did have a PAC created to help with the promotion of the school construction referendum. The interviewee stated, "They (the PAC) were very well organized, but I don't think they knew strategically what to do because they did not have a pulse on the community." The

superintendent recognized the district lost the election, but felt going into the election night that they were going to win. Since the legal advice was conservative in nature, the superintendent believed the school supporters could not "pound the pavement" to drum up support for the referendum.

The superintendent shifted his perception to an event that took place approximately one week before the election. A letter was sent to the local newspaper as an editorial from a prominent state politician who represented the area. The letter essentially told people to consider their tax rates when going to the polls and that passage of the referendum would lead to an increase. The superintendent stated,

> We had no opportunity at all to respond to this letter that came out on the Friday before
>
> the election. Our local newspaper is a Tuesday, Friday edition that hits the shelves in the
>
> evening and we could not respond with a rebuttal letter in the Tuesday evening paper.

There was also a rally against the school construction referendum on the Saturday before the election that meant to confuse the issue as well.

The superintendent was asked to address the second question that dealt with election strategies that were used during the school construction referendum. The superintendent stated,

> The PAC was well organized. They focused on the yes votes throughout the campaign.
>
> They set up a war room and had a campaign headquarters in the downtown area. They
>
> even made phone calls on election day to get the yes votes to the polls.

Again, it was stated that the campaign was a bit conservative due to the legal advice as to what sort of literature could be sent out to the public. The group tasked to do all this work did hold many public meetings, write letters to the editor, conduct interviews on the radio, and go out to service groups to talk to influential people within the community.

When asked about demographic issues playing a role within the referendum process, the superintendent was emphatic that they most certainly did play a role. The district has a unique setup with diverse demographic groups. His perception is that the history of the community potentially played against the referendum more so than the demographic issues that are typically considered as reasons for failure of a school construction referendum. The superintendent felt that two opposing demographic groups went against each other. One group was the "old money" in the town and the other was the "old money" in the farm areas. He felt that these two groups fought against each other with the farmers wanting to prevent the old town money to get everything they wanted.

Moving on to the question about the one item he perceived as the greatest factor in gaining or losing public support came down to the misinformation from the opposition and the wording of the questions on the ballot. The misinformation campaign was very last minute within this district, and the school corporation was unprepared to counter this group. Adding the local politician to the mix at the last minute also contributed to the spread of the misinformation. The superintendent stated, "We heard from a lot of voters who were confused with the ballot questions." The corporation had alternate plans in case the bids came in much lower to add on certain parts of the project such as an auditorium and a swimming pool. This was done since the public had stated they wanted certain things in the project but did not want other items. The superintendent felt in the end this just confused the situation.

The superintendent was asked the question about the perception of his role throughout the entire process and he stated that he felt he was the lead person and the lead communicator. The superintendent stated, "We have three things we want to accomplish as a school corporation and those are to be the school of choice, the employer of choice, and the investment of choice."

Again, the issue of being conservative in what he could do as superintendent came to surface. He confirmed that if a referendum was contemplated in the future, he would take on a much stronger role in communicating information to the public.

This leads to the next question about the role of the superintendent after the results were finalized. The superintendent said that after the results were finalized the evening of the election night that he was on the radio being "gracious" about the outcome. It was stated that, "we believed this was an appropriate project and we very much respected the wishes of the community, this democratic process and people had the opportunity vote the way they wished." The superintendent went on to state that the problems with the facilities did not go away, and a plan needed to be developed to fix things. He gathered the group of people who were against the project to see what could be done. Many of the detractors stated "a lower dollar amount for the referendum might have helped it pass." The superintendent gathered the board together to create a plan to fix the building issues and create a priority list.

Lastly, the final question asked was "What advice would you give other superintendents who are looking at conducting a school construction referendum." Quickly, the superintendent stated that he would identify all the groups of people who would support and oppose the project. He stated that he would "seek them out and talk to them, even if you are not supposed to do it that way." The superintendent felt that he should have been more out in front of this issue and if it passed the election that the opposing group could be the ones to file a lawsuit if they felt the school corporation and the superintendent violated the meaning of the law.

Some other items that were discussed were the complexities of school finance and how the public and even the politicians sometimes do not understand how it all works. "It confuses the normal Joe Blow on the street and they have no idea about all the different funds going in

different directions," stated the superintendent. The superintendent stated that if there was a next time for a referendum, they would hold a lot more meetings and gather a lot more public input before they finalized a project that would need to go to a referendum process in order to hopefully avoid a similar loss.

Superintendent #3. The third interview conducted took place with a superintendent that was successful in getting his school construction referendum passed. This community had some of the similar demographics as the first community as well as some similar traits to the second community discussed. Nothing in this school community really set it apart from the previous two communities, and geographically it was not too far from them.

The superintendent answered the first question about his perception about what had the most impact upon the school construction referendum. He stated, "It was the community as a whole." The community had been denied several times by the DLGF for their school construction projects even though there had not been a remonstrance process against it. After several failed attempts through the DLGF, the community was working hand-in-hand with various county agencies and decided to take the referendum to a vote once the law changed. Overwhelmingly, the community voted in favor of the project.

There was a very small group in the community considered as anti-school construction. The rest of the community did not agree with this group. The superintendent stated,

The community became tired of this small group that disagreed with the project. They became tired of the DLGF turning them, us, down each and every time. When the vote came it was as if the community wanted to show the state that they could do whatever they wanted to do with their money.

The superintendent met with this small group of protesters even at the behest of the DLGF, but nothing ever changed their mind.

Moving on to the second question about election strategies, the superintendent stated that the committee for the referendum had an election headquarters on the downtown square and they made a great number of phone calls on election day to get the yes voters to the polls. The superintendent said, "We had a group of supporters that stayed at the polling places all day with yellow shirts on to tell people 'thank you' for supporting our schools." The superintendent mentioned many other election strategies that were employed, such as yard signs and letters to the editor in the local paper. Ahead of the election the group completed many talks to local service groups and even got the local farm bureau on their side of the issue from the start. The school attorney helped the school corporation create a PAC so that money could be raised and spent towards passing the referendum.

The issue of community demographics was discussed. The issue did not play a large role in the outcome as perceived by the superintendent. The community had many supporters for the students and many of the community members wanted to see this project come to fruition even though twenty years earlier many of them went against another project. The superintendent stated, "We had a pretty high free and reduced lunch numbers, but people for the most part really supported their kids even though they did not have a lot of money."

The question of what one item the superintendent perceived to be the best item to gain public support came down to the issue the state and the DLGF had with their previous attempts to get a new school building moving forward. The superintendent stated, "It came down to a local control thing. The local community and supporters were upset with the state and how they handled our previous attempts." Jokingly, the superintendent stated they could have asked for

double the money and the community probably would have given it to them due to the anti-state sentiment. Another thought jumped into the superintendent's head as he noted that the local newspaper was very supportive of the issue from the outset, "even though they had to print the anti-building letters to the editor" as stated by the superintendent. The local newspaper editor came out in big support of the project and wrote stories that helped the school corporation's case.

It was asked how the superintendent perceived his role throughout the school construction referendum process. He stated that he was more "behind the scenes" with the school board out in front helping move the process along. The superintendent stated, "The board felt that they knew the community better and they wanted me to do the leg work to find grants to cover some of the costs of the project." The superintendent did state that he went to local service groups, such as Kiwanis, to speak about the project and support it in the public. He stated that most of the community supported the issue once they filed for the referendum since most of the community supported it when they went before the DLGF. The superintendent put it bluntly stating, "We were different than other communities around the state of Indiana. We knew what we, as a community, wanted."

Since this superintendent was the first one that was successful to be interviewed the question about how they perceived their role after the votes were finalized was much different. The superintendent stated, "We were a small community and we thanked all of those that supported the project, especially the important people that lead the effort such as the board and the newspaper editor." The superintendent went on to say that he used his interview with the newspaper to share his plans for celebrating this new school with a ground breaking ceremony so the community could focus on the well won victory. The superintendent stated, "This was about

kids, so when we had our ground breaking ceremony we had students out there to help. We focused on the students."

The last question asked of the superintendent dealt with what advice he would give to other superintendents that were looking to conduct a school construction referendum in the future. "Determine the support of the community first and foremost. Figure out before you start if you are going to win or lose," the superintendent stated. He went on to say that the earlier the support could be garnered the better the overall result would be. "Don't start late getting community support. Have a plan in place well ahead of asking the voters to vote and know what you can and cannot live with when it comes to a project."

Superintendent #4. The next superintendent faced another losing battle in the school construction referendum process. This community had some similar traits as the first three yet differed in some ways as well. The final vote on the referendum was rather close and some of the things the superintendent discussed point to issues and trends common with the other losing school corporations.

The first question was simple for the superintendent to answer and he did not waste any time getting to the issues he perceived to have the most impact upon the school construction referendum. Simply put, the superintendent believed that the opposition to the project was too great to overcome. He stated, "There's always an anti-group in every community, but we had one guy with a lot of time, money, and great oration skills. He didn't know the facts, but he could convince you of anything." It seems that this one person was around when another building project took place some 20 to 30 years earlier and felt that the superintendent then pulled a quick one on the public at the time. This trust issue for this one person drove him to go against anything extra or more the school corporation wanted from that time onward.

The superintendent went on to discuss the role the teachers had as another major impact upon the outcome of the election. He stated, "They did not have all the facts and thought things were going to change too much." The superintendent lamented this since they still had to do some things to make changes at the school with or without the referendum. The teachers that were in opposition of the referendum came to like these new changes after the fact and they did not realize what they had done to go against the referendum.

When asked about election strategies that were utilized during the school construction referendum the superintendent stated that he and the committee employed no such methods. A PAC was not created and there was no door to door campaign or yard sign push. There were informational public meetings, but these meetings were rarely attended by the public. The superintendent did attend meetings to talk about the project with public service groups, but that was the extent of the public speaking he conducted. The board did have a unanimous decision to move forward with the referendum, but they did not take on any responsibilities to conduct a proper campaign. A local planning committee was created to help plan the design for the project, but no other groups became involved in the referendum process. The superintendent made mention of a group that helped conduct school referendums, but they were too late in getting in the game when school corporations needed their help with this process.

As to the issues of demographics impacting the referendum outcome, the superintendent felt that they did play a major role. The superintendent stated, "Had we been a community filled with upper middle class people, I think we would have won easily. I know many of our upper middle class people were very supportive of the issue." Related to this idea, the superintendent shared that the main opposition group targeted communications to the older people in the community and frightened them with higher taxes, even though that would not be the case. The

question that was written for the ballot did not seem to be an issue from the superintendent's perspective since he worked with a legal group that had experience with referendums.

