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Strategies and Factors Influencing  
Public School District  
Referendums

by

Alan N. Stauffacher

August, 2012

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
School of Education

Strategies and Factors Influencing

Public School District

Referendums

by

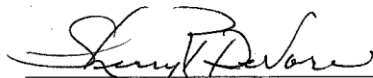
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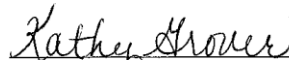
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Lindenwood University, School of Education

  
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8/16/2012  
Date

**Declaration of Originality**

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree..

Full Legal Name: Alan N. Stauffacher

Signature: Alan N. Stauffacher Date: 8-6-12

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## Abstract

Many school districts are in need of a successful plan of action for school district referendums. The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine the perceived effectiveness between factors and strategies surrounding referendums and the passage of those measures meant to improve school funding and facilities. The findings from Johnson and Ingle (2008) and Holt et al. (2006) were used to guide this study. Three questions were posed: What do superintendents identify as strategies to use as prescriptive plans for successful school referendums? What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to success of school referendums? What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to failure of school referendums? A survey was sent to 134 school superintendents in Missouri who attempted to pass referendums between November 2009 and November 2011. The survey was composed primarily of questions utilizing a Likert scale. Superintendents were to respond to statements based on their perceived influence in their referendums. The results indicated that nine strategies were influential based upon the mode and *p value* scores. Three of the most influential strategies based upon the respondent scores included: Campaign focused on the benefits to the children, influential people participated on the steering committee, and focus on getting 'yes' voters to the polls. The most influential factors included: Trust in the superintendent and school board, and board support was unanimous. Factors that were viewed to be detrimental included: Increased tax burden, organized opposition, and failure to get enough of the parent vote.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Dolph (2006) reported, “Public interest in education, despite concerns about a variety of foreign and domestic issues,... remains a top public concern” (p. 1). The assertion is schools’ infrastructures are at critical levels (Crampton & Thompson, 2008). One third of the school buildings in the nation have conditions that range from uncomfortable to dangerous, threatening the educational mission of schools (Holt, 2002). The critical levels of disrepair in these schools create a counterproductive learning environment to the children (Holt, 2002; Moore, 2004).

Holt (2002) reported that substances such as asbestos and lead from paint and water pipes pose the possibility of long-term health problems for students. In this environment, the public expects staff to educate students in conditions that few corporate employees and building inspectors would tolerate (Crampton & Thompson, 2008). Moore (2004) explained,... “while public education does not require a plush facility, it cannot be accomplished in a building that suffers from neglect...” (p. 2). Crampton and Thompson (2008) formulated these critical conclusions:

If this nation is committed to high academic standards, we must stop ignoring the impact that the physical environment plays in students’ health and learning. And to allow school staff to perform at their best, we must expect that school buildings meet the highest standards of facility excellence. (p. 20)

The question for school leaders in the present financial crisis is, do they focus on facility needs or do they focus on the staffing of classrooms (Cash & Twiford, 2009)? Many schools have delayed maintenance projects, reduced technology expenditures, and not replaced employees who have retired, increasing the need for revenue generating

referendums (Campbell, 2008). Several states have funding formulas that limit inflationary growth in revenue; in response schools must be continuously planning their next referendum to simply support school operating costs (Dolph, 2006).

Holt (2002) concluded school budgets are inadequate to address the critical level of disrepair in schools. Buildings that are poorly maintained are not energy efficient, siphoning funds that could be spent on educational programs (Holt, 2002). According to Holt, Wendt, and Smith (2006) older schools are in most need of repair, and schools in low-income areas are most likely to budget small allocations to safety and maintenance. When administrators enact budget-cutting measures, they often choose to defer maintenance for a later time, thereby creating additional concerns when considering the condition of the nation's schools (Cash & Twiford, 2009). The estimated school infrastructure needs were in the range of \$254.6 billion (Cash & Twiford, 2009).

Moore (2004) reported the most common way of financing these capital improvement programs is through tax levies or the sale of bonds. By passing a bond, voters authorize the school district to borrow money (Bondo, 2010; Holt, 2002; Moore, 2004). This money is then repaid over a number of years through taxes (Holt, 2002; Moore, 2004).

Dolph (2006) observed, "School levies and bond issues have dramatically increased across the country. State funding formulas that limit inflationary growth in revenue, more mandates that require additional resources, and changes in tax laws all contribute to the growing phenomenon" (p. 1). Holt et al. (2006) declared, "...some would argue that property taxes are a very appropriate way to fund schools. Local property taxes are very stable and taxpayers can see where money goes and how effectively it is used"

(p. 12). Holt et al. (2006) continued, “In addition, property taxes are not as vulnerable as state funding tends to be in recessionary times” (p. 12). Dolph (2006) explained:

More and more, school boards are turning to their constituents for financial support through the levy process. School business officials and other education leaders are looking at a variety of approaches and techniques for increasing the likelihood for voters to approve school funding measures. (p. 1)

According to Levy Marketing (2010), the passage of school levies is vital to education, “[and] your ability to sell the school levy to your community might depend on several factors: costs, what the money will be used for, and the satisfaction of the taxpayers with the school and its leadership” (p. 1).

Raising taxes is never a popular choice, and school district leaders must understand the difficulties they face when the decision is made to bring a referendum to the voters. Tosto (2009) explained, as the population ages and retires, people rely on fixed incomes, and it becomes easier to vote against school-related tax increases when there are no children in the home. In addition, many communities have defunct businesses that once employed people who paid public school sustaining taxes (Tosto, 2009). With the unpopularity of tax increases, school boards seek strategies to secure approval of school district referendums (Dolph, 2006).

Holt et al. (2006) explained voters have negative feelings toward levies and bonds because of the higher taxes. Other issues tend to intensify reactions by the voters from these elections, including feelings about past attempts to pass referendums and trust in the leadership of the school (Holt et al., 2006; Lafée, 2009). All these issues impact the school district’s bond campaign in attempting to win the support of the community (Holt

et al., 2006). Dolph (2006) described schools as being dependent on school referendums because of limitations in state funding formulas, inflationary growth, unfunded programs required by the federal government, a lack of resources, and changes in tax laws.

Weisner recognized in (2009) the need for referendums because shortfalls in state and federal revenues fail to keep up with mandates and inflation. School administrators' hands are tied leading to cuts in programming that would take years to recover (Weisner, 2009). Holt et al. (2006) concluded levies are not without their critics; there are problems in relying on property taxes to fund schools. These rising local property taxes can make the lives of those with low or fixed incomes more difficult, thus creating a situation that may cause them to be taxed out of their homes (Cellini, Ferreir, & Steir, 2008; Holt et al., 2006).

Some schools are continually successful with elections while others are not (Holt et al., 2006). This situation can lead to wide disparities in pupil expenditures from one school to the next (Holt et al., 2006). One may have plenty compared to the school next door that has little (Holt et al., 2006). Rokakis (2010) recognized the dilemma that schools are in by stating:

The short answer to this question is that while most of the revenues available to schools are fixed and inflexible, the cost of education continually rises. Many of the rising costs are out of the control of our local school boards. As a consumer of goods, school districts encounter inflation in most goods and services purchased. In addition to inflation, legal requirements, unfunded mandates, and expanded service expected by communities add to increased operating costs of school districts. (p. 1)



Powers (2005) reported there are several facets the public must see before they will approve a bond issue. Establishing a need in the beginning of a request for a referendum may be offered as a way to solve the facilities problem (Johnson & Ingle, 2008; Powers, 2005). The total cost of the issue that is to be voted on must be considered reasonable (Powers, 2005; Weisner, 2009). There must be a match with the expectations of the community and the project's ability to achieve the community's objectives before the project will make sense to the voters (Powers, 2005; Weisner, 2009). LaFee (2009) explained school district leaders must maintain a good relationship with the community and help them learn about the school and provide opportunities for participation in the decision-making process. The diligence it takes to maintain a quality rapport will pay-off with improved support (LaFee, 2009). Janovich (2010) described hope for schools:

I have found that over the course of the last decade, during this so-called tax revolt, that people will vote for measures—even measures that will raise their taxes if they are convinced there is a need, that the proposal they are voting on will address that need and the tax they are being asked to pay seems like it's a reasonable amount and will actually go to fund the solution. (p. 2)

In 2008, Johnson and Ingle showed that school districts could pass levies if they justified their need for community support and explained the urgency of the situation if the measure would fail. Janovich (2010) concluded, "Throughout this whole decade or so, school levies have passed, hospital bonds have passed, all these special districts have passed measures to raise taxes...It is how practically that tax money is going to be used; that's the case that needs to be made" (p. 2). Hickey (2007) explained there is a tendency for schools that have failed one levy to fail the next. This failure suggests that there are

most likely underlying factors and strategies that schools need to address to gain the support of their constituents (Hickey, 2007). School district leaders must be able to analyze their schools critically in order to gain an understanding of what the voters would be willing to support for future funding initiatives (Hickey, 2007; Weisner, 2009). To further understand the importance of factors and strategies that influence school referendums, this study will focus on the sequence of strategies that lead to school election success.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Factors and strategies believed to influence school district success with tax referendums have been identified in previous studies (Boschee & Holt, 1999; Dolph, 2006; Holt, 2002; “10 Steps,” 2010; Vogel, 2006). The factors and strategies identified by Johnson and Ingle (2008) and Holt et al. (2006) served as the foundation to create a survey instrument. The primary factors and strategies common to the Johnson, Ingle, and Holt studies were a focus on *yes* voters and communication with the community. Ten other positive factors and strategies identified in their studies provided the framework for the survey instrument including: creating a sense of urgency, clear vision, using board election data bases, creating a diverse task force, focusing on the benefits to the children, unanimous board support, use of existing funds, use of consultants, leaders keeping a low profile, and the use of a variety of media to inform the public. Superintendents in Missouri were asked to respond to the survey questions regarding the identified factors and strategies based on past experience with referendums.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The works of Johnson and Ingle (2008) and Holt et al. (2006) served as a foundation for this study to further validate what school district leaders must execute for success in their next referendum. According to two of the leading bond consultants in the state of Missouri, 144 school districts attempted to pass school referendums in the years 2009, 2010, and 2011 (G. K. Baum, personal communication, February 16, 2011; L. J. Hart, personal communication, August 30, 2011).

Of the 522 school districts in Missouri, 27% approached their constituents seeking voter approval for increased funding in the years 2009, 2010, and 2011 (MODESE, 2010). L. J. Hart reported that 40% of school referendums fail in the state of Missouri (personal communication, August 30, 2011). School administrators seldom have sufficient educational training to prepare them for the task of passing a referendum (Holt, 2002). Fleeter (as cited in Johnson & Ingle, 2008) reported school administrators who must request school funding approval every few years, due to state law, are successful only 54.6% of the time, in spite of the experience these administrators have running school district referendums. The problem is school referendums have failed because administrators were not aware of the factors that influence the voting outcome (Holt, 2002; L. J. Hart, personal communication, August 30, 2011).

## **Purpose of the Study**

Many school districts are in need of a successful plan of action for school district referendums. The purpose of this study was to identify the most successful methods to pass school referendums. Holt (2002) concluded for school districts already struggling to pay for essential budget items such as salaries, building costs cannot be expended out of

the usual school funds. In many cases, opposition to referendums that address building needs makes improving school facilities difficult to achieve (Holt, 2002). Holt et al. (2006) conducted a case study in an attempt to isolate the factors and strategies that were influential in leading two successful school referendums. In 2008, Johnson and Ingle studied school districts that attempted to pass school referendums in Ohio. The study focused on strategies that school district administrators could implement to avoid referendum failure (Johnson & Ingle, 2008). The results from these previous studies served as a framework to further isolate the important factors and strategies in school district referendum success in this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

According to Houston (as cited in Holt, 2002), a significant portion of a school leader's job must focus on reminding the public of the continued need for better facilities for children. While the need may be self-evident for those working in the school setting, it is often not clear to the public who must be convinced to pay for school improvements. (Houston, as cited in Holt, 2002). Bondo reported (2006) only students, their parents, and school employees benefit from school referendums. The important rationale behind any study of passing school referendums is to provide a quality learning environment for students (Moore, 2004). At some point in every school district, finding the resources to make school improvements will be critical to meeting the educational needs of the students (Fairbank, 2006). Fairbank concluded (2006) "You must persuade all of your constituents, not just those who are familiar with your school system, to support your efforts" (p. 42).

## Research Questions

For this study, research questions were designed to expand on previous works by researchers who have sought the correct strategies for successful passage of school referendums (Holt et al., 2006; Johnson & Ingle, 2008). These questions guided this study:

1. What do superintendents identify as strategies to use as prescriptive plans for successful school referendums?
2. What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to success of school referendums?
3. What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to failure of school referendums?

## Limitations of the Study

The following limitations were identified:

**Purposive sample.** The subjects who were chosen to participate in this study had experience dealing with school referendums in the past three years, and the names were supplied by bonding consultants who specialize in school referendums.