The superintendent perceived the one issue that was used most effectively to lose public support was the opposition group. This group had a glossy mailer that hit the mailboxes on the Friday before the election. With the local paper only publishing one time a week there was no response to the issues this mailer raised. The superintendent went on to state that the committee he created did not have any money to fight this sort of misinformation, and stated,

it wasn't fair to fight a battle such as this. The opposition group could say whatever they wanted to say without as much as anyone looking at what they were doing, but the schools have to be careful what they say in order to not end up in court.

The superintendent sees the community slowly getting older with fewer people choosing to live there. This shift in population was another item the superintendent pointed to as causing significant problems with passing the referendum. "The opposition did a great job going after the older population to vote against the referendum," the superintendent said. The tax issue hit them hard, and the superintendent pointed to that being the key issue of why so many voted against the referendum.

The superintendent was asked how he perceived his role throughout the referendum process. He stated,

I had to play a lot of roles. I had to be the one who gave the facts and also the cheerleader. I had to urge people to get involved, but that was my biggest failure since very few people wanted to get involved with the referendum.

Even the board could not believe that so few people wanted to get involved in the process. There was a good core group, but he did not see anyone wanting to take the lead. The superintendent

discussed the issue of mistrust due to a former superintendent a few years earlier creating a big gap with the school buildings in the community. "It is hard to overcome those things even if you are a different person," stated the superintendent. Looking back at the overall process, the superintendent stated he would have slowed the whole thing down and done a better job getting people to buy into the idea of the project.

When asked about the perception of his role after the election results were finalized the superintendent had some great insight. He stated, "We had an actual election party ready that evening, but the results came in and were finalized. Everyone was devastated. We all had one drink and went home." The superintendent went back the next day to figure out what went wrong and where. The school corporation still had to make some changes and the superintendent stated that he had to put an alternative plan together to fix the deficiencies. The superintendent tried to dissuade the board from jumping into another referendum rather quickly.

The superintendent had a lot of advice for fellow superintendents who might want to try a school construction referendum. "Get help. Get someone who knows what they are doing with the referendum. You will have to spend some money even though you don't want to do it," he stated. He went on to say not to take anything personally when dealing with a referendum. The superintendent went on to discuss the misinformation that spread throughout the community. He confirmed, "You have to fight this misinformation. One public forum I had a person state that I, as superintendent, wanted this referendum since I would get a 10% kickback from doing it." This was not true, but he saw continued misinformation prevalent throughout the community and even within the teacher ranks.

Superintendent #5. This superintendent was the fourth one that went through a school construction referendum that failed. This final interview about a failing referendum added a lot of information for the final chapter of this dissertation.

On the first question about what the superintendent perceived to have the most impact on the school construction referendum, there were two factors that came to light. The first factor the superintendent spoke of was the misinformation that was sent out by the opposition. The second factor from the superintendent was that he, as superintendent, was not able to "speak up on our side." The opposition group took every opportunity to remind the superintendent throughout public and school related meetings with teachers that he could not say certain things. The superintendent felt that this opposition group used that leverage each and every time to create problems for the overall referendum.

The superintendent expanded on the opposition group. He stated that there were three people who were very prominent people in the community who attended all of the school board meetings and other public meetings pertaining to the school construction. Misinformation was spread from this group about the tax rate and they were able to use the local newspaper to their advantage. The superintendent explained that the newspaper editor was a graduate of the rival high school located in the same county as the school district. There wasn't much of a chance at getting the proper information into the newspaper as per the superintendent. He explained that the school corporation invited the newspaper editor out to view all of the information and see the site many times, but the editor refused to come out to the district.

When asked about the election strategies the superintendent did not expand much on this question since there was very little done by the school corporation and the support group to organize this referendum as a campaign. The superintendent stated that he created a support

group, but they were not well organized and they did not start a PAC to help support the cause. It was stated by the superintendent, "The opposition group was more organized, and it was easier for them to spread negative information than for us to spread positive information." This corporation was the only one interviewed and researched that did not have a unanimous vote by the school board to move forward with the referendum. There was one dissenting vote, but it was not known if that school board member worked against the overall process or not since the superintendent never stated that to be true.

The third question discusses demographic issues, and the superintendent confirmed his belief that demographics did play a part in the overall outcome of the election. It was discussed that the free and reduced population for the district was around the fifty percent mark, which definitely had an impact in the mind of the superintendent. He stated, "Education is just not seen as a priority in the community." As a corporation they were near the bottom when it came to passing the ISTEP+ test, but they have slowly moved upward and the superintendent stated it was a huge cultural shift to get these improvements accomplished. The superintendent felt that there "was a lot of apathy at the polls."

The superintendent did not have a clear or concise answer to the question about whether there was one item that he perceived as key to losing public support for the referendum. He pointed back to the apathetic nature of the community and that they listened to the opposition group more than the school corporation. After thinking about the question some more the superintendent did feel that the rules for conducting the referendum did hold them back a bit since they "could not get the word out and though most people would have been in favor of the project if they understood and knew all of the facts." From the superintendent's perspective it seems that the opposition group not having constraints was a hard battle to fight.

The fifth question asked about how the superintendent perceived his role to be throughout the referendum process. He said, "I felt like I had to be the champion of this. But I didn't go to the service clubs to talk about the need." The talks and discussions took place at the board meetings exclusively. The few public forums that were conducted were not well attended throughout the process. The superintendent felt that most people in the community understood the needs since the building was very old. He stated, "It is a beautiful building and probably won architectural awards, but it was not a practical building and one that needs a lot of updates." The superintendent still felt that most people knew this information without being constantly reminded.

The sixth question asked the superintendent how he felt after the election results were finalized. The superintendent knew the evening of the election that they had lost the referendum, but the school corporation needed to move forward with some fixes to the schools. That evening some short discussions were had with the board president to have the next board meeting ready for a band-aid approach to the fixes the schools needed. The superintendent did not take the election personally nor did he discuss the loss at length during the interview.

When the superintendent was asked the last question about what advice he would give to other superintendents who would face a referendum, he stated, "Plan way in advance. Start talking to your board almost two years before you take this on and make sure people in the community know that you are looking to do this in the future." The superintendent encouraged those considering a referendum to use the advanced planning time to identify the opposition groups and to try to get them to understand the needs of the schools.

This superintendent felt that the school corporation's referendum process was rushed since their needs were great. He sensed that they had no time to prepare for the referendum

process, because the school corporation needed to fix these problems immediately. He stated, "The schools don't sell the positives too much. We need to be better at public relations and announcing to the world all the great things we do for students." He felt that public relations were expensive, but necessary in order to get people to understand what the schools needed. The public will have a hard time believing it is money well spent from his perspective.

Superintendent #6. The sixth interview conducted was with a superintendent who had led a successful school construction referendum project. This superintendent had a different perspective about his success. The process as described by this superintendent created positive results.

The superintendent was asked question number one about his perception of the issues that had the most impact upon the school construction referendum. He was quick to give three areas that he felt had the greatest impact on the school corporation's success. He stated, "First and foremost there was a definite need versus a want for the things we needed at our schools. And within that need it was within the academic side and not the extracurricular or athletic side." The second item that he felt had an impact was that as superintendent he had a lot of credibility within the community and with all of the 41 public meetings conducted, people believed the message he presented. The superintendent stated that the third item was that about 12 months out he put together a cabinet of key stakeholders. He felt this group helped get out the positive message to the voting public in an efficient and timely manner.

He continued to harp on how he and the key stakeholders were continually out in front of the public driving the positive message home that the schools had needs and those would be fixed with the referendum. The superintendent felt that many in the school community knew the main school needed some fixes since many of them had families who attended it for many years.

He also felt that the superintendent's cabinet he created truly helped drive this succinct message to the public.

The question about election strategies was asked, and the superintendent took the researcher through some of the step by step items that were done from the beginning. In using architects to help design and build the building, part of the contract included hiring a public relations firm for the whole process and this money did not come out of the general funds. The superintendent had a succinct message that he conveyed to his principals who then conveyed it to the teachers who in turn went out into the community to do door knocking on the weekends. A lot of other election strategies were used such as mailings and poll workers who went out to find the yes voters and made sure they got to the polls.

When the superintendent was pressed about demographic issues he stated that the community was very diverse with students coming from trailer parks and multimillion dollar homes. Many of the parents in the community had jobs within the region that he believed helped them to understand the needs of the students. He felt the parents understood the message about looking forward to the future and for their community to have an economic impact they needed to update the technologies the students were using.

The fourth question I asked the superintendent dealt with what the superintendent thought was the one issue that gained public support for the school construction referendum. He felt that the organization of his group and people proved to be the difference. There was only one person that worked against the referendum, but most people, from the perception of the superintendent, cast him off as the "local tax watchdog" who talked way too much. The community group that was created went after the yes votes and all of their families to insure the referendum passed. The local support group put out yard signs and did a lot to discredit the one opposition person by

stating the facts to people around the community. The superintendent went back to his initial

thoughts and stated, "We did not ask for things that were unnecessary. We did not ask for

millions of dollars for athletic facilities we did not need, like our neighboring school

corporation." The organization and the need are what the superintendent felt helped gain and

keep the public support.

Moving on to the role that the superintendent perceived as his role throughout the

process, he stated, "From the beginning the board wanted me to be the point person. I was a good

public speaker and I had a lot of credibility within the community." The superintendent went on

to say that he did all sorts of things to put himself in front of the community. He continued to

bring up the issue with his credibility helping move the issue forward. He believed this

credibility gave him access to many groups throughout the community and his involvement

within the community opened doors as well. The support organization also used all necessary

means to get their message out to the community. The superintendent added that they had some

technology oriented people that used that medium to their advantage.

It was asked of the superintendent to explain how he felt and what he did when the

election results came in and were finalized. He stated,

> We always took the position that we would move forward with changes to our schools
>
> and it only depended how quickly it could happen if the referendum passed. We had a
>
> plan B, but fortunately we did not have to use it.

The superintendent said that he brought the plan back out to the public to remind everyone what

they voted on and how quickly that process would take place. He said that almost immediately

after the election the wheels were in motion to get the project going forward.

The last and final question asked was what advice he would give other superintendents contemplating a referendum process. His first thought was, "Make sure the school board is unanimous in its decision to do the project. Make sure the board and the superintendent are unified and make sure the board understands they have to stay positive throughout the process." The superintendent stuck to his idea that the project should be about needs and not wants. He felt that there were many groups in the community that wanted some "fluff" things, but the school corporation stayed the course and focused on academic and safety needs only. He also felt that a superintendent needs to be comfortable in front of people and if not they might have some trouble with getting a referendum passed. He stated, "I can sit down with a local labor person in the coffee shop and have a conversation as well as hold a conversation with the CEO of our local hospital." The superintendent felt that credibility in the local community was another important thing a superintendent needed to hold and maintain.

Superintendent #7. The superintendent of this school corporation had completed a successful school construction referendum. All of the same questions were asked of this superintendent, but he expanded on several other items that should be noted.

The superintendent was asked the first question as to what he perceived had the most impact on the school construction referendum and he immediately stated, "Three words come to mind quickly and they are communication, transparency, and rethinking the construction plan of the previous referendum attempt." When pressed on the rethinking part it was asked if the focus became more about needs versus wants and he was emphatic with an affirmative answer. A part of the plan involved closing a school due to the age of the building, and he recognized that part of the plan needed to be communicated effectively.

He continued to talk about proper communication since some of the referendum money was going toward a newly constructed school and he felt they showed why this money needed to be spent there. When pushed to explain more about this communication, he shared that the entire plan was overhauled to fit the needs and make sure efficiency were top priorities for the construction project. He felt that by communicating this plan properly, people were able to vote in the affirmative for it.

The superintendent was asked to discuss election strategies that were used during the election and he answered this question succinctly. He stated, "First, we put together a taskforce of community members that had several sub-committees, such as fundraising, marketing, communication, and gathering volunteers to help." The superintendent said this group was a very large and active group that helped to push the referendum forward. The original group from a previous referendum was very small and did not divide duties easily as per the superintendent's perspective. This original group mainly consisted of one person who did the majority of the work.

The superintendent went on to discuss that he "literally begged" people to be invited to their groups to speak to them about the school construction referendum. The superintendent discussed that he was constantly out within the community discussing the issue everywhere he could from churches to service groups. The volunteer groups canvassed neighborhoods to leave literature and door knock on weekends. The superintendent stated, "I was constantly everywhere in the community, shaking hands and kissing babies, like a politician."

The question about demographics playing a factor in the election was discussed and the superintendent had a different view about the demographics. The superintendent looked at in several ways. He stated,

If you have a community that is well educated they will want to rationalize things and

understand why you need the money. So the communication part is extremely important.

On the other hand if your community is not that well educated you might have to

approach them in a totally different manner. I think it is harder to get a referendum

passed if your community is of the higher socio-economic class and college educated.

The superintendent discussed talking to retirement groups since they had to be approached and

the plan had to be laid out in front of them so those groups could understand the need. He also

discussed that talking to these groups allowed for a lot of misinformation to be cleared up. One

such piece of information came from a retirement group that asked why the superintendent gets

10% of the school construction bond. That piece of misinformation was easily cleared up, but the

superintendent stated it was a constant battle.

The question about the one best item used to gain public support was easily answered by

the superintendent since it was discussed at length. The superintendent felt that, "Being

transparent with the communication was what helped us through this referendum." He went on to

discuss that being out in front and communicating to the voting public was the biggest reason for

their success "hands down." He went on to make sure to add that all of the information was

presented to the public no matter what damage it could do. "If you are honest and you show and

discuss everything, your chances increase," he stated.

He was asked about how he perceived his role throughout the election and he stated,

"People want to hear from the superintendent and they will tell you that." He went on to explain

that the first referendum had a parent answering questions, but the public wants the

superintendent to be held accountable and they want to ask the superintendent direct questions

about the referendum. The superintendent added that the school board president was at almost all of the same events as the superintendent and they, too, answered questions from the public.

The superintendent was asked how he perceived his role after the election results were finalized. He noted that things were put into motion immediately. "We put up banners and marquees that said thank you and we placed an advertisement in the local newspaper thanking the voters," he stated. He went on to discuss that the local newspaper was very supportive of what the school corporation was doing in the community. He also went on to discuss that there was no organized opposition group to this referendum.

The last question asked of the superintendent dealt with what advice he would offer to other superintendents contemplating a school construction referendum. He stated, "The communication piece is extremely important to understand and it should be in place way before this process is discussed." He went on to discuss that creating a strong community group is vitally important and that a superintendent needs to get one in place almost immediately once the board decides to move forward with a school construction referendum. Lastly he stated, "The public wants to hear from the superintendent and make sure you are prepared to do this. As a superintendent you will spend a lot of your own time being out in public supporting this request."

The superintendent followed up with some thoughts specifically about actions taken after the referendum. Mainly, he stated, "The school corporation needs to continue to communicate and show the public how they are spending the money properly." He went on to say, "You never know when you might need another referendum in the future. With the budgets being cut you might have to be back out there asking for more money." He also discussed how the referendum laws were written and they did not allow a superintendent to advocate for the project freely

unlike a politician can do for themselves during a campaign. This fact caused a lot of concern as to how the superintendents around the state would be able to get referendums passed.

Superintendent #8. The last and final superintendent also had a successful referendum campaign for his school project. This superintendent stated that he may need to be coming back to the voters in the near future for a general fund referendum. He was hopeful that this success would help him in the future if he needed to do this again.

The superintendent of this corporation stated that he started communicating the need for the building projects four or five years ahead of the school construction referendum when he was asked what he perceived had the most impact upon the referendum. "I got a community group put together and invited everyone I could think of and we looked at our building master plan six months after I became superintendent," he stated. He felt that the community knew what the issues were and the community group had a lot of decision making powers when it came to the building master plan. He and the community group went through all the things that needed to be looked at and each of them were identified ahead of time. This pre-planning was the one thing that carried this referendum through to success in the superintendent's opinion.

The setup of this group led to the next question about what other election strategies were utilized throughout the process. The superintendent stated, "This core group we created helped to create a PAC for the election. They raised money and manpower to get things done." He considered the organization of this group as a key reason that no opposing organization started within the community. He continued to believe that his group and their presence at all of the meetings were "paramount to their success." The pro-referendum organization went to the polling places and made sure that all of the yes votes got to the polls on Election Day.

The superintendent went on to discuss the demographics and make-up of the district before the question was asked. He shared information about a suggestion to close down an elementary school many years earlier in another part of the district and build a bigger building at the main school campus in the middle of the district. He said, "This caused a lot of issues and we wanted to avoid that. We wanted to make sure we were unified in what our goal was." The superintendent felt that the people of the district were mostly supportive of what they were trying to accomplish. When he was pressed on the demographics question he did not perceive any one demographic issue playing a vital role in the election outcome.

He was asked what he perceived to be the one best item that won the election for the school district and he stated that it was getting the community involved and on board with the idea of construction years in advance of the election. He stated, "We have a community that has a lot of pride and we made sure we had conversations within the community to get everyone's input." The superintendent felt that the community's involvement was essential to the success. He discussed how one person single-handedly went out and raised a quarter of a million dollars for their basketball stadium just by going door to door. When asked about communication being an integral part of this community involvement, he stated, "Yes, we communicated and made them aware, at the same time getting them involved with the process."

The question about the superintendent's role within this process was discussed. The superintendent perceived his role to be that of a consensus builder within the community by creating the community group that drove the referendum to a positive outcome. He stated, "I was out in the community, but the community group did a lot of the work and garnered a lot of the support for this project."

He was asked what he perceived his role to be after the election results were finalized. He stated that he needed to make sure the community was thanked for their support and the community organization that helped see this through was lauded as well. He went on to say,

I sort of like the new process since the vote goes to the people. It is not like the old days where someone went out and petitioned people to get a bond. Some people accused the supporters of going out and twisting the arms of old people. This new process removes this issue.

The final question about what advice would be given to other superintendents who wished to undertake a school construction referendum shed some more light on the research. His first statement, "Don't wait until the last minute. Get started early. Make sure you count the votes as best you can and if you are going to lose then why go through the trouble?" He continued to harp on the fact that the community support was integral to the success, and added, "You cannot do it alone. Get help from the community and if you can't get them to help, you will definitely not win." The superintendent went on to make sure he stated that the board needed to be unanimous and supportive of the referendum. He made it clear that if this would not be the case then it would be "foolish" to undertake the project.

Demographics of all School Construction Referendum Districts

This portion of the research will look at some of the demographic information that was collected. This demographic information will come from all of the school districts that were involved in a school construction referendum from 2008-2010 in the state of Indiana and not just the eight school districts that were randomly selected for this research. The information collected came from the 2000 U.S. Census and the Indiana Department of Education. This information included school corporation name, county, year of referendum, time of election, outcome, total

amount sought, tax rate increase per $100 assessed valuation, student population, district

population, total assessed valuation of the district (during the year of the referendum), per capita

income, and lastly the median value of homes.

This demographic information will be presented for 27 of the school districts that held a

referendum for school construction projects between 2008 and 2010. There were a total of 31

referendums during this time period, but Noblesville Schools, Decatur County Community

Schools, Mooresville Consolidated School Corporation, and Tell City-Troy Township School

Corporation each held two referendums during this time period.

Eleven school corporations have passed a school construction referendum from 2008 to

2010. Out of these 11, seven of the elections were in the spring, one was in the winter, and three

were during the fall election cycles. An argument for a winter or special election could be made,

especially if the majority of a district's population is in the retirement age group since many of

them may be in warmer climates during the winter months. One of the researched school

corporations had their retired population accuse the superintendent of doing this.

There were 20 referendums that failed to pass from 2008 to 2010. Of these, 11 were

conducted in the spring, five were conducted in the fall, two were conducted in the winter, and

two were conducted in the summer. Out of the fall elections there were three positive outcomes

and five negative outcomes. The spring elections had seven positive outcomes versus 11 negative

outcomes. The special elections which occurred in the winter and summer had one positive

outcome and four negative outcomes.

The 2008 year for referendums was positive since 4 out of the 5 that requested a

referendum vote passed. The 2009 year for referendums was a bit bleaker since only 2 out of the

15 passed. The 2010 year for referendums fared a little bit better with 5 out of the 11 referendums passing.

Taking a look at the total amount of the referendum that was sought, there is no clear picture. Indianapolis Public Schools and the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation asked for $278,000,000 and $149,000,000, the two highest amounts requested, yet both of these passed, whereas Tell City-Troy Township School asked for $6,000,000 and $10,000,000, the two lowest amounts, and neither request passed. Looking at the top 10 by dollar amount, six of them passed, and out of the bottom 10 by dollar amount requested, three of them passed.

The next area looked at was the tax rate increase per $100 assessed valuation. The two lowest tax rate increases proposed were in the Hamilton Southeastern School District and the Lake Central School Corporation at .0944 and .1230 respectively. The Hamilton Southeastern school construction referendum passed and the Lake Central failed. Out of the 10 lowest tax rate increases, five of them passed. The two highest tax rate increases were in the Flat Rock-Hawcreek School Corporation and the Lebanon Community School Corporation at .7800 and .6674 respectively. Both of these referendum requests passed. Out of the 10 highest tax rate increase requests four of them passed.

The total assessed valuation of the districts during their referendum years was looked at as well. The 10 school districts with the lowest assessed valuations had 3 out of 10 referendums pass. The 10 school districts with the highest assessed valuations had 6 out of 10 pass.

The student population during the referendum showed that the smallest 10 school corporations only had 3 out of 10 pass the referendum. The 10 largest student populations during the referendum had 6 out of 10 pass. Based upon the 2000 Census data, the 10 districts with the lowest population within their district had 3 out of 10 referendums pass. The 10 districts with the

highest population within their district had 6 out of 10 referendums pass. The student population and the district populations coincided in the number of passing for both the bottom 10 and the top 10.