**Demographics.** Demographic variances, race, and ethnicity were not considered in this study. Superintendents were from public school districts with vastly different student socioeconomic backgrounds and from different geographical areas of the state, varying from metropolitan to rural communities. The percentage of senior citizens, working households with children, and the number of staff members by percentage of the voter population may have affected outcomes. None of these variables were considered in this study.

**Time lapse.** A potentially limiting factor can be the lapse of time. Some superintendents were surveyed three years after their referendum campaign. To ensure accurate recall of information, the survey should have been answered immediately following a school referendum.

**Superintendents in Missouri.** This study was limited to the opinions of superintendents in Missouri. Each superintendent had varying levels of experience with school referendums. Each superintendent had relationship differences in his or her respective communities that can be viewed as positive or adversarial.

**Survey Instrument.** The survey instrument was created by the researcher utilizing the studies from Johnson and Ingle (2008) and Holt et al. (2006). The question reliability of the survey instrument measuring the same way under the same conditions was a limiting factor.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

The following terms are defined for clarity and understanding of the topic:

**Bond consultants.** Underwriters who make money by providing services to governmental agencies for building projects (Holt et al., 2006).

**Bond issue.** An election for capital projects secured by pledge of the issuer's full faith credit and taxing power (Holt, 2002).

**Community relations.** The school district's emphasis on the importance of a quality educational system to the members of the community and the special services the school can provide to the community (Boschee & Holt, 1999).

**Demographics.** The composition of the school district's community that has a direct effect on the passage or failure of a referendum (Boschee & Holt, 1999).

**Factors.** For the purpose of this study, factors are defined as the components of a school district's referendum over which the school district officials have no control. An example of a factor impacting a referendum is the state of the economy.

**Five-year master plan.** A district-wide strategic plan for school and facility development (Clemons, Salazar, Sprick, Valdez, & William, 2010).

**Lease financing.** A method of financing capital improvements, avoiding debt limitations through the public sale of certificates of participation ("Lease Financing," 2012).

**Proposition C waivers.** A vote by local school districts to waive all or a portion of the required reduction of taxes deposited in the operating funds for school districts (MODESE, 2012).

**Referendums.** For the purpose of this study, referendums are defined as the general term that encompasses tax levies, bond issues, lease financing and Proposition C waivers.

**Senior citizens.** Citizens of the community usually over the age of 65, who may or may not have children or grandchildren in the school district (Boschee & Holt, 1999).

**Steering committee.** Committee in charge of the identification and coordination of all tasks of the referendum proposal (Holt, 2002).

**Strategies.** For the purpose of this study, strategies are defined as the components of a school referendum over which school district officials can have some control.

**Strategic planning.** The recommended activities for a step-by-step plan for passing bond issues (Boschee & Holt, 1999).

**Super-majority.** A vote that takes more than a simple majority to ensure passage (Boschee & Holt, 1999).

**Utilization study.** An efficiency study that is performed by districts to optimize the size and design of a school building to maximize facility utilization and minimize overhead costs (Clemons et al., 2010).

### **Summary**

The future for school districts will continue to rely heavily on local tax initiatives to fund schools. The deterioration of school buildings, overcrowding, and inadequate funding for instruction create the economic conditions necessary for school district leaders to master strategies and minimize the negative impact of factors that will lead to referendum success. School leaders in the present financial crisis must make decisions on maintaining facilities or keeping classrooms adequately staffed (Cash & Twifford, 2009).

School levies and bond issues have dramatically increased across the country due to the reduction of funding from state formulas, mandates, and changes in tax laws (Dolph, 2006). The passage of school levies is vital to education and the ability of school leaders to convince voters to support schools is critical (Levy Marketing, 2010). In response to this need, school leaders are looking for a variety of techniques to ensure the likelihood of referendum success (Dolph, 2006). The factors and strategies identified by Johnson and Ingle (2008) and Holt et al. (2006) will serve as a framework for the survey instrument used to determine the perceptions of Missouri superintendents regarding referendums.

In Chapter Two, a review of literature related to school referendum strategies and factors was presented. Research performed toward identifying successful strategies and



diverse tactics are numerous, but concrete data toward passing referendums remains elusive. A description of the research design and methodology used to analyze findings was explained in Chapter Three. Quantitative data and research findings were presented in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, conclusions and recommendations for action and further study were shared.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature**

### **Introduction**

How can school district administrators meet the pressures of federal and state mandates when there are limited funds available to address crumbling infrastructures and understaffed classrooms (Cash & Twiford, 2009)? In a poor economy, additional stress on school operating budgets creates an atmosphere where public school administrators must make critical decisions (Adams, 2010). School administrators must consider the choices of increasing student- teacher ratios, convincing legislators of the need for more funding, or seeking voter approval for levy increases (Adams, 2010). The reality for many schools is that without additional funds from the next school district referendum, school staffs will be reduced, student-teacher ratios will increase, and instructional materials will not be purchased (Cash & Twiford, 2009).

In difficult economic times, school leaders must continue to strive toward improved student performance, while building maintenance is often neglected until the next referendum is passed (Cash & Twiford, 2009). A critical issue with all school referendums is that they benefit only a limited segment of the population (Bondo, 2010). The entire population may vote on a school levy and often will weigh the cost of increased property tax against the perceived benefit to the school district (Bondo, 2010; Holt 2002). By nature, securing funding for a selected population through a general election is difficult (Bondo, 2010; Holt, 2002).

### **Considering a Campaign**

When considering a referendum campaign, school districts should not arbitrarily attempt to commit the voters to increased taxation without a thorough plan (Clemons et al., 2010). The Association of Iowa School Boards (2009) suggested exploring the following questions before a school undertakes a school referendum: Is the school board united before deciding to pursue a referendum? Is the media supportive? What is the history of referendums in the area? Does the local Chamber of Commerce support the school? Is the educational staff supportive and are they willing to work for passage? Are there political issues that could influence the vote? Leary (2007) determined that a list should be made of reasons for requesting a referendum and list for not doing so. If there is a clearly defined need and support exists from the entire school network and its partners, the referendum should go forward (Leary, 2007).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The most critical components to school election success were identified by the works of Johnson and Ingle (2008) and Holt et al. (2006). Johnson and Ingle (2008) stated, "...there are some strategies that seem to lend themselves to an increased likelihood of success" (p. 32). Holt et al. (2006) indicated the purpose of their study was to determine the most influential factors that led to success in a rural school district.

Through their research Johnson and Ingle (2008) discovered a positive correlation between election success and several important factors and strategies schools should consider when outlining a strategic plan. These factors and strategies included getting positive voters to the polls, creating a sense of urgency, the school district's clear vision, utilizing the media, board unity, using education staff, and community support (Johnson

& Ingle, 2008). In a study by Holt et al. (2006), a ranked list of recommendations that were most influential in passing school bond elections was created: A diverse task force should be created; a focus of all disseminated information should target benefits to children; the board of education should be unanimous in their support; plan designs should be simple and utilize district funds; a focus should be placed on the *yes* vote; schools should utilize consultants and trained professionals to inform the community; a low profile approach by administrators is optimal and a variety of media should be used to inform the community.

**Yes votes.** A common element in all referendum campaigns should be the focus on the *yes* vote (Boschee & Holt, 1999; Clemons et al., 2010; Holt et al., 2006; Johnson & Ingle, 2008; Klein, 2006; Leary, 2007; Nagardeolekar & Merritt, 2006; Whitmoyer, 2005). Klein (2006) maintained, “Getting out the vote is a must, but carefully parsing your election rolls can be the difference between failure and success” (p. 31). The most common campaign strategy involves attracting wide spread attention to as many voters as possible before the tax levy vote (Whitmoyer, 2005). This strategy has a tendency to bring unknown quantities of non-supportive voters to the polls (Whitmoyer, 2005). Holt et al. (2006) reported:

Statistically, approximately 30 percent of voters oppose school district bond measures—because they resent the public sector, are on fixed incomes, have no children, have no other personal incentive for schools to be successful, or for any number of other reasons. Districts cannot afford to waste their effort or attempt to convert the entrenched no vote. (p. 13)

Holt et al. (2006) found, “From 35.5 percent to 40 percent of the registered voters within a school district participated in school bond referendums. Many of the respondents implied that making a special effort to get yes voters to the polls was critical” (p. 20). Parents of students and staff members as a segment of the population can carry an election if the turnout is sufficient (Clemons et al., 2010). These people should be fully informed about all aspects of the election and should play an active role in the election process (Clemons et al., 2010). Campaign strategists should focus much of their attention on shaping the campaign to map out plans as carefully as possible to get *yes* voters to the polls (Nagardeolekar & Merritt 2006). The district should hold an open meeting to fulfill the professional obligation to inform the public, but all efforts after this point should be to target the *yes* vote (Whitmoyer, 2005).

In the case study researched by Weisner (2009), the focus was not to worry about those who vote no simply because they are opposed to raising taxes. They tried to address “hot button” issues like fiscal responsibility (Weisner, 2009, p. 2). The goal is to get those people to the polls that represented the *yes* vote while trying to avoid the mass media outlets that bring out the opposition (Whitmoyer, 2005). A successful way to use campaign funds is to remind supporters to get out and vote rather than to reach out to a random target audience (Whitmoyer, 2005). Focusing on the *yes* vote is important according to Holt et al. (2006), but the undecided vote was potentially the group who could spell election success.

Johnson and Ingle (2008) found through their research school districts that focused on the *yes* vote were 7.6 times more likely to have their levies pass. One of the most important themes that emerged from their study was having specific and intentional

strategies for getting positive voters to the polls (Johnson & Ingle, 2008). Nagardeolekar and Merritt (2006) stated:

Presenting a united front on the part of the school board, district staff and faculty, and all the *yes* vote stakeholders is an essential component in passing a school bond. Do not waste time or money on entrenched opponents—on reversing the no vote. (p. 2)

Johnson and Ingle (2008) found, “If an initial levy campaign fails after implementing a high profile, high voter turn-out campaign, plan for a second low profile campaign designed to specifically target *yes* voters and rally them to the polls” (p. 2). Powers (2005) recommended these strategies:

The Voter Identification committee will identify the *yes* voters and devise a plan to get them to the polls.... The smart campaign doesn’t try to sway no voters, but will instead find all *yes* voters and seek to persuade undecided voters. In addition to contacting and identifying the voters in the district, this committee will also push a voter registration effort. Surprisingly, approximately 30% of parents in any district are not registered to vote. Successful completed voter registration could be the margin of victory in a close election. (p. 13)

In 2008, Abrahamson described the election of Obama and recent school bond elections in Los Angeles and Minneapolis as a lesson for all districts and colleges to remember. Do not forget the potential *yes* vote of recent graduates from high school, because most have good memories of school and every effort should be made to make sure they receive ballots and vote (Abrahamson, 2008).

**Sense of urgency.** Leary (2007) suggested creating a sense of urgency helps supportive voters see the need and recognize the importance of acting immediately. Johnson and Ingle (2008) found that school districts were three times more successful in their referendum campaigns than those that failed to capitalize on this strategy. Often deficiencies in facilities, safety issues, cutting important programs, and the belief the school is losing ground helps voters understand how urgent the passage of the referendum has become (Leary, 2007; Powers, 2005; Weisner, 2009). Districts that survey their patrons can often identify coalitions that can rally around the urgency of the vote (Leary, 2007).

**District's clear vision.** Leary (2007) explained that a vision helps promote clarity for the school's community that can spark motivation and provide focus in all aspects of the referendum. The superintendent and the school board should be able to express this vision at all times (Holt, 2002). This vision plan should identify needs, explain priorities, and illustrate a progression of implementation steps (Carey, 2007; Dolph, 2006). This vision should have the consensus of the community in the identification of needs and costs (Clemons et al., 2010).

A major aspect of developing a district's vision is getting the public involved in formulating a five-year Facility Master Plan, which encourages the community to share the vision of the school (Carey, 2007; Clemons et al., 2010; Holt, 2002). The use of Educational Specification documents also assists the district in focusing on district needs, amount of space needed, equipment, and project costs (Clemons et al., 2010). This document allows the district to communicate a projected budget and timeline for voters to see a plan for the future (Clemons et al., 2010).

**Board election data bases.** A strong voter identification program will aid school districts with their identification of supporters, opponents, and those who are undecided that need persuasion (Fairbank, 2006). Leary (2007) recommended obtaining voter lists to see those who are registered to vote and creating a plan to get parents and those who might support the referendum out to the polls. Whitmoyer (2005) suggested the committee in charge of voters obtain a registered voter data base from the county elections office. This list can be used to identify absolute voters who participated in school elections over the last three years (Whitmoyer, 2005). Leary (2007) concluded that districts should determine who supported the last election, the list should be updated semi-annually, and a group should be placed in charge of increasing the number of *yes* votes through partnerships.