The per capita income was based upon the 2000 Census data as well, and ranged from the high end of $32,164 to the low end of $16,992. The bottom 10 school districts had 5 out of 10 referendums passed. It must be noted that the Indianapolis Public Schools had the lowest per capita income at $16,992 and they asked for the largest school construction referendum in the 2008-2010 school years at $278,000,000. The top 10 school districts had 4 out of 10 referendums pass. The median value of the housing units based upon the 2000 Census data had a range from $64,400 to $161,100. The lowest 10 school districts based upon median value had 4 out of 10 referendums pass and the highest 10 school districts had 4 out of 10 referendums pass.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This chapter reviews the questions that were asked of the superintendents, the methodology utilized, and a summary of the findings. This chapter also presents the common themes of both the superintendents who were successful and of those who were unsuccessful with their school construction referendums. An additional review of the demographic data will be presented to see if certain trends appear.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover if there were common themes among the superintendents who went through school construction referendums regardless of whether they won or lost. The overall goal of this research was to see if these common themes showed what a school superintendent should do to win their school construction referendum and what they should avoid doing that might lead to defeat. The following research question has been answered in this study:

1. What perceptions do superintendents have about gaining and losing public support for a school construction project through a referendum?

The secondary questions for this research asked directly of the superintendents:

2. What issues did the superintendent perceive as having the greatest impact on the results of the referendum and why?

3. How did the superintendent perceive his role during the referendum as well as after the result was finalized?

4. What advice would the superintendents give to leaders of those districts preparing for a school construction referendum?

There were seven questions that were used during the interview process with the superintendents:

1. What issues did you perceive to have most impact upon the school construction referendum?

2. Which election strategies were used during the school construction referendum?

3. Did you perceive that demographic issues played a factor in the school construction referendum?

4. What did you perceive as one best item that was used to gain (or lose) public support?

5. How did you perceive your role as you went through the school construction referendum process?

6. How did you perceive your role after the results were finalized (win or lose)?

7. What advice would you give other superintendents who are looking to conduct a school construction referendum?

The review of literature provided a base for the research and led to the development of these questions. Although this is a qualitative study, the review of literature mainly dealt with quantitative studies. I sought to gather information directly from superintendents who oversaw this process and to get their perceptions about the items that helped or hurt the outcomes. The referendum process is in its infancy in the state of Indiana, so a lot of beneficial information can be gleaned from the superintendents.

Discussion of Themes

There were several main topics and themes discussed by the superintendents. Many of these themes appeared throughout the districts whether they won or lost their referendums, but a majority of the themes the superintendents discussed corresponded with the outcome of their referendums. This part of the research will break down what themes were discussed by the superintendents based upon their perceptions.

The first major theme to come out of the research dealt with communication. This could involve communication plans, discussions with individuals or groups, and a variety of other ways of getting the school corporation's message out when it came to the school construction referendum. All of the interviewed superintendents spoke about communication and how they got their message out to the public though some discussed it more often than others.

The second theme that came out of the research dealt with forming community committees to become the driving force behind the school construction referendum. Both the losing and winning school corporations had a variety of planning committees made up of community members to help organize the referendum. Each of the corporations used these committees in various ways and doled out responsibilities to them.

Another major theme and topic discussed at length dealt with planning. A majority of the superintendents discussed planning well ahead of the actual referendum. This planning sometimes took place years in advance and taking on the referendum was just a piece of the puzzle, not the big picture. Several of the superintendents who did not have clear plans came out on the unsuccessful end of the referendum. This topic is an important one to note for future groups that want to take on a school construction referendum.

These themes and topics show up throughout the research with the superintendents. Each of the superintendents offered a unique look at what was done during their school construction referendum. Some of the items could be more clearly tied to a successful outcome, while others are associated with an unsuccessful outcome. These themes became apparent whether they were successful or unsuccessful and depending on how much they utilized these tactics may have had an impact on the outcome.

Interpretation of the Findings

The following information summarizes the answers of the eight superintendents who conducted a school construction referendum. These answers provide some insight into what the superintendents perceived to be the items that led to a successful or unsuccessful referendum outcome. It is important to remember that there were four superintendents who were successful with their school construction referendum and there were four superintendents who were unsuccessful with their school construction referendum.

What issues did you perceive to have most impact upon the school construction referendum?

This question had a variety of answers from the superintendents, but the themes that were discussed previously came to surface. Superintendents #3, #6, #7, and #8 were all successful with their referendums. Each of them talked about communication being a key factor when answering this question as well as each school corporation having a lot of community support. All four successful superintendents had clear plans for their school construction referendum and superintendent #8 noted that he had started planning five years prior to the referendum, with most others at least a year in advance.

Three out of the four successful superintendents also described that their school corporation focused on the needs of the schools and not the wants such as athletic areas. This focus on needs helped the superintendents gain support for their projects. One superintendent even revised his corporation's plans from a previous attempt to focus on the needs only and thus deflating the opposition's argument. This idea of prioritizing needs over frivolous things was a major selling point by all of the superintendents who were successful.

The last item that all four superintendents pointed to as having an impact on the referendum was trust. Some described this as transparency and others described this as credibility, but all four successful superintendents used the word "*trust*" when discussing this first question. Superintendent #6 harped on his credibility within the community and his belief that people felt he was a trusted person. He felt that this trust and credibility was a major part of achieving success.

All four superintendents of the unsuccessful school corporations talked about the opposition groups causing a lot of issues. The four successful superintendents spent very little time discussing the opposition groups since most did not have any organized resistance. All four of the school corporations that failed had people who worked directly against the school corporation. Some of the people and groups that were in opposition of them were politicians, newspaper editors, or the local farm bureau. This major opposition to the referendum became a discussion point. Three out of the four superintendents also discussed a last minute mailer or letter to the editor of the local paper that spread misinformation and did not allow time for the school corporation to respond.

Superintendents #2 and #5 spoke about their legal counsel advising them to be very cautious when speaking to the public about the referendum process. Both of these

superintendents lamented this fact and noted that if they had to do it over again, they would have been much more vocal. One of the successful superintendents discussed how vocal he was and how much he was out in front of the issue.

Only one of the unsuccessful school corporations had a school board that was not unanimous when they chose to take on the school construction referendum. There were two school corporations that had school boards that pushed for the referendums but did not want to take the time to become involved in the process. Two of the successful superintendents spoke about how their school boards were very supportive and out in the community gathering support for the referendum.

Failed communication or being unable to communicate properly seemed to hit all four unsuccessful school corporations in some form or another. None of the four spoke about elaborate communication plans nor did they speak about long range planning for their projects. Although they were not pushed to describe their communication plans and how far out in advance they developed them, the subject did not surface during the interview.

In summarizing this question and the superintendents' answers, it is clear that communication was the main component of the successful school corporations and the lack of communication hurt those corporations that lost their elections. The strong opposition groups played a main part in the outcome for the unsuccessful school corporations and it was very evident that these groups could almost signal certain defeat since the successful school corporations rarely, if ever, spoke about strong opposition groups. Trust was another major focus and those school corporations that had trusting leadership seemed to win out. One of the unsuccessful superintendents had a leader of an opposition group that felt they were lied to about

a school construction project some 25 years earlier and they used that issue to fight the current superintendent's referendum.

Which election strategies were used during the school construction referendum?

There were a variety of answers for this question ranging from forming a PAC to taking no action to get people to the polls. This question was raised since much of the research discussed running referendum campaigns much like an election campaign for someone running for political office. It is important to understand what each of the school corporations did in order to see if using these strategies had an impact on the outcome.

One of the first strategies of an election is the creation of a PAC. Out of the four failing school corporations only two had formed a PAC and of the two only one had any money or significant organization behind it. The other two school corporations did not develop a PAC in support of their school construction referendum. Out of the four school corporations that passed their referendum only two of them formally developed a PAC while the two remaining corporations did not. However, both of these school corporations had tremendous support from the community before the idea about a school construction referendum was discussed. This community support was discussed at length by the two superintendents. Two of the failing school corporations saw the work of opposition PACs formed to work against the referendum.

Several of the successful corporations discussed having a campaign headquarters near their downtown areas that people could see each and every day as they travelled through town. Only one failing corporation had a campaign headquarters, but this failing corporation seems to be an anomaly compared to the other failing school corporations. All four of the corporations that were successful used a get out the vote drive on election day and only one of the failing corporations had a well-organized get out the vote push on election day. A door knocking

campaign was initiated by all of the successful school corporations and only two of the failing school corporations attempted to use door knocking as a way to get their message out to the public.

It should be noted that two of the failing school corporations did absolutely nothing when it came down to election strategies. One of the two had an organized PAC against them that had plenty of money to spend working against the referendum. One of these failing school corporations did none of the prescribed election campaign strategies and it was clearly shown by the final results on election day. The lone failing school corporation that did implement several election strategies had a very different community make-up than most that were researched. This different population and a community leader speaking out against the project seems to be what helped defeat that referendum.

Did you perceive that demographic issues played a factor in the school construction referendum?

Demographics are statistical characteristics that make up the population of these school districts such as income and home values. The question was asked of the superintendents, but their answers were based upon their perception of the demographics of the corporation and what impact they had on the outcome of the referendum.

When this question was posed to the superintendents, six out of the eight stated that demographics did factor in the outcome of the referendum, while only two did not see demographics of any kind being an issue. The two superintendents who did not see demographics as a factor did state that they had strong community backing and significant community pride for their schools. Some of the superintendents saw the demographics as playing

either a positive or negative role in the outcome, while others described the demographics as something you should consider when creating your communication plan.

The four failing superintendents all stated yes when they answered this question. Superintendent #1 pointed at the low education levels of the district and the fact it was very rural. Superintendent #2 used demographics to describe what split the two main opposing sides, describing them as the "country-club people" and the "farmers" who were defined as those living outside the city area of the district, whether they farmed or not. Superintendent #4 stated it was the older population that went against the referendum aggressively since they feared it would drive their taxes higher. Lastly, superintendent #5 felt that the high population of free and reduced students within their schools did not help since he felt that "education was not a priority" for this part of the community.

Two of the four successful superintendents perceived demographics playing a role in the outcome of the referendum, but both of them spoke about how their communication plans were molded around the audiences they were speaking to. Superintendent #8 stated that the message was different for those highly educated people who wanted to see the numbers and understand the overall impact for their students versus the older population who wanted to know how much it was going to cost them when it came time to pay the tax bill.

The overall perception is that demographics do play a factor in the outcome of a referendum, but those that have been successful seem to have crafted their messages to feed the different demographic sectors the information they needed to support the referendum. The two superintendents that did not feel that demographics played a part did, however, speak about their tight-knit communities backing their schools. A superintendent should know the history of how

the community has reacted to these questions in the past, which will likely be a strong factor in understanding how they will respond to a current-day referendum.

What did you perceive as the one best item that was used to gain (or lose) public support?

This question asked the superintendents to identify the one item they felt garnered the greatest support for their referendum or that one item they felt pushed their referendum towards defeat. While their answers were each different, they do have some commonalities.

Three of the superintendents spoke about the community coming out for or against the referendum based upon some of the items included in the construction proposal, such as a pool or an auditorium. Two superintendents whose referendums failed both spoke about how people in the community told them they would have voted for the referendum, if not for too many unwanted items included. The superintendent who mentioned this factor and who was successful felt that his focus on needs over wants is what earned sufficient support for the referendum to pass.

Two of the failing superintendents spoke about last minute mailers and glossy postcards that hit voter mailboxes on the Friday before the election. Both of them felt they had no time to respond to this new confusing information before voters went to go to the polls. Both of these school corporations had major opposition to what they were trying to accomplish with the referendum.

Overall, the main theme for this item was communication, whether it was last minute mailers opposing the referendum or the variety of tactics used by the four successful corporations to support their referendums. One superintendent even said it was "paramount" to his success. Of the four school corporations that failed, three of the superintendents talk about misinformation being sent out and a lack of money to get their supporting messages to the voters.

Those corporations that were successful all were linked by their focus on communicating with their public. This leads one to believe that running the referendum as an actual campaign and treating it as such will lead to more successful outcomes than naught. Those corporations that were organized and asked for their needs only were successful. They were also successful when they got their message to the people. If the two failing school corporations that had last minute mailers hit had planned for such an event, their outcome might have been different. Political campaigns are prepared to put last minute information in the hands of the voters, school corporations need to be ready to do the same.

How did you perceive your role as you went through the school construction referendum process?

This question was asked in order to get a feel as to what a superintendent should be doing during this referendum campaign. It clarifies and pinpoints the things that were done to be successful and those things to avoid in order for the referendum to not fail. Again, the details of the answers sounded different, but in the bigger picture they all had some sort of connection.

Out of all of the eight interviews only one superintendent stated that he was not the lead communicator, point person, or champion of the school construction referendum. This corporation was slightly different in that its school board believed they knew the community better than the superintendent and that they wanted to be the ones out there beating the bushes while the superintendent worked on logistics. The other seven superintendents who stated they were the lead person all emphasized communicating the message and being the person to try to organize support.

The four failing superintendents all spoke of being the lead person for this referendum, but they each had a different idea as to how it was supposed to look with them as the lead

communicator. The first two superintendents both felt that they had to be constrained with the information they gave out to the public for fear of being sued in court for overstepping their boundaries as set forth in the statute. Both of them lamented this fact and stated they would do it differently if given another opportunity. Superintendent #4 had a failed referendum and placed much of the blame for the referendum's defeat on trust issues with the previous superintendent. Superintendent #5, the final one that failed, stated he did nothing but speak at board meetings and a handful of public forums that were not well attended. He even stated that he avoided the service clubs.

The research for this question points to the value of the superintendent being the main leader of a school construction referendum. The one outlier in answering these questions utilized a very strong and community-minded school board that could handle those issues. The failing school corporations faced issues that prevented a positive outcome far out in advance of these referendums. It must be noted that the one superintendent who did not go out to the service clubs and speak to them lost the school construction referendum by a significant margin.

How did you perceive your role after the results were finalized (win or lose)?

This question was an important one to ask since many school corporations may return to the polls for another school construction referendum in the near future regardless of the outcome of the current election. Win or lose, the issue is how things are handled once things are over. The referendum process looks like a campaign for a political office and should be handled as such.

The four failing superintendents all spoke about being congenial after the results came in, but they still had a job to do and schools to fix. Three of the four went forward with alternative plans to put small fixes into place at the schools, and the fourth superintendent had to discuss the possibility of another referendum with the school board. Three of the four failing superintendents

spoke to their opposition groups and heard valuable feedback. One opposition group stated there was nothing the school corporation could have changed, because they would have gone against anything and everything. Two of the other opposition groups told the superintendents that if they had asked for less money or items that they did not believe were not necessary, they might have gone along with the referendum.

The four superintendents who passed their referendums all stated that they thanked the voters and the support groups who helped make the outcome possible. Two of the superintendents even held some informational meetings the following week to show the public exactly what had been approved and how quickly the projects would start. None of the winning superintendents had any follow-up talks with those people who were opposed to the referendum.

Win or lose, the superintendent needs be thankful and appreciative of the democratic process. The superintendent needs to have statements ready for the press and his supporters that are geared toward the proper outcome. One superintendent had a letter awaiting his staff the very next morning after the loss to explain what the school corporation would do to take care of the students' needs.

Since one of the superintendents interviewed discussed the possibility of going back for another referendum it should be noted that there have been two school districts that have lost their first construction referendums and have gone back to try again between the years of 2008 to 2010. Tell City-Troy Township School Corporation voters rejected a project costing $10 million with a tax rate per $100 of $.28 in the fall of 2009 by a vote of 49.2% for and 50.8% against. They tried again in the fall of 2010 with a smaller project costing $6 million and a tax rate per $100 of $.16. It failed by a vote of 43% for and 57% against. Noblesville School Corporation tried in a special election in January of 2009 and failed by 48.9% for and 51.1% against. They

tried again in May of 2010 and passed by a vote of 60% for and 40% against. Surprisingly, they increased the asking price from the initial one of $59.9 million to $63.6 million and a tax rate of $.1506 to $.19 per $100 of assessed valuation.

It is interesting to see two corporations go back to a referendum and the one that decreased its costs and asking price was defeated, but the other school corporation that increased their costs and asking price won. The gap of votes for and against increased for each corporation as well. The corporation that cut its costs had a larger losing gap than the first outcome and the corporation that increased its costs and earned a resounding victory by 20 percentage points.

Overall a referendum campaign is just like a political campaign. The corporation needs to be congenial about the win or loss at the polls. The superintendent needs to have statements and plans ready in case the referendum fails. The school board needs to very carefully consider taking the issue back to the voters since there is very little data to support that a second campaign will be successful.

What advice would you give other superintendents who are looking to conduct a school construction referendum?

This is an important question to ask the superintendents of this study since they have faced the referendum process, and even though some of them have failed, they have each learned a great deal about things a superintendent could try to increase the chances of success. All of the superintendents had different views on this question, but again, communication and planning became the main talking points of the majority of them.

Two of the four failing superintendents advised other superintendents to seek out help from organizations or other superintendents who have gone through this school construction referendum process. As with most anything educators do, seeking help is a top priority and

something that is done frequently. It should be noted that this research study took place during the infancy of the school construction referendum process and there were very few groups or people who had gone through a referendum in the state of Indiana.

Three of the four failing superintendents also advised that any superintendent wishing to conduct a school construction referendum should seek out the opposition groups to share information with them to increase the understanding of the school corporation's need. It can also be an opportunity for the superintendent to learn what the opposition group might be willing to do. Several of the failing superintendents spoke about the opposition groups coming to them after the election and stating that they would have supported the referendum if certain items were out of the project. This thought leads to the next item that a majority of superintendents spoke about whether they lost or won the election.

Seven of the eight superintendents interviewed stated that the advice they would give another superintendent is to make sure they know their community. Some of the superintendents, four out of the four successful ones, stated that planning a strong community group and knowing what the community needs from their schools is very important. Over all of the interviews, four of the superintendents discussed planning their projects well in advance. Of these four, three were successful with the election outcome.

Along with proper planning comes proper communication. School districts are becoming better at communication, but that has not been so in the recent past. All of the eight superintendents discussed communication in some form or another as something that is important to be done and would advise other superintendents to create a very strong communication plan. Three of the superintendents, all of whom were successful, stated they had

long range communication plans in place and they were constantly communicating with the public whether the issue dealt with finances or academics.

The four successful superintendents stated they would advise other superintendents to create a strong community group to help get the referendum project moving forward. Throughout their interviews these superintendents discussed the strength of their groups and the lengths to which these groups would go to support the school construction referendum. All of the groups raised funds to support the campaign as well as gave their time to be at local events supporting the school construction referendum.

Indiana has several organizations that support superintendents such as the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents (IAPSS); another newly created group dedicated to helping school corporations with school construction referendums is called FAIR Indiana, which stands for Fostering Accuracy, Involvement, and Responsibility. Both of these groups would help facilitate any superintendent who needs to be in contact with those around the state of Indiana that have gone through a referendum. All of the superintendents included in this research project serve as prime examples of people willing to help.

It is important to understand that knowing the community, planning in advance, and communicating with the constituency are some of the most important things a superintendent can do in order to be successful with a school construction referendum. All three of these areas must be covered in order to have a fighting chance at the polls. It is evident that if the superintendent does not know his community he will surely end up on the losing end of the election. Although two of the failing superintendents felt they had the pulse of the community and both ended up with close vote outcomes, last minute opposition groups derailed all of the work they had done.

Two of the failing superintendents did not have proper understanding of their communities, no unified school board support, basic communication plans, weak or non-existent community groups, and no funds to support a campaign. Both of these vote outcomes were rather large and not easy to overcome. The two other failing superintendents had proper understanding of their communities, unified school board support, and better than average communication plans. One of them had a strong community group and one of them did not. Both of the vote outcomes were very close and possibly could have been overcome if they had been ready for the last minute mailers their opposition groups sent out.

Demographics of all school construction referendum districts.

It is important to understand that this demographic information is limited in its scope, but does show some impact and should be viewed when undertaking a school construction referendum.

The timing of the election does not seem to have an impact based on the outcomes. Fall elections had a 37.5% positive outcome, the spring elections had a 38.9% positive outcome, and the special elections had a 25% positive outcome. Historically the spring election cycle has a low voter turnout, but there is only a difference of 1.4% success rate, which is not significant.

Since the study covers the years 2008, 2009, and 2010 it should be noted that the economy has taken a toll on the election outcomes. In 2008, there was an 80% success rate, compared to 13.3% in 2009, and 45.5% in 2010. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Indiana in 2008 was 263,616 (millions of current dollars). In 2009, the GDP dropped to 259,894 (millions of current dollars) and rose back to 275,676 (millions of current dollars) in 2010 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012). There was a significant dip in the Indiana GDP in 2009 compared to 2008 and 2010. The highest success rate of the three years occurred in 2008, and

could be attributed to the referendum process being brand new and an unknown quantity to Indiana voters. The success rate was the lowest in 2009, which was a very down year and then it rose again in 2010 when the GDP was at its highest for the three years of this research project, though the success rate was still not near the 2008 rate.

The next demographic piece that was looked at was the amount that the referendum sought. One would presume that the lower amount that was asked for, the better the chances of passage would be, but this was not the case. Two of the largest referendums that were requested in the state of Indiana passed; one for $278,000,000 and the other for $149,000,000. There is not enough data to determine if the amount sought has an impact on the election outcome.