**Diverse task force.**

The importance of creating...“a diverse community task force to study school facilities is critical. 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” (Janovich, 2010, p. 17). In 2006, Vogel believed selecting the members of a community committee is a crucial step. Those included should consist of labor unions, realtors, Chambers of Commerce, and the ministerial associations (Vogel, 2006). The more community leaders the school obtains on their side the better and every goal should be to get the people who are trusted to support the referendum (Holt et al., 2006; Vogel, 2006).

Groups who are composed of members of different backgrounds tend to limit honest discourse (Brent, Finnigan & Stewart, 2009). When attempting to find out there if



is support, one must make sure that people have expressed themselves openly (Brent et al., 2009). Parents, reporters from the media, district staff, and people from all demographic sectors should have a position on the committee (Clemons et al., 2010). Retirees should be a focus since it will be hard to win an election without them (Clemons et al., 2010). Strong consideration should be given to inviting the opposition so that some of the issues might be bridged before the election (Clemons et al., 2010). In 2007, Carey believed construction programs should include citizen oversight. These people can report progress and oversee whether the projects are being completed as promised, giving voters confidence in the next election (Carey, 2007).

**Benefits to children.** Crampton and Thompson (2008) stated if the people in this country are going to be committed to higher academic standards and compete globally, our government must recognize the impact that the physical environment plays in students' health and learning. If we expect school staff to perform at their best, we must expect that school buildings meet the highest standards of facility excellence (Crampton & Thompson, 2008). Studies have shown that students in modern school buildings scored significantly better than those in older structures in reading, listening, language arts, and math (Holt, 2002). There is also evidence that an effect on student achievement exists six years after the bond issue (Cellini et al., 2008).

Holt (2002) maintained that all contact during the referendum campaign should emphasize the needs of the children. Leary (2007) suggested that referendum materials that have been designed around the benefits to the children are more apt to create a positive reaction. Class size reduction and student safety are themes that resonate well with voters (Crampton & Thompson, 2008; Theobald & Meyer, 2005).

**Board's unanimous support.** Holt et al. (2006) discovered that unanimous support from the board of education was a must before a referendum is brought before the voters. It is important that the superintendent make sure that the board is united in the support for the referendum or that concessions have been made that create a unanimous coalition (Holt, 2002). Dissention can spell disaster for school districts when attempting to pass a referendum (Nagardeolekar & Merritt, 2006). Holt (2002) emphasized, "A negative vote by a board member sends a message to the public that something is wrong and does not warrant support" (p. 22). The board member who is vocal about his or her dissent becomes a credible opponent for the referendum (Fairbank, 2006). The board should have a collective vision of the school district and what future referendums will do to achieve that vision (Cullen, 2008).

**Simple plan designs.** Holt et al. (2006) found school districts should keep their plans simple and do everything possible to utilize district funds to lessen the impact the tax has on the voters. The budget for the levy should be thoroughly vetted, but it is important not to pare down numbers just to get something passed that will fall short of the district's needs ("10 Steps," 2010). It will be critical for school leaders to evaluate all known construction costs, but also any associated expenses (Cullen, 2008). Offering the simplest plan on the first attempt to pass a referendum, with nothing to cut if the referendum fails, can be a mistake (Holt, 2002). Cullen (2008) stated, "Voters want options and you must be ready to provide them multiple options that represent effective solutions."

**Consultants.** In 2002, Holt described the need to give the public accurate information. Most school personnel, including administrators do not have the knowledge,

neither do they have the time to answer many of the questions that may arise out of discussions about levies, bonds, and capital projects (Holt, 2002). Most school districts that were successful in bond elections found that tapping into the professional expertise of consultants was very important (Carlson, 2008; Clemons et al., 2010; Dolph, 2006; Holt, 2002; Vogel, 2006). Consultants can prime the voters with clear and accurate information that is important in developing credibility with the voters (Holt, 2002). The use of consultants at times can give the voters the extra confidence to support a school's referendum measure (Holt, 2002).

Hiring a construction management firm can help to eliminate mistakes and change orders (Carlson, 2008). Consultants from outside the school district can also help select architects and talk to construction workers intelligently (Carlson, 2008). Since school administrators are trained to talk about school, but not construction, the construction management firm can monitor projects from the beginning to the end (Carlson, 2008). Vogel (2006) explained, "Voters want to know more than ever. Consultants help provide its clients with floor plans, step-by-step explanations of renovation work, detailed budget breakdowns, even computer generated, 3 D 'fly around' imaging of what the new building will look like" (p. 2).

The school board should utilize experts such as bond consultants, architects, and other trained individuals to educate support groups in the community (Holt et al., 2006). Large communities may want to use a specialized firm to poll the voters to gain a feel of what the voters may be willing to support (Clemons et al., 2010). Dolph (2006) postulated, "Information obtained from these polling firms is critical both for focusing levy strategies but also the details of the levy" (p. 1). There are also websites that promise

to help schools understand their political environment, get voter opinions, find the most effective arguments to minimize opposition, identify stumbling blocks to victory, create the most persuasive messages to gain support, and create the best strategies for winning (“Levies and Public Funding,” 2010).

**Administrators keeping a low profile.** Leary (2007) explained change driven from the top down, without the involvement of those who are impacted, creates resistance. Referendums that have the greatest success had administrators that played a low-key role (Holt, 2002). A superintendent can garner support for a referendum by presenting financial concerns in a factual, low-key manner, and presenting these concerns at board meetings, which allows the local media to report this information (Leary, 2007). Leary (2007) stated, “The manner in which a board of education and its administration carry out their individual roles is a measure of how the public perceives its educational system” (p. 16). Holt (2002) also recommended citizens leading the referendum, noting their involvement was essential. Powers (2005) described the role of administrators as sources of information to give direction to the citizens leading the referendum. Leary (2007) stated:

Regardless of school size, the superintendent must take an ongoing, active leadership role. Without the highly visible dedication, decades of research have shown that even the strongest building level plan will eventually run out of energy without central office support. (p. 7)

**Community relations.** Holt (2002) recognized the importance of having a year-round community relations plan. This plan is absolutely essential to the goal of passing a referendum and can provide invaluable information about perceptions, attitudes, and the

enthusiasm level of those who would support or oppose a referendum (Holt, 2002). The value of effective communication between a school district and its patrons should never be underestimated (Holt, 2002).

Communication was a key component in the article, *10 Steps* (2010), in which the author stated, “Keep the flow of communication going and always look for ways to connect with community members on a personal level. Find out how various groups will react to specific features in the bond issue well in advance of Election Day” (p. 1). Communication, while a necessity when trying to pass a bond or levy, should be a continual process (Dolph, 2006; Holt, 2002). Communication is a general mechanism for providing information about the school district and creating connections (Hickey, 2007; Holt, 2002). In 2006, Vogel found leaders can create invaluable good will by reaching out before the bond is even on the ballot. The community appreciates leadership that continues to listen and adjust to their needs (Vogel, 2006). LaFee (2009) explained, routinely communicating with organizations both informally and formally is critical to building transparency.

Vogel (2006) observed the importance of unifying support of the staff and making sure there is clear communication with all faculty and administration. If the administration explains to all district employees what the measure will accomplish and why it is important, the staff will respect the effort (Vogel, 2006). Watkins and Stevens (2010) suggested, “Openly sharing information with a wide constituency, involving a diversity of voices in the decision, challenging ideas, traditions, norms, and presenting a unified coalition holds off suspicions that information is being withheld” (p. 2).

A variety of communication venues should be created when attempting to convey the referendum message to the voters. Weisner (2009) explained the importance of creating communication paths that streamline information and reduce the number of opportunities for miscommunication. These paths will create a more precise two-way flow of shared information (Weisner, 2009).

The survey process is an excellent tool for engagement of the community because it gives an opportunity for the school and community to communicate (Dolph, 2006; Vogel, 2006). Another recommended way of improving communication is the use of a steady stream of information to the local media, including weekly updates (Faltys, 2006). If schools can keep the good news about the district in front of the patrons and staff members, the focus stays on the positive (Faltys, 2006). Always remember to ... “give voters clear information. Tell community residents where the money will go and what the needs are. Avoid too many specifics, which will likely change before the money arrives; nothing sinks a bond faster than squabbling over minutiae” (“10 Steps,” 2010, p. 1).

**District staff.** School district leaders should not overlook the influence school employees can have on a school district’s referendum success. Hickey (2007) indicated enlisting teachers in the bond process is a fundamental factor in bond election success. Theobald and Meyer (2005) observed the percentage of teachers in the voting population had a strong effect on the success of a school district election. Increasing the percentage of teachers who are also voters by one standard deviation created a 19% increase in the probability of success (Theobald & Meyer, 2005).

Hickey (2007) maintained teachers build relationships throughout the community by teaching students and influencing parent understanding of educational and social

issues (Hickey, 2007; Theobald & Meyer, 2005). Each teacher has family members who have close ties to other community members which, due to this relationship, creates high voter turnout (Hickey, 2007; Theobald & Meyer, 2005). Furthermore, “a supportive teacher may positively influence the votes of many community members, and a majority of teachers in favor of the bond may provide the foundation for success due to [their] web of influence” (Hickey, 2007, p. 8).

Understanding the role of the district staff as key communicators should never be underestimated. Clemons et al. (2010) suggested:

In small communities in particular, word of mouth is the primary driver of election success. Because the staff usually lives in the community, janitors, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and administrative assistants may drive the majority of word of mouth election promotion and cannot be overlooked in communicating with staff about why the election is necessary. (p.43)

Hickey (2007) pointed out teachers are often key communicators in the community and as the teachers assume increased influence, vocalized opinion about the plans can reveal optimism about passage. Simply put, communication with the teachers creates the foundation for bond success (Hickey, 2007). Clemons et al. (2010) suggested district staff should be fully informed and play an active role in all stages of the bond election process. Listening to staff groups will often reveal what the community will support; when teachers do not believe in what is being done, garnering support from the rest of the community is difficult (Clemons et al., 2010). Also in the case study by Hickey (2007) teachers were asked after a failed election, what are the district’s top five needs? The

survey of staff revealed a new direction for the next referendum that resulted in the subsequent passage of the school's bond (Hickey, 2007).

What the staff communicates to the school community can also be counterproductive to school referendum success. Clemons et al. (2010) discovered a New Mexico school district lost a bond election through inaccurate information, when post election analysis discovered the source was a bus driver. The driver had ... "heard children talking on the bus and assumed incorrectly that there was a problem with what the bond election was meant to fund" (Clemons et al., 2010, p. 43). Hickey (2007) also postulated a failed election occurred because leadership was not concerned with teachers and other subordinate personnel, and as a result, the staff was opposed to the bond.

Clemons et al. (2010) maintained, "When staff are kept informed about district facilities and financial planning the employees are more likely to support those plans—particularly if the staff has been consulted for views in an ongoing manner" (p. 25). The importance of taking the time to explain to all district employees what the measure will accomplish, working to receive their unified support, and creating clear communications with all faculty and administrators will pay dividends in the end (Vogel, 2006).

A district which does not garner the support of its staff in bond elections is failing to capitalize on the constituencies who have the greatest potential interest in support for the election (Clemons et al., 2010; Holt, 2002). Therefore, districts should take active measures to gain support from staff and to assure that staff voter turnout is exceptionally high (Clemons et al., 2010). Teachers not only have the most to gain from the school improvements, but employees also have significant influence in the community (Hickey, 2007).



**Variety of media.** Linking any single campaign strategy with an explanation concerning why some elections pass or why some fail is impossible (Faltys, 2006). Yet, Johnson and Ingle (2008) found, “For each unit increase in the number of strategies implemented, districts were 1.311 times more likely to pass a levy” (p. 20). Faltys (2006) also found a statistical significance with the amount of detail in bond planning and passage. Vogel (2006) suggested these strategies for campaign committees as a way to get critical information to the voters:

Media information went out over a wide range of outlets: as an electronic employee newsletter, staff e-mails, special district website, the district’s cable TV channel, parent e-mails, district publications, the district’s mass notification system and weekly televised media briefings. The school communications officer worked to place at least one facility need or bond-related story in local news outlets every week and actively pursued interviews on major television and radio programs. (p. 2)

Holt et al. (2006) recommended campaigns to “utilize telephone campaigning, coffees in home, parent-teacher meetings, door-to-door canvassing, and direct mailings from the citizens’ committee as techniques for educating the community about the needs of the school district” (p. 17). Johnson and Ingle (2008) found, “Variables for specific media venues/techniques, utilizing the local newspaper increased the likelihood of passage almost 11 times, and districts that used brochures were .04 times more likely to pass their levy than districts that did not use brochures” (p. 23). Another recommendation is the campaign should be presented to as many groups as possible (Faltys, 2006).

Disseminated information should concentrate on the benefits to children and community using flyers, brochures, question and answer sheets, and other printed material (Holt, 2002; Holt et al., 2006). Disseminating this information through a mailing campaign can be particularly effective, highlighting key costs, what the money will be used for, how this affects the voter (Holt et al., 2006; Powers, 2005; “Levy Marketing,” 2010). In small towns, a phone campaign can be effective, because when friends and neighbors know the person who is calling is supportive of the referendum, they may feel additional confidence with their vote (“Levy Marketing,” 2010).