The tax rate increase per $100 of assessed valuation was researched as was the total assessed valuation of the school districts. The tax rate increase did not seem to have an impact on the outcome of the election. The assessed valuation of the district could potentially be a factor since the 10 school districts with the highest assessed valuation had a 60% success rate compared to the lowest ten school districts which had a 30% success rate when it came to school construction referendum outcomes. It would seem that the higher the assessed valuation of a school district, the greater the chance of success, but again, not enough data is readily available to determine if this holds true.

The student population of the school district showed a similar outcome to the assessed valuation. The top 10 districts based upon student population had a 60% success rate and the lowest 10 districts had a 30% success rate. These percentages also concurred with the overall population of the districts. It would seem that the higher the population the greater the chance of success of passing a school construction referendum, but again, not enough data allows for it to not be conclusive since the referendum process is new to the state of Indiana.

The per capita income did not show any major differences. The success rate for the 10

school districts with the highest per capita income had a 40% success rate compared to the

lowest 10 school districts per capita income which had a 50% success rate. The median value of

the housing units in the districts showed no difference. The highest 10 school districts based

upon median value of the housing unit only had a 40% success rate and the same success rate of

40% was for the lowest 10 districts based upon median value of the housing unit. Again, one

might guess that there would be more success with the greater the median value of the housing

unit during a referendum, but this is not the case in Indiana.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations that can be made from the discovery of the themes

from the superintendents and the review of literature. These recommendations are items that

should be considered when school corporations in the state of Indiana wish to conduct a school

construction referendum. It should be noted that these are recommendations and may not be

inclusive of everything that must be done in order to have a successful referendum outcome.

Even performing every item at the highest ability does not necessarily insure success at the polls.

Voters are hard to understand and predict. The recommendations are to be used to increase a

school corporation's chances at being successful during a referendum election.

The first recommendation when contemplating whether or not to conduct a school

construction referendum is to create a master facility plan and to have a communication plan in

place. Both of these items should go hand in hand since they are both essential communication

tools. Kowalski (2002) discussed the need for a master facility plan that should be available for

the public to view at any time. The data from this research shows that there is a need to plan in

advance in order to be successful. One successful superintendent said he started planning five

years in advance; however, this may not be the typical timeline, but it does show the importance of having a good master plan in place. The facility plan should be a living document that grows and changes each year as new things arise and always available to the public. This is the first tool that the public can look at when they have questions about the direction of the school corporation when it comes to facility planning.

The communication plan for a school corporation should go hand in hand with the facility plan. Carroll and Carroll (2000) discussed the need for an ever constant communication plan that should be constantly changed and updated to meet the needs of the parents, staff, students, and taxpayers. Holt (2002) again made the point that the communication plan and community relations are "essential" if a school corporation is to be successful with passing a referendum. There is no question that a proper communication plan is important, and the data gathered for this study strongly supports this idea. It should be noted that proper communication should be constant obsession of all school corporations. Carroll and Carroll (2000) stated it best when they said, "Public schools must switch from a product-to a customer-centered mentality" (p. 22).

The second recommendation for school corporations looking to conduct a school construction referendum is to have a strong community group or committee to help run the campaign. Bauscher (1994), Holt (1993), and Kraus (2009) all made the point that in order for a referendum to have a chance at being successful the committee that is put in place to move the referendum forward should be a diverse group. Holt (2002) listed citizen participation and community relations programs as two of the main factors that will influence a school construction referendum. The data from this research drives this point home as well. All of the successful school corporations had very strong community groups to help run the referendum campaigns.

The third recommendation when considering a school construction referendum is that a superintendent must know the community and whether or not they will accept the possibility of a referendum. This includes knowing if there will be opposition, who those groups might be, and whether or not they pose a real threat to the referendum as a whole.

Beyond knowing this information a superintendent must know the yes votes and whether they have enough to win. A plethora of researchers in the area of referendums including Graham et al. (1990), Holt (1993), Lifto (1995), Lode (1999), and Kraus (2009), agreed that knowing the voters within the school corporation is an important part of a successful referendum outcome. The research data supports this statement since the four successful superintendents knew their yes votes and whether or not the community would support a referendum. Two out of the four unsuccessful superintendents did not have a clear picture about their communities and the two remaining superintendents had an understanding of their communities, but did not contemplate the opposition groups and the tactics that would be utilized.

Recommendations for Further Study

During the discovery of this research, I found several topics which are significant to warrant the potential for future studies. These research topics are listed below in no particular order. I have added comments where necessary.

1. Analyze the longevity of school superintendents and whether or not this impacts the outcomes of the referendums. This topic might be important to see if a newly installed superintendent can build trust with the community at large. Does time in the position help with the passage of a referendum?

2. Do a case study on the corporations that have done multiple referendums. Several of the school corporations throughout Indiana have gone back to the voters more than

once to ask for a new vote on a referendum. It would be interesting to see what was

done differently if the corporation was successful or why a referendum failed for a

second time.

3. Study the opposition groups that defeated referendums in their communities. What

drove them to organize? What issues caused them concern and would they have been

more apt to change their opinions if the request from the school corporation was

different? And if so, did they see these requests as wasteful spending?

4. Study the impact of economic factors on the outcomes of school construction

referendums.

Summary

This research was conducted to discover the perceptions of superintendents who had

successfully and unsuccessfully navigated the school construction referendum process adopted

by the state of Indiana. The perceptions of the superintendents were important to view because

they could offer an in-depth view of the referendum process and give the reasons they thought

they succeeded or failed. Many states have been doing referendums for years, but this newly

adopted practice in Indiana needed to be studied at length to offer other school corporations a

chance at being successful with their future referendums.

Three main recommendations came about from this study and they can be utilized by

future superintendents to guide them if and when they undertake a school construction

referendum. Since Indiana has moved to referendums for operating budgets as well, some of

these recommendations may be able to be utilized to become successful at those as well, but this

study focused solely on school construction referendums. The superintendents of this study

answered the questions honestly and the data obtained supports much of the research that was

discussed in the review of literature. The table below shows some of the events and strategies

that affected the superintendents.

Table 1

Strategies and Events for Both Successful and Unsuccessful Superintendents

Strategy/Event	Successful superintendent #	Unsuccessful superintendent #
Communication plan	3, 6, 7, 8	1, 2, 4
Community committee	3, 6, 7, 8	1, 2, 4, 5
Facility plan	3, 6, 7, 8	1, 2
Political Action Committee (PAC)	3, 6, 7	1, 2
Organized opposition group	*	1, 2, 4, 5
Election day strategies (get out the vote, etc.)	3, 6, 7, 8	1, 2, 4
Last minute campaign mailing/letter from opposition		1, 2, 4
Needs versus wants in the project	3, 6, 7, 8	4, 5
Conservative legal advice		1, 2
Unanimous school board	3, 6, 7, 8	1, 2, 4

* All corporations had opposition in some form or another, but the successful school corporations did not have any organized opposition.

Although there is no clear cut answer to conducting successful school construction

referendums, this research will help increase the chances of being successful on election day.

The economy will have a major impact on future referendums. The state of Indiana has

undergone a major education overhaul and school corporations as well as superintendents need

to have all the tools available to successfully run the schools and allow for local school boards to

have the best information available to them before they undertake a school construction

referendum campaign. This research hopes to aid those and guide them toward successful

outcomes.

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APPENDIX A: HOUSE ENROLLED ACT 1001

DIGEST OF HB 1001 (Updated March 14, 2008 3:23 pm - DI 73)

State and local finance. Eliminates: (1) medical assistance to wards fund levies; (2) family and children's fund levies; (3) children's psychiatric residential treatment services fund levies; and (4) children with special health care needs county fund levies. Eliminates the hospital care for the indigent fund levy and a portion of the health and hospital corporation levy. Eliminates the statewide property tax levies imposed for the state forestry fund, the state fair, and department of local government finance (DLGF) data base management. Provides for the assumption by the state of the costs of child welfare services and incarcerating delinquent children in a department of correction facility. Makes related changes to procedures governing the adjudication of children as children in need of services or as a delinquent child. Provides that payment for child services shall be made not later than 60 days after the date the department of child services receives the service provider's invoice together with a properly prepared claim voucher and documentation. Provides for the assumption by the state of the amount previously raised by the hospital care for the indigent fund levy and a portion of the health and hospital corporation levy. Eliminates school corporation tuition support levies. Increases the state tuition distribution by the amount of the terminated tuition support levy. Creates the state tuition reserve fund. Abolishes the tuition support account in the state general fund. Requires a transfer of money from the state general fund to the state tuition reserve fund. Provides an additional supplemental standard deduction for homesteads. Provides additional homestead credits in 2008 of $620,000,000. Provides that in a county that adopted a local option income tax (LOIT) in 2007, the county auditor, with the approval of the county fiscal body may petition the DLGF to permit a portion of the additional 2008 homestead credit to be used instead to increase the additional state funded homestead credit provided for 2009 or in both 2009 and 2010. Provides $140,000,000 in homestead credits in 2009 and $80,000,000 in homestead credits in 2010. Provides that a school corporation may not impose a special education preschool property tax levy after December 31, 2008. Requires the department of education to make distributions equal to the product of $2,750 multiplied by the number of special education preschool children who are students in the school corporation. Increases the maximum amount of the state income tax deduction for renters from $2,500 to $3,000. Provides that an individual who owns a homestead with a gross assessed value of less than $160,000 and who has adjusted gross income of $30,000 (in the case of a single return) or $40,000 (in the case of a joint return) is entitled to a property tax credit to the extent that property taxes on the individual's homestead increase by more than 2% from the prior year. Repeals the expiration date for the state earned income tax credit. Provides that the maximum amount of the standard deduction is the lesser of $45,000 or 60% of assessed value for 2009 and thereafter. Requires the DLGF to adopt rules or guidelines concerning the application for the

standard deduction. Increases the sales and use tax rates from 6% to 7%. Adjusts distributions of sales tax and use tax so that new revenue from the rate increase is deposited in the state general fund. Reduces sales tax collection allowances for retail merchants. Beginning in 2009, abolishes property tax replacement credits, state homestead credits (except for the temporary homestead credits in 2009 and 2010), the property tax replacement fund, and the property tax reduction trust fund. Provides that revenues from sales tax, income tax, and certain wagering taxes formerly deposited in those funds are to be deposited in the state general fund. Provides that a county council may adopt an ordinance to allow a taxpayer to make installment payments of taxes due under a reconciling statement. Provides that for property taxes first due and payable in 2009, the circuit breaker credit is equal to the amount by which a person's property tax liability attributable to the person's: (1) homestead exceeds 1.5%; (2) residential property exceeds 2.5%; (3) agricultural land exceeds 2.5%; (4) long term care property exceeds 2.5%; (5) nonresidential real property exceeds 3.5%; or (6) personal property exceeds 3.5%; of the gross assessed value of the property that is the basis for determination of the property taxes. Provides that for property taxes first due and payable in 2010 and thereafter, the circuit breaker credit is equal to the amount by which a person's property tax liability attributable to the person's: (1) homestead exceeds 1%; (2) residential property exceeds 2%; (3) agricultural land exceeds 2%; (4) long term care property exceeds 2%; (5) nonresidential real property exceeds 3%; or (6) personal property exceeds 3%; of the gross assessed value of the property that is the basis for determination of the property taxes. Specifies that property taxes imposed after being approved by the voters in a referendum or local public question shall not be considered for purposes of calculating the circuit breaker credit. Provides that for certain eligible counties, property taxes imposed to pay debt service or make lease payments for bonds or leases issued or entered into before July 1, 2008, shall not be considered for purposes of calculating the circuit breaker credit. Changes the membership of the distressed unit appeal board. Makes changes to the relief available from the distressed unit appeal board. Provides that the distressed unit appeal board may provide that some or all of the property taxes that are being imposed to pay debt and that would otherwise be included in the calculation of the circuit breaker credit shall not be included for purposes of calculating the credit. Authorizes a distressed political subdivision to petition the tax court for judicial review of a final determination of the distressed unit appeal board. Provides that political subdivisions are required to fully fund the payment of their debt obligations, regardless of any reduction in property tax collections due to the circuit breaker credit. Provides for a grant in 2009 and 2010 to replace a portion of the revenue lost to a school corporation from the application of the circuit breaker credit. Specifies that a school corporation is entitled to such a grant in a particular year only if it expects to lose more than 2% of its property tax revenue because of application of the circuit-breaker credits. Provides that a school bus replacement plan must apply to at least 12 years (rather than 10 years). Requires the state board of education to adopt administrative rules setting forth guidelines for the selection of school sites and the construction, alteration, and repair of school buildings, athletic facilities, and other categories of facilities related to the operation and administration of school corporations. Requires a school corporation to consider the guidelines and to submit proposed plans and specifications to the department of education. Requires the department of education to provide written recommendations to the school corporation, including findings as to any material differences between the plans and specifications and the guidelines. Requires the school corporation to have a public hearing on the plans and specifications. Requires the department of education to establish a central clearinghouse containing prototype designs for school facilities. Permits a school corporation to

appeal to the department of local government finance to impose a shortfall levy to replace a shortfall in a tuition support levy imposed before 2009. Provides that beginning in 2010, the budget year for all school corporations shall be from July 1 of the year through June 30 of the following year. Effective July 1, 2008, transfers to the county assessor property assessment duties of township assessors in all townships in which the number of real property parcels is less than 15,000 and in townships in which there is a trustee-assessor. Requires a referendum to be held at the general election in 2008 in each township in which the number of parcels of real property on January 1, 2008, is at least 15,000. Provides that the referendum shall determine whether to transfer to the county assessor the assessment duties that would otherwise be performed by the elected township assessor of the township. Provides that a person who runs in an election after January 1, 2012, for the office of township assessor must have attained the certification of a level three assessor-appraiser before taking office. Establishes a procedure for removal from office of county assessors and township assessors who fail to adequately perform the duties of office. Amends the procedure to obtain a review by the county property tax assessment board of appeals. Provides that each appraiser that performs assessments on behalf of a county property assessment contractor must have a level two assessor-appraiser certification, and requires the DLGF to consider before approving the contract the contractor's experience, training, and number of employees. Provides that the DLGF must be a party to appraisal and reassessment contracts. Specifies that after June 30, 2009, an employee of a county assessor who performs real property assessing duties must have attained the level of certification that the assessor is required to attain. Repeals the county land valuation commission and obsolete provisions. Provides that in 2009 and each year thereafter, the state pension relief fund shall pay to each unit of local government the total amount of pension, disability, and survivor benefit payments from the old police and firefighter funds by the unit. Provides that for property taxes first due and payable after December 31, 2008, the DLGF shall reduce the maximum permissible property tax levy of any civil taxing unit and special service district by the amount of the payment to be made in 2009 by the state for benefits to members (and survivors and beneficiaries of members) of the 1925 police pension fund, the 1937 firefighters' fund, or the 1953 police pension fund. Makes an appropriation to the pension relief fund. Provides that certain interest earned by the public deposit insurance fund continues to be used to pay local police and firefighter pensions through 2022. (Under current law, the interest would be used for this purpose through 2012.) Provides that for purposes of computing and distributing excise taxes or local option income taxes, the computation and distribution of the excise tax or local option income tax shall be based on the taxing unit's property tax levy as calculated before any reduction due to circuit breaker credits. Provides that the local government tax control board is not abolished. Provides that a capital project is a controlled project if it will cost the political subdivision more than the lesser of $2,000,000 or an amount equal to 1% of the total gross assessed value of property within the political subdivision on the last assessment date (if that amount is at least $1,000,000). Provides that a project that is in response to a natural disaster, emergency, or accident that makes a building or facility unavailable for its intended use and that is approved by the county council is not a controlled project for purposes of the referendum process. Provides that a controlled project for a school building for kindergarten through grade 8 is subject to a referendum if the cost is more than $10,000,000. Provides that a controlled project for a school building for grade 9 through grade 12 is subject to a referendum if the cost is more than $20,000,000. Provides that other controlled project with a cost that exceeds the lesser of $12,000,000 or 1% of assessed value (but at least $1,000,000) are also subject to a referendum.

Specifies that it takes 100 persons who are either owners of real property within the political subdivision or registered voters residing within the political subdivision or 5% of the registered voters residing within the political subdivision to initiate such a referendum. Provides that controlled projects that are not subject to a referendum are subject to the petition and remonstrance process. Repeals provisions concerning: (1) the procedures for amending a resolution previously adopted by a redevelopment commission; and (2) locally funded property tax replacement credits in tax increment financing (TIF) allocation areas. Provides that certain property tax levy appeals are eliminated beginning in 2009. Provides that the levy appeal for increased costs to a civil taxing unit resulting from annexation, consolidation, or other extensions of governmental services is not eliminated. Allows such an appeal in the first year increased costs are incurred and the immediately succeeding four years, and makes the excessive levy for a year a permanent part of the unit's maximum permissible levy for succeeding years. Eliminates certain exceptions to the property tax levy limits. Provides that the exemptions from the property tax levy limits for certain taxes to fund a community mental health center or community mental retardation and other developmental disabilities center do not apply to a civil taxing unit that did not fund a community mental health center or community mental retardation and other developmental disabilities center in 2008. Specifies the method for determining the assessed value of certain agricultural land that has been strip mined. Makes other changes related to property tax assessment. Repeals the county boards of tax and capital projects review. Provides that review and approval by the DLGF are not required before a civil taxing unit may issue or enter into bonds, a lease, or any other obligation if the civil taxing unit's determination to issue or enter into the bonds, lease, or other obligation is made after June 30, 2008. Provides that after June 30, 2008, review and approval by the DLGF are not required before a civil taxing unit may construct, alter, or repair a capital project. Provides that in counties without a county board of tax adjustment, each civil taxing unit that imposes property taxes shall file with the fiscal body of the county in which the civil taxing is located: (1) a statement of the proposed or estimated tax rate and tax levy for the civil taxing unit for the ensuing budget year; and (2) a copy of the civil taxing unit's proposed budget for the ensuing budget year. Provides that a county fiscal body shall issue a nonbinding recommendation to a civil taxing unit regarding the civil taxing unit's tax rate or levy or proposed budget. Provides that in the case of a taxing unit's governing body that does not consist of a majority of officials who are elected, the governing body may not issue bonds or enter into a lease payable in whole or in part from property taxes unless it obtains the approval of the city or town fiscal body or the county fiscal body (as applicable). Provides that review by the DLGF and approval by the DLGF are not required before a school corporation may issue or enter into bonds, a lease, or any other obligation if the school corporation's determination to issue or enter into the bonds, lease, or other obligation is made after June 30, 2008. Provides that after June 30, 2008, review by the DLGF and approval by the DLGF are not required before a school corporation may construct, alter, or repair a capital project. Prohibits, with respect to bonds payable from property taxes, special benefit taxes, or tax increment revenues, a local issuing body from: (1) issuing refunding bonds that have a repayment date that is beyond the maximum term of the bonds being refunded; or (2) using savings resulting from refunding bonds or surplus proceeds for any purpose other than to maintain a debt service reserve fund, repay bonds, or reduce levies. Requires the local issuing body to pay interest and principal on bonds on a schedule that provides for substantially equal installment amounts and regular payment intervals, with certain exceptions. Provides that (with certain exceptions) the maximum terms for property tax based obligations are: (1) the maximum applicable period under

federal law for obligations issued to evidence loans under a federal program; (2) 25 years for TIF obligations; and (3) 20 years for other property tax based obligations. Specifies that the need for level principal payments over the term of the obligations, in order to reduce total interest costs, is an exception to the requirement that an agreement for the issuance of obligations must provide for the payment of principal and interest on the obligations in nearly equal payment amounts and at regular designated intervals over the maximum term of the obligations. Provides that certain decisions with respect to TIF allocation areas are to be made by the legislative or fiscal body of the city, town, or county instead of the redevelopment commission or are subject to the approval of the legislative or fiscal body. Provides that if TIF revenues of an allocation area have been decreased by a law enacted by the general assembly or by an action of the DLGF below the amount needed to make all payments on obligations payable from tax increment revenues, the governing body of the TIF district may: (1) impose a special assessment on the owners of property in an allocation area; (2) impose a tax on all taxable property in the TIF district; or (3) reduce the base assessed value of property in the allocation area to an amount that is sufficient to increase the tax increment revenues. Requires review of these actions by the legislative body of the unit that established the TIF district. Makes other changes related to TIF. Provides three additional options for the distribution of local option income tax for property tax replacement in Lake County. Provides that an individual may claim a deduction for state income tax purposes for property taxes that: (1) were imposed on the individual's principal place of residence for the March 1, 2006, assessment date or the January 15, 2007, assessment date; (2) are due after December 31, 2007; and (3) are paid in 2008 on or before the due date for the property taxes. Converts the 100% property tax deduction for inventory to an exemption by excluding inventory from the definition of personal property subject to property tax. Repeals property tax credits and exemptions applicable to inventory. Provides that counties receive CAGIT, COIT, and CEDIT distributions that would otherwise be lost as a result of the termination of certain levies. Provides that a check issued by a county for a refund of the additional 2007 homestead credit is void if the check is: (1) outstanding and unpaid for 180 days after it is issued; and (2) for an amount that is not more than $10. Allows the county council or county income tax council to adopt before October 1 of a year an ordinance changing the purposes for which revenue attributable to the LOIT for property tax relief shall be used in the following year. Provides that a county auditor may not grant an individual or a married couple a standard deduction if the individual or married couple, for the same year, claims the deduction on two or more different applications for the deduction and the applications claim the deduction for different property. Provides that a co-op is considered a homestead for purposes of the standard deduction and homestead credit. Provides that a civil taxing unit's levy appeal in a case where the civil taxing unit cannot carry out its governmental functions may be granted only if the civil taxing unit's inability to carry out its governmental functions is due to a natural disaster, an accident, or another unanticipated emergency. Provides that the local property tax replacement credit percentage for a particular year that is funded by a LOIT shall be based on the amount of tax revenue that will be used under the LOIT to provide local property tax replacement credits. Provides that a taxpayer that owns an industrial plant located in Jasper County is ineligible for a local property tax replacement credit against the property taxes due on the industrial plant if the assessed value of the industrial plant as of March 1, 2006, exceeds 20% of the total assessed value of all taxable property in the county on that date. Allows a school corporation to appeal to the DLGF for a new facility adjustment to increase the school corporation's tuition support distribution for the following year to pay increased costs to open: (1) a new school facility; or (2) an existing facility