In 2006, Holt et al. suggested districts that created catch phrases to their levy campaign were more likely to help voters remember key points of the campaign. These catch phrases remind voters why the school needs their vote (Holt et al., 2006). Printed material with these phrases should be hung in business windows, used as yard signs, and placed in newspapers as advertisements (“Levy Marketing,” 2010). Leary (2007) suggested that a campaign logo be adopted that connects people with a positive theme. In the study by Weisner (2009, p. 2) “A You, Plus Two” message reminded voters of their obligation to convince other voters to vote *yes* for the levy.

Strategies for getting specific groups out on Election Day, like holding a parent luncheon at the school were recommended (Clemons et al., 2010). When getting information to the public Powers (2005) recommended:

Brochures and fact sheets must answer the basic questions: How much money is needed? What will the money be used for? How much will it cost the individual? (Reduce the costs of the bond election to per day/per week amounts per household.) All literature should stress the theme of the campaign and be child

oriented. If the literature urges a *yes* vote rather than serves a general information piece, the campaign committee, not the school district must pay for it. (p. 13)

### **Other Important Components**

A question that must be asked is, “What can district leaders do to increase referendums support for the referendum” (Hickey, 2007, p. 2)? Hickey (2007) suggested there are many discrete strategies that need to be addressed to develop the support necessary for a successful election. While research on strategies that influence school referendums is sparse, general patterns for success exist (Hickey, 2007; Johnson & Ingle, 2008).

**Committees.** Often the delegation of duties through clearly defined roles helps with the enormous task of organizing a campaign. Holt (2002) explained that the role of the Steering Committee is to identify and coordinate all necessary tasks leading up to the formulation of the formal proposal to the board. The Steering Committee organizes the education of the community about the plan and the need for an impending vote (Clemons et al., 2010; Holt, 2002). The Steering Committee can garner a great deal of community support if given a major rather than a superficial role (Clemons et al., 2010).

In 2005, Powers recommended a Facilities Study Committee who would establish a need and be composed of people of a similar age of the typical voter turn-out. A Media Control Committee would work with the media to control the flow of printed information (Holt, 2002; Powers, 2005). The committee would also be in charge of advertising, buttons, yard signs, and window signs (Powers, 2005). A Voter Identification Committee would be in charge of identifying frequent voters, *yes* voters, and would create a plan to get them to the polls (Holt, 2002; Leary, 2007; Powers, 2005).

In 2005, Whitmoyer suggested the Voter Identification Committee make comparisons between those who voted and lists of parents of school age children. A bond consulting company recommended in their pamphlet that volunteers coordinate voter registration (L.J. Hart & Company, 2009). Volunteers should coordinate teachers and parents to call each parent of students in the school and distribute election materials to those identified (L.J. Hart & Company, 2009).

**Surveys.** Fairbank (2006) described, “A popular but not very effective strategy is to compile a list of every conceivable construction and remodeling project... and throw it in front of the voters for approval. Unfortunately, this approach frequently leads to electoral defeat” (p. 43). Dolph (2006) suggested, “The information obtained through the polling process is critical when determining not only the levy strategy and tactics, but also the levy itself” (p. 30). These surveys should be non-threatening and every effort should be made to contact all portions of the community (Holt, 2002). Surveys can be done person to person, door to door, at shopping centers, and over the phone (Holt, 2002). In the end, the goal is to measure support of a referendum and existing objections (Dolph, 2006; Fairbank, 2006; Holt, 2002).

A helpful guide to obtain quality feedback is to ask respondents what is the weakest portion of the referendum proposal (Holt, 2002). Brent et al. (2009) suggested using homogeneous focus groups to help elicit accurate support. Grouping people with common backgrounds facilitates the sharing of ideas and prevents a few people from dominating conversations (Brent et al., 2009). Surveyors can better compare and contrast multiple opinions in these focus groups, which allows for accurate feedback (Brent et al., 2009). Surveyed groups should contain groups of senior citizens, school staff, parents,

students, and business owners all meeting homogenously to gather information (Brent et al., 2009).

School districts should also consider conducting surveys with scientific polls utilizing a split-sample question technique (Lifto & Senden, 2006). This technique helps committees ask questions about what kind of language people find more appealing and in turn will be more likely to support (Lifto & Senden, 2006). The language chosen would be used to teach school leaders how to best communicate with voters (Lifto & Senden, 2006).

**Community support.** The use of highly visible citizen support groups can send the message to the voters that the community has embraced the need for a referendum. Holt (2002) discovered data indicating “the most significant factor in passing a school bond referendum is the development of a ‘broad-based citizens’ volunteer committee” (p. 18). Clemons et al. (2010) believed the best time to organize a support committee is when the district is ready to create a five-year facilities master plan.

Citizens in the community should be sought to take command of the leadership of the school’s referendum. Holt (2002) believed active support groups should take the role of leaders in the referendum campaign. The members of support groups should assume the responsibility for education of the public (Holt, 2002). Holt et al. (2006) credited the community task force in creating community support in the election campaign by making recommendations, presenting findings, and communicating the message of the election. Clemons et al. (2010) reported the more community involvement the better chance that the community will support the plan and future elections.

Citizen support groups should be put in charge of many of the things that are not legal for district employees to do (Janovich, 2010). Some of those responsibilities might include raising funds, staffing phones, and printing and disseminating flyers, brochures, and other printed materials (Janovich, 2010; Leary, 2007). Nagardeolekar and Merritt (2006) stated:

Community leaders recruited to spearhead a school construction bond campaign should be well-known and well-respected, have the time and energy to devote to a lengthy and arduous undertaking... and have superlative 'people skills'— someone who is friendly, and a good listener, and a good talker. (p. 2)

**Parents.** In O'Brien's (2008) study of senior citizens, he explained why younger voters tend to view political issues differently in the following passage:

Young families, the ones who depend most heavily on the local education system and who often pay the lion's share of taxes in some communities, tend to be busy, uninformed, and uninvolved in the local decision-making process. Moms may be active in the parent-teacher fundraisers, or Santa Breakfast events. And young dads may never miss coaching a Little League or soccer game, but ask them who their school board members are, and what's happening with the future of the local school system, and you're likely to get a blank stare. (p. 2)

School districts do a reasonably good job of keeping parents informed and building principals are usually trusted by them (Dolph, 2006). If the parents see the principal engaged in the election process it usually resonates well at the polls (Dolph, 2006). Holt (2002) explained:

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).

Younger voters are sometimes not as politically engaged, staying busy trying to get their careers off the ground, buying and maintaining their homes, and raising families (O'Brien, 2008). To engage younger voters, Dolph (2006) pointed out that parents view smaller class size as improved opportunities for students and a levy strategy that emphasizes smaller class sizes sits well with the parent voter. O'Brien (2008) described an excellent way of getting parents involved when he stated, "Tap the power of PTO and PTA organizations, sports, and activity booster organizations. Educate young families constantly on what's going on that could affect the quality of schools, the system and the facilities they use" (p. 2).

**Trust.** When considering whether to bring a referendum before the voters, evaluating whether trust has been established between the school district leadership and the districts' voter is important (Faltys, 2006; Leary, 2007). Each year referendums fail because school districts do not fully recognize the link between trust and the referendum's success (Leary, 2007). Faltys (2006) observed that lack of trust in the superintendent and bond failure was statistically significant. The passage of a bond referendum after previous failures in a Texas school district was based upon a new found trust in the district when the previous superintendent left (Faltys, 2006). Nagardeolekar and Merritt (2006) focused on the personality, attitude, and reputation of the district

superintendent and the school board for creating trust. Nagardeolekar and Merritt (2006) described superintendents as:

some being realists; some are dreamers; some are knowledgeable about school construction and others have no clue... but unless a superintendent's dreams are matched by what the district can afford, a school bond proposal is likely to go down in flames. (p. 2)

The most successful public relations campaigns instill trust, confidence, and faith in the local school district leadership (Faltys, 2006). Superintendents often must make difficult decisions, making absolute trust a mandate (Leary, 2007). Those leading campaigns must focus on winning back the voters; without these efforts campaigns are destined for failure (Faltys, 2006).

Another technique toward changing the community's perception involves using trusted citizens to back the campaign (Holt et al., 2006). Name recognition and confidence in the person can build confidence in the voters (Holt et al., 2006). Hickey (2007) suggested, "Trust is more than following through on promises. Trust comes from liking the person, people, or authority" (p. 8). General trust is a fundamental factor in election success and honest communication is essential (Hickey, 2007).

A lack of trust in the leadership and boards of education intensify bond elections, making achievement of success more difficult (Holt et al., 2006). The public trust must be earned every day; school staff can work for months building trust and one bad incident can cause the voters to lose trust for years (Holt et al., 2006). Trust is not something the school leaders just display before the public when the school wants money (Faltys, 2006). Districts need to be open to public view continually, even when there is no school



referendum in sight (Faltys, 2006). In a study by Hickey (2007) the researcher found the community had been made promises that were not kept and voters were hesitant to lend support. The failure to keep promises, in turn, created an atmosphere of distrust and led to a solid defeat (Hickey, 2007).

The issue of improved trust often requires a change in leadership for the voters to see the need for passing a school referendum. Faltys (2006) revealed the issue of trust in the school board and the resulting school bond referendum success can take years to correct and change. Steps must be made to ensure that the school board acts in an honest way towards the school's constituents (Faltys, 2006; Weisner, 2009). Actions must be straight forward and visible to the public in all areas in order to gain the trust of those in the community; in some ways only time can heal the past (Faltys, 2006; Holt, 2002; Weisner, 2009).

Hickey (2007) observed in his analysis of three case studies of districts who failed referendums that there was a significant trust issue with each of the superintendents. A lack of trust in the teachers and staff toward the superintendent was evident by strong opposition to the previous bond; plans were unclear, and in an environment without trust, issues were multiplied (Hickey, 2007). The superintendent must model a new mission of creating trust with partnerships, businesses, news media, attending school events, and participating with civic projects (Leary, 2007). Trust becomes one of the foremost factors in the ability to plan a successful bond election after prior failures (Hickey, 2007).

Often school's leadership must completely change approaches by being completely open to public view before trust can be instilled. LaFee (2009) suggested complete transparency as a significant step towards creating an atmosphere of trust.

Asking the community to look at the problem and letting them tell district leaders what needs to be done helps the community share what will be supported (Holt, 2002; Lafee, 2009). If a district has not done a good job showing how effective the district has been in conducting business, then it is hard for people to believe there is a need for additional funding (Lafee, 2009).

Districts should poll voters to see what would be supported (Vogel, 2006). Levels of trust and support will become evident from these polls; the school leaders can decide if the district should go forward or dissolve plans (Vogel, 2006). Administrators need to become more transparent with motives to prove that everyone is working toward the same goals (Lafee, 2009). When there is a general lack of information about what the district is doing, the public will look at the school thinking that something is being hidden from them (Lafee, 2009).

**Timing.** The timing of a referendum should never be overlooked because of the impact it might have on the success of the voting outcome. Bondo (2010) mentioned “The days of simply putting forward a tax increase to support education are most likely gone” (p. 1). School districts must be aware of all variables, including timing to have a successful election (Bondo, 2010). Holt (2002) suggested, “The timing and length of a campaign can be a factor, but most researchers find neither the time nor the length of the campaign was significant in the outcomes to the elections” (p. 20). Some states mandate the timing of bond votes and schools should think hard about how to bring out the supporters for the district’s cause (“10 Steps,” 2010). The time when an election is placed before the voters is important (“10 Steps,” 2010).

The opportunity to vote on more than one issue in one election was shown to be statistically detrimental to school referendums (Faltys, 2006). Without the clutter of other elections, people are more informed, and informed people are more likely to vote *yes* (Tosto, 2009). In an eight-year study in Michigan, Bowers, Metzger and Militello (2010) found in research, “In our interpretation the time during a calendar year that a bond election is held, the position of the bond proposal on the ballot, and voter turnout all matter” (p. 392).

School administrator should give strong consideration to holding an election right after school starts when interest is highest with parents and should avoid holding an election when school is not in session (Clemons, 2010). School district leaders should avoid the holiday seasons in November and December and if at all possible, do not host an election around other elections (Clemons, 2010). Tosto (2009) reported:

In an even numbered year... election news is jammed with articles about national and statewide races. By the time November rolls around, the millionth story on the presidential election is written: People know more about Sarah Palin’s hairstyle than whether or not a local school district is trying to pass a referendum. Compared to an odd-year election where a school levy may be the only race. If you don’t know what the referendum is for, what is the chance you’d vote to increase your taxes? (p. 2)

**Supermajorities.** Holt (2002) stated, “Over the past several years a formidable anti-tax movement has developed across the country. In many states such tax movements have brought about legislated tax limitations and restrictions on capital expenditures” (p. 14). As a result several states that have supermajorities included: Alabama three fifths

(special school tax), Kentucky two thirds (bond issues), Missouri 57.15% (bond issues two thirds vote for debt ceiling), New Jersey three fifths (exceeding levy limitation), New York State three fifths (debt limit elections), Oklahoma three fifths (bond issues), Oregon (50% turnout needed for property tax regardless if the referendum passes or fails), South Dakota three fifths ( to improve capital outlay), Washington State three fifths (bond issues), and West Virginia three fifths (for all bond issues), (Ballotpedia, 2010b). Holt (2002) reported, “From 1990 to 1995, the Iowa State Department reported that only 38 percent of the Iowa school districts’ holding bond elections passed” (p. 17).

Shaw (2010) explained George Bush would not have been president if supermajorities were required and other measures would not have passed because just over a 50% vote was received. It is not fair that sports stadiums, parks, and prisons can be built with a simple majority, but schools have to obtain 60% of the vote (Shaw, 2010). On the website, Ballotpedia (2010a), the writer stated:

About two-thirds of local school bond proposals in California were approved in the decade that runs from 1998-2008. Prior to 2001, districts needed two-thirds approval to pass local general obligation bond measures. More than 40% of local school bond ballot questions failed. In November 2000, California voters passed Proposition 39. Proposition 39 reduced the supermajority needed to pass a bond issue ballot question from 67% to 55%. Prop. 39 also imposed some restrictions on the allowable amount of the bond and included some accountability requirements. Since the passage of Proposition 39, districts have had a choice of whether to seek two-thirds or 55% approval. 80% of local school bond ballots that rely on the 55% approval have succeeded. (p. 1)

**Facility planning.** In 2005, Powers described facility planning as an entire process by itself and as one that is critical to the long term success of any district. One way to accomplish facility planning is by utilizing a Facility Study committee and this committee should be composed of people from a variety of backgrounds (Clemons, 2010; Holt 2002; Powers, 2005). People with knowledge of construction should be considered first, with groups of people who are representative of the demographics of the voters in the community (Powers, 2005). Parents with school-age children, influential retired people, and teachers should also be a part of this committee (Clemons, 2010; Powers, 2005).

Administrators and other staff should be a resource to provide direction on enrollment projections, requirements for programs, and bonding capacity, which all affect the facility plan (Holt, 2002; Powers, 2005). Unfortunately, “most decisions in facility planning involve school administrators, professional planners, architects, and engineers with local school constituents included at the end of the process” (Crampton & Thompson, 2008, p. 14).

**Senior citizens.** According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the participation rates of older Americans in elections far exceeds that of younger voters (as cited in O’Brien, 2008). O’Brien (2008) noted, “In the last presidential election, the AARP reported that 70 percent of people age 55-74, and 67 percent of people 75 and older voted. This compared to 48 percent of voters under the age of 50” (as cited in O’Brien, 2008, p. 1). Hickey (2007) reported:

There is another group who may often hold the most clout, who could stand in the way of that next high school expansion project or new elementary school.

Politically they are more often than not the most active and powerful local voting block; they own homes and pay taxes, which means they've been around and aren't going anywhere anytime soon; the majority of their children are beyond school age, so they've gotten what they wanted from the local school district; and they now vote with their pocketbooks and are often single-issue voters, and that issue is taxation --the lower the better. (p. 1)

Senior citizens are much more likely to vote than younger residents may be more sensitive to higher property taxes and are on fixed incomes, seeing little benefit because children are out of the house (Hickey, 2007). O'Brien explained:

There are many reasons the experts speculate as to why mature voters are more politically engaged. First, they tend to have more time to join church, community, and civic groups to become engaged in local affairs and get out to the polls on Election Day. (p. 2)

Changing demographics may affect the outcome of elections (Holt, 2002). As the population of the United States grows older, fewer citizens have school age children and they may believe that schools that were good enough for them will work today (Holt, 2002). A committee should be formed to deal directly with senior citizens (Powers, 2005). They often make or break issues because they exercise their right to vote, have fixed incomes, and their pocketbook tends to be thought of first if they don't have enough information (Powers, 2005).

In California "empty nesters" do not move into smaller houses like in other states (Cellini et al., 2008, p. 9) They have an incentive to stay in their original homes where they will likely oppose tax increases, as they see little use from school spending and see

only paper gains from increased home values (Cellini et al., 2008). Fletcher and Kenney (2008) hypothesized:

The elderly who have lived in a community for a long period of time may be more likely to support school spending than those who have recently moved to the area.

This is because the long-term elderly may be more likely to have grandchildren in the district's schools and may care about other children in the school system.

(p. 285)

Fletcher and Kenney (2008) also expressed the counter argument that there is little reason to be concerned about senior voters' support for schools. The elderly have a most imperceptible impact on school spending (Fletcher & Kenney, 2008). Children in high populations of those above sixty five should not fear about receiving an inferior education (Fletcher & Kenney, 2008).

One should remember the childless voter to consistently win school elections and the school will need to convince voters without children to support school spending (Cellini et al., 2008; Fletcher & Kenney, 2008; Hickey, 2007; Holt, 2002; Johnson & Ingle, 2008; O'Brien, 2006; Powers, 2005; "10 Steps," 2010). Studies involving the influence of senior citizens on election outcomes have produced mixed results (Johnson & Ingle, 2008). Fletcher and Kenny (2008) claimed that concern with the senior vote is unfounded and that elderly residents tend to align themselves with younger households when they have grandchildren in school.

**School-community partnerships.** Blank, Melaville, and Jacobson (2012) described community partnerships as a set of agreements connecting a school, families, and the surrounding community. These schools are equipped to develop students into

educated citizens that are prepared to give back to the communities where they reside (Blank et al., 2012). Abromitis (2009) defined the foundation to forming school-community partnerships as,... “building communication, sharing resources, and developing unique solutions to community problems” (p. 1). Leary (2007) described these partnerships as a way to bring a harmonious relationship between groups, with school districts giving back to the community without expecting anything in return.

This process, according to Blank et al. (2012), involves: a shared common vision, structures to engage stakeholders, open communication about issues and solutions, use of data, empowering schools to sustain community school work, and leveraging resources with woven funding streams. Each community has unique problems and the collaboration toward solving those issues requires shared resources (Abromitis, 2009). Students and employees donate their time to partnership activities without pay, utilizing the newspaper to highlight partnership activities (Leary, 2007). Student groups can work on community beautification projects as well, or by helping senior citizens with raking leaves, shoveling sidewalks, and picking up groceries (Leary, 2007). These partnerships can develop critical levels of support, enhancing the school’s standing in the community (Blank et al., 2012).

**Tough economic times.** The future for school districts will continue to rely heavily on local tax initiatives to fund schools. Every two to four years schools could lose 14-24 percent of their funding if voters turn down petitions to renew funding (“League of Education Voters,” 2010). These levies help school administrators pay for the day-to-day operations of the schools (“League of Education Voters,” 2010). Without them, funding for teachers, textbooks, transportation, smaller class sizes, and extra-



curricular programs would be eliminated (Campbell, 2008; “League of Education Voters,” 2010). Campbell (2008) suggested, “Larger class sizes and delayed maintenance on schools could be some of the side effects of a slashed budget next year...despite the gray economic forecasts this year and next, school leaders said they will do everything possible not to fire teachers” (p.1)

Much of funding for building renovations, new construction, and deferred maintenance cannot be accommodated with operation budgets (Matt, 2010). To address those needs, districts must present bond measures to voters in their respective communities and find ways to raise support before elections (Matt, 2010). Crampton and Thompson (2008) believed, “The failure to invest in school buildings sends a cynical message of indifference to students, rather than showing them that we value education” (p.5).

Dolph (2006) explained, “Regardless of the district issues, some voters will vote no on a tax levy simply because of real or perceived economic concerns” (p. 1). In Weisner’s case study (2009), the district had made cuts that increased student-teacher ratios, trimmed fine arts, and after-school activities. In the rather bleak economic outlook the district was able to convince voters to support the school despite economic worries (Weisner, 2009).

In the article produced by the National School Boards Association (2009), the author reported, “Nationally, 230 out of 330 school bond measures supporting K-12 education were approved on Election Day...The overall approval rate, nearly eighty seven percent, is better than previous years” (p. 1). The Minnesota School Boards

Association calculated in a year when unemployment jumped and housing prices fell, seventy one percent of schools got one or more requests approved (Tosto, 2009).

Over the last decade, during the time when taxes are increasingly unpopular, people will vote positively for measures that will raise their taxes if they are convinced there is a need (Janovich, 2010). If people see the measure as being reasonable they will make the effort to fund the solution (Janovich, 2010). Tosto (2009) indicated, “People know the state isn’t funding schools and they also know two years from now, schools may face a state funding cut for the first time ever. So the only option is local support” (p. 1). Janovich (2010) reported:

Throughout this whole decade or so, school levies have passed, hospital bonds have passed, and all these special districts have passed measures to raise taxes... It is how practically that tax money is going to be used; that’s the case that needs to be made. (p. 3)

**Technology.** The use of technology in the referendum campaign is truly an effective way of targeting key audiences. Arbietman (2009) described how technology was used in their campaign:

Technology is a huge part of approximately seventy two percent of the of the successful bond campaigns. We used school web sites, student videos, virtual pictures from the architect, e-mail, school reach, text messaging, Face book, and much more. We truly feel that this allowed us to reach the total population. (p. 1)

Weisner (2009) described a district that used “social media and networking including ‘e-blasts,’ Face book, and a Web site expertly maintained by a former student and written and designed by freelance writers and a designer all of whom volunteered their time” (p.

25). O'Brien (2008) suggested, "Schools should target parents of young children using new technology communication tools, emphasize quality education, preservation of property values, and the need to attract more young families to contribute to a healthy tax base" ( p. 2).

**Benefits to the community.** In 2009, Weisner reported early-on campaign committees identified the key evidence-based community-wide benefits of property values, lower crime rates, and economic development and used them as touchstones when new issues and concerns arose. Leary (2007) stated:

The school system's place in the total community is a factor to consider when asking citizens to invest in a long term commitment to a high quality educational system. Referendums are more likely to pass when they include opportunities to enhance the quality of life for all of the school district's residents. (p. 14)

The belief was that regardless of a person's age or stage in life, everyone benefits from strong schools (Hotz, 2010; Moore, 2004; Weisner, 2009). This focus helped the committees to respond thoughtfully and on their own terms when criticism, complaints, and challenges arose (Weisner, 2009). One study determined housing prices increased by 6% in school districts that passed a bond issue, with the effects lasting as much as a decade. (Cellini et al., 2008). Shifts in housing prices were not evident in areas where bonds failed (Cellini et al., 2008).

Hotz (2010) reported, in a majority of studies, higher home values are associated with increased testing scores. In one study, a 2-6% increase in home values meant a 10% increase test scores of students (Hotz, 2010). Most people wanting to buy a home in a high-quality school district will not even consider purchasing in a low-performing school,

regardless of the price (Hotz, 2010). As home buyers, people should make sure of the quality of the school before they buy (Hotz, 2010). Cash and Twiford (2009) reported:

Many researchers have categorized building factors as either cosmetic or structural. The cosmetic factors, those that can be seen, consistently are linked with improved student performance. Structural factors, including heating and air-conditioning, also are linked to student achievement. Factors that have been noted repeatedly influenced student achievement include natural lighting, paint colors and paint cycles, general cleanliness, air quality, temperature control, acoustical enhancements, safety features, absence of graffiti, and air-conditioning. (p. 3)

Moore (2004) asserted the quality of the schools plays major role in getting businesses to locate and stay in the community. Local businesses need a quality workforce that the local schools can provide (Moore, 2004). Quality schools increase property values, stimulate economic growth, lower crime rates, create a source of pride, and attract working class people sharing the tax burden (Moore, 2004). The overall effects of the infrastructure of our schools cannot be ignored and go directly against the educational mission of our schools (Holt, 2002).

Money from bonds will produce a local infusion of jobs in construction, retail, and the rest in the fields of food service, health care, and hotels (Geers, 2010). In a successful school bond or levy increase, the mean income in the community has a tendency to rise due to the exodus of those who are not willing to pay higher taxes and those who are willing to pay for quality schools taking their place (Cellini et al., 2008).

**Detrimental factors.** School districts should make themselves aware of potentially negative community environmental factors that may be detrimental to school

election success before a referendum is to be brought before the voters. Lafee (2009) attributed their first election defeat to an organized opposition group who employed tax defeat strategists from outside the community to turn down the proposal. A successful campaign is contingent on whether those running the campaign understand what the opposition is expressing to the voters (Holt, 2002). All campaign presentations and media messages should be prepared for the opposition's message (Holt, 2002). Bock (2008) maintained, "Active local opposition to school levies is always bad news for schools seeking to increase school taxes" (p. 239).

Faltys (2006) found several factors that seemed to negatively influence previous elections: "Voters were opposed to any tax increases. There was influential or organized opposition. Campaign committee was absent or unable to convince voters of the need. The public was simply apathetic towards the schools. People did not understand the issue" (p. 15). Faltys(2006) also identified four factors regarding long-term conditions in the community that contributed to the failure of school bond referendums: "Public feels taxes are already too high. The community includes large voting blocs that oppose tax increases. Citizens feel the effect of reassessment. The public does not truly understand the school finance" (p. 15).