that has not been used for at least three years. Deletes the expiration date in the provision authorizing a school corporation to use money in its capital projects fund for utility services and insurance. Appropriates to the department of education from the state general fund $10,000,000 for the state fiscal year beginning July 1, 2008, and ending June 30, 2009, to make new facility adjustment distributions that are approved by the department of local government finance. Provides that a school corporation does not need the approval of the school property tax control board or the DLGF before holding a referendum concerning a referendum tax levy. Provides that a school corporation may hold a referendum on whether a referendum tax levy should be imposed to replace property tax revenue that the school corporation will not receive because of the application of the circuit breaker credit. Provides that in counties other than Marion County, if the percentage increase in the proposed budget for a civil taxing unit with an unelected governing body for the ensuing calendar year is greater than the growth allowed under the assessed value growth quotient, the governing body of the civil taxing unit must submit its proposed budget and property tax levy for approval by the county fiscal body or municipal fiscal body. Provides that budgets, levies, and bond issues for taxing units in Marion County with an unelected board must be approved by the city-county council. Provides that if a township assessor determines that the township assessor has made an error concerning: (1) the assessed valuation of property; (2) the name of a taxpayer; or (3) the description of property; in an assessment, the township assessor shall on the township assessor's own initiative correct the error. Provides that if such a correction results in a reduction in an assessment, the taxpayer is entitled to a credit on the taxpayer's next tax installment. Requires a township board to consider certain factors when determining whether a fire and emergency services need exists requiring the expenditure of money not included in the township's budget estimates and levy. Requires the DLGF to report to the commission on state tax and financing policy (CSTFP) regarding: (1) the possibility of eliminating the existing method of assessing and valuing property for the purpose of property taxation; and (2) the use of alternative methods of valuing property for the purpose of property taxation. Requires the CSTFP to study those issues and report to the legislative council. Requires the CSTFP to study the following issues and report to the legislative council: (1) Whether it is reasonable and appropriate to require all counties to use the state-designed software system. (2) Alternative methods for distribution of local option income taxes. (3) The possible elimination of property taxation of homestead property. Provides that a taxpayer that receives a tax statement or a provisional tax statement for the first installment of property taxes based on the assessment date in 2007 and first due and payable in 2008 may appeal the assessment by filing a notice in writing with the proper assessing official not later than the later of 45 days after the tax statement (or reconciling statement) is given to the taxpayer or July 1, 2008. Provides that the county auditor's annual statement to political subdivisions and the DLGF for counties with taxing units that cross into or intersect with other counties must include the assessed valuation as shown on the most current abstract of property. Adjusts the maximum property tax rates for county cumulative capital development funds and for municipal cumulative capital development funds to reflect the change from 33.33% to 100% of true tax value. Provides that a county council or county income tax council may in 2008 adopt or increase a LOIT for property tax relief or public safety at any time before January 1, 2009. Provides that a county council or county income tax council may not adopt an ordinance determining that LOIT revenue shall be used to provide local property tax replacement credits at a uniform rate to all taxpayers in the county unless the county council or county income tax council has: (a) made available the county council's best estimate of the amount of property tax replacement credits to be provided to

various classes of property; and (b) adopted a resolution or other statement acknowledging that some taxpayers in the county that do not pay the LOIT will receive a property tax replacement credit that is funded with LOIT revenue. Requires a county council or county income tax council to hold at least one public meeting each year at which the county council or county income tax council discusses whether the LOIT for levy replacement should be imposed or increased. Provides that a copy of a completed case plan concerning a child in need of services or a child adjudicated as a delinquent shall be sent to an agency having the legal responsibility or authorization to care for, treat, or supervise the child. Indicates that the certain assessment system software and hardware standards apply to all assessment system software and hardware rules and standards adopted by the DLGF. Provides for the distribution to the legislative services agency of policy documents provided to local taxing officials. Requires written standards for the operation and management of a property tax data base system. Authorizes the DLGF to adopt temporary rules to revise its rules establishing standards for computer systems used by Indiana counties for the administration of the property tax assessment, billing, and settlement processes. Requires employers to report to the department of state revenue the amount of withholdings attributable to local income taxes each time the employer remits to the department the tax that is withheld. Requires an individual filing an estimated tax return to designate the portion of the estimated tax payment that represents state income tax liability and the portion of the estimated tax payment that represents local income tax liability. Provides that if an individual requests the payor of a distribution to withhold taxes from the distribution, the individual must designate the portion of the withheld amount that represents state income tax liability and the portion of the withheld amount that represents local income tax liability. Requires the department of state revenue and the office of management and budget to develop certain reports related to local option income taxes. Requires the department of revenue to develop a system of crosschecks between annual withholding tax reports and individual taxpayer W-2 forms. Requires the office of management and budget to submit an informative summary of certain calculations related to the certified distribution of local income taxes to the county council and requires certain information to be included in the informative summary. Makes other changes. Makes appropriations.

APPENDIX B: SUPERINTENDENT QUESTIONS

These are the interview questions to be used with the superintendents.

1. What issues did you perceive to have most impact upon the school construction referendum? (List them in rank order)
2. Which election strategies were used during the school construction referendum?
3. Did you perceive that demographic issues played a factor in the school construction referendum?
4. What did you perceive as one best item that was used to gain (or lose) public support?
5. How did you perceive your role as you went through the school construction referendum process?
6. How did you perceive your role after the results were finalized (win or lose)?
7. What advice would you give other superintendents who are looking conducting a school construction referendum?

APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Superintendent Perceptions of the Success and Failure of School Construction Referendums
From 2008-2010 in the State of Indiana

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Walter Lambert, who is a

doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University. Mr.

Lambert is conducting this study for his doctoral dissertation. Dr. Terry McDaniel is the faculty

sponsor for this project.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You should read the information

below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to

participate. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a superintendent who

went through a school construction referendum in Indiana between 2008 and 2010.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and understand the superintendent

perceptions about the success or failure of school construction referendums within the current or

former school corporation. This study will be conducted with eight total superintendents, which

will include four who had successful referendums and four who had unsuccessful referendums

between 2008 and 2010. This study will explore the "perceptions" of each superintendent

whether they were successful with their referendum or not. In order to obtain this information,

the following questions will be asked to the subjects in this study:

1. What issues did you perceive to have most impact upon the school construction referendum? (List them in rank order)

2. Which election strategies were used during the school construction referendum?

3. Did you perceive that demographic issues played a factor in the school construction referendum?

4. What did you perceive as one best item that was used to gain (or lose) public support?

5. How did you perceive your role as you went through the school construction referendum process?

6. How did you perceive your role after the results were finalized (win or lose)?

7. What advice would you give other superintendents who are looking conducting a school construction referendum?

PROCEDURES

All of the superintendents were chosen at random to participate within this study and the identity of the superintendents will remain anonymous. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

Participate in an interview wherein you will be asked to answer seven questions designed to assess your perception of the outcome to the school construction referendum. This interview will last approximately 1 to 2 hours depending on your answers. The interviews will be recorded digitally to aid in transcription.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is minimal risk for injury in this study for the participants. However, there is a slight risk of breech of confidentiality due to the audio recording of these interviews. Every precaution and measure will be taken to avoid this potential risk (see precautions under confidentiality).

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

While there is no direct benefit to you for participating in this research, the information

gathered from this study will expand the current research on school construction referendums

and allow for future superintendents in the state of Indiana a better understanding of what makes a school referendum successful and what can cause it to be unsuccessful.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Confidentiality will be maintained in the following ways:

- You are asked not to identify yourself by name or school district on the digitally recorded interview. Information will be reported using pseudonyms.

- Data will not be linked with individuals or individual school districts at any time. All data presented within the dissertation will be for all school corporations that are successful and unsuccessful with their school construction referendums not just the eight that are studied for this dissertation.

- The answers to these questions will be digitally recorded and coded in order to obtain themes and accuracy.

- A code will be assigned to data from each superintendent. A hard copy master list of superintendents and codes will be stored in a secure filing cabinet in the office of the researcher, Walter Lambert.

- The researcher and participants will have access to the data obtained only from their own individual interviews during and after the study.

- Upon completion of the study, the digital audio recordings will be stored for three years and then destroyed.

Walter Lambert will use the information collected in his dissertation. Dr. Terry McDaniel, Dissertation Chairperson, and Walter Lambert, Principal Investigator may use any information that is obtained from this in any way they think is best for publication or education. Any information used for publication will not identify you individually.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

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Ph.D. Candidate
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Dr. Terry McDaniel
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RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Printed Name of Subject

_____   _____

Signature of Subject   Date

APPENDIX D: LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT

Dear Superintendent:

I am writing to seek your assistance in a doctoral research study designed to gain further knowledge about the perception of superintendents who have gone through successful/unsuccessful school referendum projects in the state of Indiana from 2008-2010. Your school corporation was chosen at random to participate in this study since your corporation went through a school construction referendum. Your willingness to answer a series of questions related to your perception of the success or failure of your school construction referendum would be most helpful.

The data obtained from the interviews, which will be digitally audio recorded to ensure accuracy in data gathering, will be complied by the Principal Investigator, Walter Lambert, Ph.D. candidate at Indiana State University. This study is being conducted under the direct supervision of Dr. Terry McDaniel, Indiana State University Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and should take approximately two hours depending on your answers. I will be contacting you by phone within the next few days to set up a date and time for an onsite interview. If you have any questions or concerns about this study prior to my phone call, please contact me at the number and email below.

Enclosed is the Consent to Participate in Research form for your review and signature if you are willing. This form is a requirement of the Internal Review Board at Indiana State University. Please review this document, provide your signature, and I will collect the signed informed consent document at the time of the interview.

Thank you for your consideration in assisting me in completing the requirements of the Ph.D. program at Indiana State University. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Walter Lambert
Ph.D. Candidate
Indiana State University
Cell phone: 812-454-0832
Email: wlambert@warrick.k12.in.us