**After the vote.** Relationships and trust building are some of the most important strategies in success at the polls (Hickey, 2007). After the vote is when the challenge of building begins (Holt, 2002). Leary (2007) suggested that following a vote, a list should be made of everyone who voted, determine those that supported the referendum, update this supporter list semi-annually, maintain and expand school partnerships and outreach, and maintain a referendum team for greater margins of success.

There should be a focus to maintain the post referendum relationship with the community after the passage and people should be informed of the location of the projects and the timeline for completion (Hickey, 2007). Frequent updates to the community allow people to know the status of projects and help build and maintain trust (Holt, 2002; Hickey, 2007). Some districts place temporary bill boards showing the project that was financed by a bond (Hickey, 2007).

**Failed levies.** The problem of passing school referendums often goes back to the colleges and universities (Holt, 2002). Very seldom are administrators prepared for the task of planning for an effective strategy to pass school referendums (Holt, 2002). Johnson and Ingle (2008) discovered, “Rejecting an election in one year increased the likelihood of voters rejecting the election in the next year, suggesting that this is an incentive for school boards to avoid budget vote defeats” (p. 9). Leary (2007) suggested, “Never propose a referendum that is in jeopardy. If a winning mindset breaks down, a negative attitude can develop that takes years to overcome” (p. 42).

Bonds fail for many reasons and school districts need to figure out why and adjust their strategies (Clemons et al., 2010). If districts fail to analyze the reason behind the failed election, schools risk losing resources and creating negative expectations (Clemons et al., 2010). Districts must develop a system to listen and learn from the community so that these relationships avoid becoming adversarial, further eroding the opportunities for district support (Clemons et al., 2010; Holt, 2002).

Analysis must occur immediately after failed elections, so that the reasons for failure are clearly on the voter’s minds, and so the district can immediately begin to adjust strategies (Clemons et al., 2010; Holt, 2002). Poor communication is a key reason

for finance election failure (Lifto & Senden, 2006). Lifto and Sendon (2006) reported, “The collective fingers of blame, which are pointed at school boards and superintendents, cite jargon, legalese, and ‘educationese’ as barriers to both understanding and supporting a school district’s proposal” (p. 2). Clemons et al. (2010) suggested the following are post-election questions and strategies that must be carefully explored:

Evaluate the level of school board participation in the election, along with the level of opposition within the board. Successful bond elections generally require consensus among board members. How actively did the board work to pass the elections? How well did the community facilities steering committee function? Did it take the lead in the election? What was the level of school district staff participation in the election? Given that school bond elections tend to have low voter turnout, voting by district staff can carry the election if staff turnout is sufficient. What was the level of parent participation in the election? Again given that voter turnout can be low in district bond elections, sufficient parent turnout can carry the election. (p. 54)

Schools should do an analysis of how segments of the community voted, which can provide clues as to where to concentrate on the next election (Holt et al., 2006). The problems that caused the bond issue to be brought to a vote have not gone away and so the new plan should begin immediately (Holt et al., 2006). Powers (2005) made these suggestions:

Voter research is a vital part of successful bond issue campaign. Ideally, research will start the day after the previous bond. Careful analysis of election results is a useful tool in fashioning the strategies for success. Several questions should be

asked: What was the total voter turn-out? How many parents voted? What is the age of your voting public? How many of the high school seniors voted? What is the percentage of parents who are not registered to voters? (p. 14)

**Prescriptions for passing levies.** There are several studies in existence that have prescribed plans for passing school elections. Each one has merit in context with the author's experience. Lafee (2009) offered four guidelines for successful elections: First, leaders have to become transparent throughout the whole organization (Lafee, 2009). Second, school district efforts must extend beyond the tenure of the superintendent and board turnover (Lafee, 2009). Third, never underestimate the impact demographic changes and don't expect the same results (Lafee, 2009). Finally, leaders must be prepared to share with the public the school's weaknesses and the need for input and help (Lafee, 2009).

The authors of the article *Levy Marketing* (2010), suggested starting a campaign just five weeks from the election with a post card mailer; four weeks from the election, a town hall meeting; three weeks from the election, signs, stickers, and phone calls should be made; two weeks from the election, a second town hall meeting; one week from the election, a second post card mailer should be sent; three days from the election, phone calls should be made.

Preparation for school referendums should never officially end, but when a referendum is in the future, planning is imperative. O'Brien (2008) concluded that the studies on the feasibility of the referendum, with an absolute understanding of how the referendum will affect tax rates, must be thoroughly vetted. School leaders must make sure that they are in compliance with every law considering local zoning, federal, and



state laws or this will become a focus of local special interest groups (O'Brien, 2008). If the district is able to focus on the sound financial use of resources they should do so, providing district audits to the public so that trust is established ("10 Steps," 2010).

Inviting the local media from the very beginning of referendum process and keep them involved so that they know the issues is important. O'Brien (2008) concluded that school district leaders should call the local media before receiving calls from them. With all public meetings, referendum leaders should prepare written press releases for the media; school leaders cannot assume that the message created by the media will be what they want the public to hear (O'Brien, 2008).

Specific outreach briefings should be planned with the media to make sure there are no misunderstandings and they are knowledgeable about all issues (O'Brien, 2008). The information that is disseminated to the local media should always focus on the benefits of the referendum to the children and the community (Holt et al., 2006). O'Brien (2008) concluded, "If you do not maintain a proactive media relations effort, you allow the special interests to define the issues and set the tone for all media coverage, and you stand a higher chance of losing in the court of public opinion"(p. 2).

When building the case for a referendum, preparation is even more important than the bond measure itself (Vogel, 2006). Vogel (2006) recognized, "Every district has a list of top priorities, but those don't necessarily correspond to what the electorate is willing to pay for" (p. 2). The tax levy increase should be limited by keeping designs simple and utilizing existing funds (Holt et al., 2006) Going to the voters too often will send the wrong message, so districts should not pare down numbers just to get something passed, only to come back to the voters later ("10 Steps," 2010).

O'Brien (2008) suggested that from a communication standpoint school district leaders want to be able to tell the school's patrons that they have done everything possible to lessen the impact of taxes even through special financing arrangements. A successful practice is to give patrons clear information about where the money will be utilized, yet avoiding too many specifics helps promote the referendum measure in a positive way ("10 steps," 2010). Early on, use the staff to establish who gets what; rivalries among schools can sabotage a referendum is important ("10 Steps," 2010).

Holt et al. (2006) suggested advice should be sought from those administrators and school boards who have won elections recently and apply those strategies that would influence the vote locally. These steps allow districts to focus on key strategies that could spell success (Holt et al., 2006). Getting other governmental agencies involved to take advantage of the political climate by connecting the referendum to what the community members are most concerned about is a good practice ("10 Steps," 2010).

Young families should be mobilized because they have the most to gain and will be the best allies the of school's referendum (O'Brien, 2008). O'Brien (2008) suggested that schools should... "emphasize quality education, preservation of property values, and the need to attract more young families to contribute to a healthy tax base (p. 2). And in conclusion, Vogel (2006) advised "Hold your own with the persuasion voters; do well with the *yes* turnout vote and you'll win the measure" (p. 2).

## **Summary**

The most critical components to school election success were identified by Johnson and Ingle (2008) and Holt et al. (2006) and were utilized as a framework for this study. A focus on *yes* voters, communication with the community, creating a sense of

urgency, clear vision, using board election data bases, creating a diverse task force, focusing on the benefits to the children, unanimous board support, use of existing funds, use of consultants, leaders keeping a low profile, and the use of a variety of media to inform the public served as a conceptual framework for this study.

Before bringing a referendum before the voters, there should be a thorough plan, with careful consideration given to how the community would support the measure (Clemons et al., 2010). Without complete support of the media, business persons, and the board of education; plans for a referendum should be scrapped for fear of a negative outcome that might plague future attempts (Leary, 2007). Schools that have developed close community partnerships have a greater chance of successful support of school referendums (Leary, 2007).

The issue of schools securing more funding through referendums is complicated, and in difficult economic times, issues become more pronounced. School district leaders may be required to choose between maintaining school facilities and funding student instruction (Adams, 2010). When seeking additional funding through a school referendum, school district leaders must make sure that the factors within the voting community are void of conditions that will compromise the referendum's success. Election success is contingent on factors and strategies that are proven through research to be beneficial.

The research design and methodology were described in Chapter Three. The purpose of the research was presented in the introduction and the research questions followed. The population and sample selection were described and justified. The choice of a descriptive study was described and the survey design was presented. A description

of the data analysis was calculated using the mode and Chi-square analysis along with an explanation of internal validity and external validity factors. Quantitative data and research findings were presented in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, conclusions and recommendations for action and further study were shared.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine the effectiveness of factors and strategies surrounding referendums and the passage of those measures meant to improve school funding and facilities. Every year across the United States public school district leaders attempt to get additional funding to build or upgrade school facilities (Bowers, Metzger, & Montello, 2010). Districts that cannot secure funding from voters may fall behind other more successful schools that are providing quality learning conditions (Bowers et al., 2010).

Holt (2002) explained, “The consequences of failing to improve the infrastructures in American school districts are too great to be ignored. Some of the effects have a direct impact on the educational mission of schools” (p. 4). Bowers et al. (2010) explained, “Understanding why bond requests are passed or rejected is an urgent issue for school district leaders, local communities, and educational researchers” (p. 376). Procedural advice is plentiful, but empirical literature on factors that are focused on the exact strategies that improve the likelihood of passing a referendum remains sparse (Bowers et al., 2010).

#### **Research Questions**

These research questions were designed to expand on previous works by researchers who identified factors and strategies for successful passage of school referendums (Holt et al., 2006; Johnson & Ingle, 2008). This study may provide school district leaders the answers to the following questions:

1. What do superintendents identify as strategies to use as prescriptive plans for successful school referendums?

2. What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to success of school referendums?

3. What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to failure of school referendums?

### **Research Design**

The type of research executed in this study was the survey design method. Bluman (2008) described data collection as a way of helping people determine a course of action or a way to make informed decisions. In this study, respondents were to recall influential factors from past election campaigns that affected the outcome of the school's referendum.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of the study consisted of superintendents experienced with school referendums. A purposive sample was used to focus on the superintendents in Missouri who have had experience with referendum campaigns. Battaglia (2011) explained, "The main objective of a purposive sample is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population" (p. 1).

The sample was obtained from a list of school superintendents who have sought help from two primary bond consultants from November 2009 to November 2011. The sample selected included 134 public school districts in Missouri that have attempted to pass school referendums from those consultants. A survey was administered to superintendents in Missouri public schools who have attempted to pass bond issues, levy increases, Lease Certificates of Participation, or Proposition C waivers. Due to mobility of superintendents, attempts were made to contact the superintendents who led the school

referendum. The superintendents of the Western Missouri conference who piloted the survey were not included in the population sample.

### **Instrumentation**

The survey instrument (see Appendix A) was used to gather data for the study and was administered to superintendents in the state of Missouri. The survey was designed to ascertain what school superintendents identified as influential factors and strategies to school referendums. The factors and strategies identified by Johnson and Ingle (2008) and Holt et al. (2006) served as a framework for the survey instrument used to determine the perceptions of Missouri superintendents regarding referendums. Factors and strategies identified as having a positive or negative influence in their studies were used to formulate the questions on the survey instrument (Holt et al., 2006; Johnson & Ingle, 2008).

Superintendents of the Western Missouri conference were asked to provide feedback on a pilot of the survey to determine the clarity of the questions in the survey instrument. Superintendents were asked to respond to 27 questions regarding factors identified as having a positive impact on referendums. These questions are based on research by Johnson and Ingle (2008) and Holt et al. (2006). A five-point Likert scale was used for these questions that describe each factor as: 1=No Positive Influence, 2=Very Little Positive Influence, 3=Some Positive Influence, 4=Strong Positive Influence, and 5=Very Strong Positive Influence. Allen and Seaman (2007) described Likert scales as being a common method to measure perceptions and are appropriate measurements for ordinal data.

Johnson and Ingle (2008) and Holt et al. (2006) identified factors that had a negative influence on school referendums. Superintendents were asked to respond to 29 additional questions regarding factors identified as having a detrimental impact on referendums. These 29 questions were structured with a five-point Likert scale that describe the each factor as: 1=No Negative Influence, 2=Very Little Negative Influence, 3=Some Negative Influence, 4=Strong Negative Influence, and 5=Very Strong Negative Influence. A final question about what the superintendent believed should have been done differently in the referendum process was asked to elicit an open-ended response.

Each question in the survey was used to elicit responses about the superintendents' perceptions between the influence of the strategy used and the passage of the referendum. Common detrimental factors were identified by the responses of the superintendents and the success or failure of the referendum. The researcher utilized the responses from the survey instrument in the statistical treatment of data.

### **Data Collection**

For the purpose of this study, two consulting companies were asked to provide the names of school districts in Missouri that utilized their services regarding referendum campaigns. Superintendents who attempted to pass a referendum in the last three years were surveyed. A survey was sent out via electronic mail using an online survey instrument to collect responses from survey participants. The contact information obtained from the Missouri School Directory (2011) provided the electronic mail addresses of the superintendents of those districts that utilized the services of the consulting firms.



Frequency distribution tables were produced from the online survey instrument that utilized data collected from surveyed participants reflecting the most frequent answers from the respondents. Integration into the Excel Data Analysis Toolpak from the online survey instrument allowed for the analysis of data using Chi-square methods. On open-ended questions, the text analysis feature from the online survey instrument was utilized to analyze the most common responses.

Subjects were asked to complete surveys and responses within ten days. A second mailing was sent fifteen days later to solicit additional responses. Electronic data received was stored in a password protected electronic folder for three years after the survey.

There were no risks associated with participation in the study. No personally identifiable information will be published or retained. Findings from the study will be made available upon request to superintendents in the state of Missouri and the cooperating bond financing companies.

### **Data Analysis**

The Excel Analysis Toolpak was utilized for ease of use. The Excel Analysis Toolpak can be used to ...“quickly and easily compute and execute data analysis” (Faucheux, 2010, p. 1). The Excel Analysis Toolpak was used to create frequency distribution tables, calculate the mode, and perform Chi-square analysis.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

According to Bluman (2008), descriptive statistics is defined as consisting “of the collection, organization, summarization, and presentation of data” (p. 4). Bluman (2008) also stated, “The statistician tries to describe a situation” (p. 4). The data obtained from the Likert scales from the survey instrument were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

**Frequency distribution.** Bluman (2008) defined frequency distributions as “the organization of raw data in table form, using classes and frequencies” (p. 35). Data in this study were organized by placing the data into tables for analysis.

**Mode.** Bluman (2008) defined mode as, “The value that occurs most often in a data set” (p. 109). Hall (2010) explained, “With Likert scale data, the best measure to use is the mode or most frequent response” (p. 1). The calculation of the mode revealed the perceptions of the superintendents measured by their most frequent responses to each question.

### **Inferential Statistics**

According to Bluman (2008), inferential statistics is defined as consisting “of generalizing from samples to populations, performing estimations and hypothesis tests, determining relationships among variables, and making predictions” (p. 6). Caution should be used to in generalizing these samples to the population. A purposive sample was used rather than a random sample, and the number of responses would not be expected to represent the general population. Inferential measurements were necessary in this study to determine if frequencies are by chance or a result of variance.

**Chi-square.** McLaughlin (2010) defined the Chi-square test as... “a statistical test commonly used to compare observed data...” (p. 1). The Chi-square statistical analysis method will be used to help determine if the expected frequencies were by chance or if the result of variance. A correlation of  $p < .05$  was considered significant.

### **Internal validity**

In 2008, Trochim explained that “internal validity is the approximate truth about inferences regarding cause-effect or causal relationships. Thus, internal validity is only

relevant in studies that try to establish a causal relationship” (p.1). Trochim (2008) went on to state, “All that internal validity means is that you have evidence that what you did in the study caused what you observed” (p. 1). In a study of correlations the application of a treatment does not apply to threats of internal validity. These threats, according to Yu and Ohlund (2010), are history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, statistical regression, selection of subjects, experimental mortality, selection-maturation, interaction, and the John Henry effect. The use of randomization did not occur in this study, which would create a threat to internal validity.

### **External Validity**

Trochim (2008) described external validity as “... the degree to which the conclusions in your study would hold for other persons in other places” (p. 1). Trochim (2008) went on to describe the procedures for drawing samples requires the sample to be representative of the general population. In this study, the use of a random sampling technique was determined not to be able to generate a large enough to sample to make generalizations back to the population. Each district that attempted to pass a school tax referendum in the past three years became the target of a purposive sample.

Trochim (2008) described the best way improve external validity would be to use random sampling while attempting to keep the dropout rates low. With this in mind, a second research questionnaire was sent out to superintendents 15 days later to improve the number of respondents. Another method to improve external validity according to (Trochim, 2008) is “...to do the study in a variety of places, with different people and at different times” (p. 3).

Superintendents from across the state of Missouri within a three year time frame were asked to participate in this study. Threats to the external validity of this study included temporal and population validity measures. Temporal issues are caused by the generalization of the study over time. This study was conducted over a short duration; external validity would be threatened by this factor. Population validity would be considered a threat due to the purposive sample and the small population of respondents.

### **Ethical Considerations**

According to Driscoll and Brizee (2010), researchers should have permission from the people who will be studied and nothing should be done to physically or emotionally harm those being studied. In this study, the respondents who were adults and considered to be leaders in their school districts were asked to respond to a survey sent by electronic mail to their school districts. The respondents were asked for their permission to participate in the survey before they respond to the electronic mail survey. There was no identifiable information with the survey that would link the survey with the respondent. The results of the surveys will be purposely made available to the respondents to be of assistance to the superintendents in future referendums. The purpose of this study was to benefit school districts in providing better educational programs for the students they serve.

### **Summary**

The research design and methodology were described in Chapter Three. The purpose of the research was to determine the effectiveness of factors and strategies surrounding school referendums. Fifty-six Likert scale statements about the effectiveness of strategies and factors were formulated from the studies of Holt et al. (2006) and

Johnson and Ingle (2008). The population and sample selection were chosen based upon superintendents in the state of Missouri who attempted to pass referendums from November 2009 through November 2011. The choice of a descriptive study was described and the survey design was presented. A description of the data analysis using the mode and Chi-square analysis were described along with an explanation of internal validity and external validity factors. An ethical consideration for human subject was explained to assure nothing was done physically or emotionally to harm those being studied.

In Chapter Four, data from superintendent responses were presented. Demographic data, success based upon month, even or odd year success, multiple issues on the ballot, responses to 56 Likert statements, and an open-ended question were analyzed. In Chapter Five, conclusions and recommendations for action and further study were shared.

## Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

### Introduction

Each year across the United States, school districts bring before the voters requests to help finance the school's needs (Bowers et al., 2010). School district leaders often find themselves in the dilemma of how to convince voters of the need for additional taxation, when resources could be better spent attempting to improve academic performance (Johnson & Ingle, 2008). In many scenarios, school leaders are relying on some of the same funding systems that have been in place for the last 50 years (Leary, 2007). In most cases it means, "Go to the voters for additional tax dollars, and if the ballot issue is voted down, cut out more programs, increase class size, or reduce capital expenditures" (Leary, 2007, p. 5). These issues indicate the need for school districts to focus their energy toward creating a culture conducive to passing the next school referendum.

The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine the perceived effectiveness between factors and strategies surrounding referendums and the passage of those measures meant to improve school funding and facilities. The type of research executed in this study was the survey design method. A survey was administered to superintendents in Missouri public schools who have attempted to pass bond issues, levy increases, Lease Certificates of Participation, or Proposition C waivers between the years of November 2009 and November 2011. The survey was created utilizing the factors and strategies identified by Johnson and Ingle (2008) and Holt et al. (2006).

The following research questions were applied throughout the study:

1. What do superintendents identify as strategies to use as prescriptive plans for successful school referendums?
2. What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to success of school referendums?
3. What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to failure of school referendums?

### **Organization of the Chapter**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a summary of the data collected. This chapter contains three parts. Part one is an overview of data collected from superintendents about the success or failure of the referendums, when the referendums were held, and whether there were multiple elections competing with the school referendum. Part two was divided into three sections that focus on successful strategies, factors that lead to success, and factors leading to failure, taken from the three research questions of this study. These sections contain a summary of data that measured superintendents' perceptions on a five-point Likert scale regarding strategies and factors that were perceived to be influential in their referendums. Part three contains a summary of data on strategies used and a text analysis on an open-ended question, "As you reflect on the referendum process, what you would do differently next time?"

**Demographic data.** Demographic data was gathered by comparing the demographics from the schools whose superintendents responded to the survey, to the state of Missouri's student demographics, utilizing the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website (MODESE, 2012). Surveys were sent out to 134 superintendents in Missouri, and 98 responded to the survey with a response

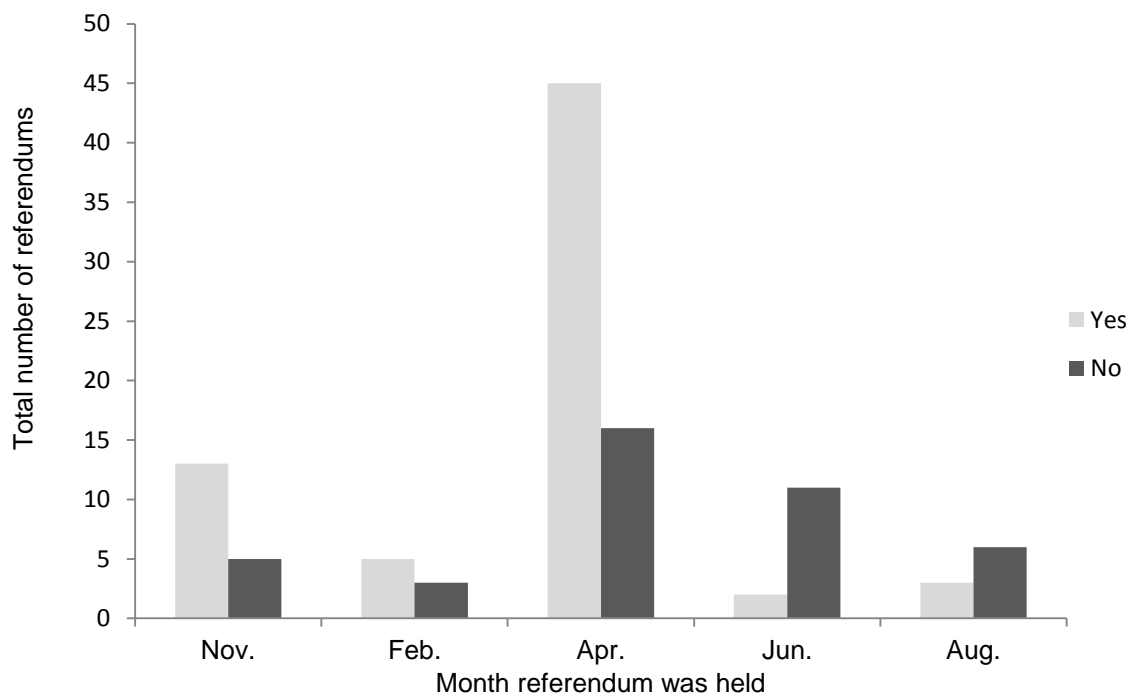
rate of 73%. Compared to the 522 total public school districts in Missouri, the survey sample was not representative of ethnicity by percentage of Missouri public schools. The ethnicity of the school districts of the respondents were: 88.5%, Caucasian; 4.9%, African American; 2.81%, Hispanic; 0.82%, Asian; and 0.54% Indian. Missouri public schools by ethnicity were: 74.70%, Caucasian; 17.10%, African American; 4.5%, Hispanic; 1.8%, Asian; and 0.5% Indian (MODESE, 2012).

Figure 1 is a summary of the data from superintendents' responses on whether the referendum passed and what month the referendum was presented to the voters. During the month of November, 13 schools passed referendums and five failed. In February, five school referendums passed and three failed. In April, 45 school referendums passed and sixteen failed. During June, two school referendums passed and 11 failed. In August, three school referendums passed and six failed.



Figure 1

*Month referendum passed or failed.*



*Figure 1.* Nov. = November grey passed and black failed; Feb. = February grey passed and black failed; Apr. = April grey pass and black failed; Jun =June grey passed and black failed; April grey passed and black failed. August grey passed and black failed.

Table 1 is a summary of the data from superintendents' responses on whether the referendum passed or failed and if the referendum was held during an even or odd year. In even years, 30 schools (68%) passed referendums and 14 failed. In odd years, 36 passed (67%) referendums and 17 failed.

Table 1

Referendum Attempted in Even or Odd Year

		Even (n)	% Passed	Odd (n)	% Passed
Out come	Yes	30	68%	36	67%
	No	14		17	

Number of referendums and percentage passed

*Note.* Even years typically have a higher number of elections, at times increasing voter turnout especially in November. According to Faltys (2006), voters tend to become confused when there are several issues going before voters, increasing the odds of no votes.

Table 2 is a summary of the data from superintendents' responses to the survey instrument on whether the referendum passed or failed and if there were more than one issue competing with the referendum. On single issue ballots, 25 schools (66%) passed and 13 failed referendums. On multiple issue ballots, 39 schools (85%) passed and 7 failed referendums.

Table 2

*Multiple Issues on Ballot*

		Single Issue (n)	% Passed	Multiple Issues (n)	% Passed
Out come	Yes	25	66%	39	85%
	No	13		7	

Number of referendums and percentage passed

*Note.* Multiple issues are often believed to lead to voters not truly understanding issues and thereby voting “no” more frequently. According to Faltys (2006), multiple issues on a ballot can be detrimental for school referendums.

**Measures of central tendency.** Superintendents were asked to respond to questions about how they viewed the influence of strategies and factors on the referendums they attempted to pass. The first 27 questions were structured with a positive Likert-type scale of: 1=No Positive Influence, 2= Very Little Positive Influence, 3=Some Positive Influence, 4= Strong Positive Influence, 5=Very Strong Positive Influence. From these responses statistical measures of mode and Chi-square were calculated. From the Chi-square analysis,  $p$  values were calculated using a  $p < .05$  level of significance.

Because some factors and strategies are considered negative in some elections and positive in others, a negative Likert-type scale was utilized in the second section with similar statements as in the first section. The final 29 Likert-type scale statements were structured with a negative scale of: 1=No Negative Influence, 2= Very Little Negative Influence, 3=Some Negative Influence, 4=Strong Negative Influence, 5=Very Strong

Negative Influence. From the superintendents' responses statistical measures of mode and  $p$  values from Chi-square calculations were analyzed.

The next section of this chapter was organized around the three research questions to be answered in this study. 1. What do superintendents identify as strategies to use as prescriptive plans for successful school referendums? 2. What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to success of school referendums? 3. What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to failure of school referendums?

To be considered a successful strategy or factor the following statistical measures were used: mode scores of four or higher on positive Likert scales, or two or lower on negative Likert scales. To be considered a factor that leads to failure, the following measures were used: mode scores of two or lower on positive Likert scales or four or higher on negative Likert scales. For these analyses, a Chi-square value was not reported. The  $p$  value level of significance of  $p < .05$  was considered to be statistically significant to measure what superintendents perceived as influential.

**Successful strategies.** The following strategies would be considered effective based upon the question, "What do superintendents identify as strategies to use as prescriptive plans for successful school referendums?" All successfully identified strategies (positive scale), had a mode score of at least (4) "Strong Positive Influence," and a  $p$  value of  $p < .05$ . All successfully identified strategies (negative scale), had a mode score of at least (2) "Very Little Negative Influence," and a  $p$  value of  $p < .05$ .

"Diverse citizen's committee ran campaign," (positive scale) yielded a respondents' mode score of (4), "Strong Positive Influence," and a  $p$  value of  $p=.032$ .

The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this strategy as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Influential people participated on the steering committee,” (positive scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (4), “Strong Positive Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.002$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicates that superintendents viewed this strategy as influential in referendum campaigns. “Influential people participated on the steering committee,” (negative scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (1), “No Negative Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.009$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this strategy as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Clear district vision,” (positive scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (4), “Strong Positive Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.003$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this strategy as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Campaign focused on the benefits to the children,” (positive scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (5), “Very Strong Positive Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.001$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this strategy as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Focus on getting “yes” voters to the polls,” (positive scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (4), “Strong Positive Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.000$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this strategy as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Sense of urgency was communicated,” (positive scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (4), “Strong Positive Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.001$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this strategy as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Focus on getting “yes” voters to the polls,” (negative scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (1), “No Negative Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.027$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this strategy as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Focus on the undecided vote,” (negative scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (1), “No Negative Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.027$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this strategy as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Staff participation in the referendum campaign,” (positive scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (4), “Strong Positive Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.000$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this strategy as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Utilization of campaign election data bases,” (positive scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (4), “Strong Positive Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.009$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this factor as influential in referendum campaigns.

**Factors leading to success.** The following strategies would be considered effective based upon the question, “What existing factors do superintendents identify that

lead to success of school referendums?” All successfully identified strategies will have a mode score of at least (4) Strong Positive Influence and a  $p$  value of  $p < .05$ .

“Board support was unanimous,” (positive scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (5), “Very Strong Positive Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.000$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this factor as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Board support was unanimous,” (negative scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (1), “No Negative Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.012$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this factor as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Senior citizens,” (negative scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (2), “Very Little Negative Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.000$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this factor as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Past failures,” (negative scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (1), “No Negative Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.009$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this as having no negative influence in referendum campaigns.

“Multiple issues on the ballot,” (negative scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (1), “No Negative Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.000$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this as having no negative influence in referendum campaigns

“Small voter turnout,” (negative scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (1), “No Negative Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.005$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this factor as influential in referendum campaigns.

“Voter trust in the superintendent and school board,” (positive scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (4), “Strong Positive Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.000$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this factor as influential in referendum campaigns.

Voter trust in the superintendent and school board,” (negative scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (1), “No Negative Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.001$ . The mode score and the significant  $p$  value score indicated that superintendents viewed this factor as influential in referendum campaigns.

**Factors leading to failure.** The following strategies would be considered detrimental based upon the question, “What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to failure of school referendums?” All detrimental factors will have a mode score of at least (2) Very Little Positive Influence. “Increased tax burden,” (positive scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (1), “No Positive Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=1.798$ . The low mode score indicated that superintendents viewed this factor as detrimental in referendum campaigns.

“Organized opposition” (positive scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (1), “No Positive Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=2.276$ . The low mode score indicated that superintendents viewed this factor as detrimental in referendum campaigns.



“Failure to get enough of the parent vote,” (positive scale) yielded a respondents’ mode score of (2), “Very Little Positive Influence,” and a  $p$  value of  $p=.618$ . The low mode score indicated that superintendents viewed this factor as detrimental in referendum campaigns.

Table 3 is a summary of the data from superintendents’ responses to the survey instrument on strategies used during referendum: 73.5% of the respondents said they used newspapers to pass their referendums, compared to 80% who failed used this strategy; 38.2% of the respondents said they used TV to pass their referendums, compared to 13.3% who failed used this strategy; 13.2% of respondents said they used radio to pass their referendums, compared to 30% who failed used this strategy; 52.9% of the respondents said they used yard signs to pass their referendums, compared to 66.7% who failed used this strategy; 44.1% of the respondents said they used slogans to pass their referendums, compared to 60% who failed used this strategy; 39.7% of the respondents said they used public speaking engagements to pass their referendums, compared 67% who failed used this strategy; 39.7% of the respondents said they used e-mail to pass their referendums, compared to 46.7% who failed used this strategy; 27.9% of the respondents said they used Facebook to pass their referendums, compared to 46.7% who failed used this strategy; 45.5% of the respondents said they used district websites to pass their referendums, compared to 46.6% who failed used this strategy; 70.5% of the respondents said they used community meeting to pass their referendums, compared to 63.3% who failed used this strategy.

Table 3

*Summary of Strategies Used and the Percentage of Successful and Unsuccessful Referendums*

Strategy	Successful (n) Using Strategy	% Passed	Unsuccessful (n) Using Strategy	% Failed
News Paper	50	73.5%	24	80.0%
TV	26	38.2%	4	13.3%
Radio	9	13.2%	9	30.0%
Yard Signs	36	52.9%	2	66.7%
Slogans	30	44.1%	18	60.0%
Public Speaking Engagements	46	67.6%	20	67.0%
E-mail	27	39.7%	14	46.7%
Face book	19	27.9%	14	46.7%
District Websites	31	45.5%	14	46.6%
Community Meetings	48	70.5%	19	63.3%

*Note.* Johnson and Ingle (2008) found districts that used more strategies were more likely to pass school referendums and also found that specific strategies increased the probability of passage.

**Open-ended question.** Forty nine superintendents responded to the question, “As you reflect on the referendum process, what would you do differently next time? Five general patterns of responses were observed. Twelve superintendents reported, “Satisfaction with the referendum, and no changes were recommended.” Three superintendents responded, “A reduction in length of the campaign would be optimal.” Two superintendents responded, “A desire to gauge support for the referendum before committing to an election.” Two superintendents responded, “Use more media and rely

less on public meetings.” Two superintendents responded, “Build a foundation for the referendum earlier.”

### **Summary**

In Missouri, 98 superintendents were surveyed to determine the answers to these research questions: 1. What do superintendents identify as strategies to use as prescriptive plans for successful school referendums? 2. What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to success of school referendums? 3. What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to failure of school referendums? To be considered a successful strategy or factor the following statistical measures were used: mode scores of four or higher on positive Likert scales, or two or lower on negative Likert scales. To be considered a factor that leads to failure, the following measures were used: mode scores of two or lower on positive Likert scales or four or higher on negative Likert scales. For these analyses, a Chi-square value was not reported. The  $p$  value level of significance of  $p < .05$  was considered to be statistically significant to measure what superintendents perceived as influential.

In Chapter Five, a summary of the finding was presented in relation to the three research questions. A comparative analysis was created utilizing the 56 Likert scale statements by calculating the mode, Chi-square and  $p$  value analysis. Limitations to the study were discussed, and conclusions drawn from the data. Each question was addressed with supporting data. Implications for practice and recommendations for further study were presented.

## Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

### Summary of the Findings

Many school districts are in need of a successful plan of action for school district referendums. The purpose of this descriptive study is to determine the perceived effectiveness between factors and strategies surrounding referendums and the passage of those measures meant to improve school funding and facilities. The findings from Johnson and Ingle (2008) and Holt et al., (2006) were used to guide this study. The following research questions were used as a framework throughout this study:

1. What do superintendents identify as strategies to use as prescriptive plans for successful school referendums?
2. What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to success of school referendums?
3. What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to failure of school referendums?

The population sample for this study was a purposive sample. School superintendents were chosen in the state of Missouri who attempted to pass bond issues, school levies, Proposition C waivers, and Lease Certificates of Participation from November 2009 through November 2011. Surveys were sent out using an electronic online survey tool. The first survey was sent out on March 19, 2012 that yielded 60 responses, a follow-up survey was sent out 15 days later. 38 additional responses were collected for a total of 98 respondents out of 134 possible survey participants. This represented a total return rate of 73%.

The data were divided into three parts. Part one, was an overview of data collected from superintendents about the success or failure of the referendums, when the referendums were held, and whether there were multiple elections held at the same time. Part two, was divided into three sections that focused on successful strategies, factors that lead to success, and factors leading to failure, taken from the three research questions of this study. These sections contained a summary of data that measured superintendents' perceptions on a five-point Likert scale regarding strategies and factors that were perceived to be influential in superintendents' referendums. Part three, contained a summary of data on strategies used and a text analysis on an open-ended question, "As you reflect on the referendum process, what would you do differently next time?"

Of the superintendents that responded to the survey, 68 reported their referendums passed, and 30 reported their referendums failed. When asked what month the referendum was held, the majority were held in April (n=61) and November (n=18). Months such as June and August that usually have single issue elections in Missouri, had a failure rate of 85% and 67%. This runs counter to the findings of Faltys (2006) that single issue elections are usually more successful when running referendums. Similarly, it was found that dates that had multiple elections (85%) passed at rate higher than those with single issues (66%), counter to the findings by Faltys (2006).

Section two, of the survey, was divided into three categories for data analysis that focused on successful strategies, factors that lead to success, and factors leading to failure, taken from the three research questions of this study. The mode and the *p* value from Chi-square analysis were used to determine what superintendents perceived as influential strategies and factors in their referendums.

In the first category (successful strategies) of section two, nine influential strategies based upon the mode and  $p$  value scores included: Diverse citizen's committee ran the campaign, influential people participated on the steering committee, clear district vision, campaign focused on the benefits to the children, sense of urgency was communicated, focus on getting "yes" voters to the polls, focus on the undecided vote, staff participation in the referendum campaign, and utilization of campaign election data bases.

The second category (factors that lead to success) in section two, influential factors based upon the mode and  $p$  value scores that lead to success included: Board support was unanimous, senior citizens, past failures, multiple issues on the ballot, small voter turnout, and voter trust in the superintendent and school board. In the last category (factors that lead to failure) in section two, factors based upon the mode and  $p$  value scores that lead to failure included: Increased tax burden, organized opposition, and failure to get enough of the parent vote were found to be factors that lead to failure.

In the third section of the survey, superintendents responded to what strategies were used in the election campaign. Districts that had failed referendums (see Table 3) actually used more strategies in the election campaign than did those that passed. Johnson and Ingle (2008) found that there was an increased likelihood of passage with an increase of strategies used. The data from this research did not correspond with the findings in the Johnson and Ingle (2008) study.

On the last question of the survey, superintendents were to respond to an open-ended question, "As you reflect on the referendum process, what would you do differently next time?" Since a majority (69%) of school districts passed referendums in

this survey, the most frequent response was a satisfaction with the way the referendum was conducted and superintendents recommended no changes. Three additional responses from superintendents focused on a reduced length of a campaign being optimal. Other responses were not of sufficient number to gain insight to conducting referendums differently.

### **Comparative Analysis**

The second section of the survey instrument was constructed with 56 Likert scale questions. Twenty-seven of these questions were on a positive Likert scale and 29 on a negative Likert scale. Each question was analyzed using the mode and the  $p$  value from Chi-square statistical analysis. The mode scores from superintendent responses were the primary determining factor on whether a strategy or factor was viewed as influential by the researcher.

Hall (2010) explained, “With Likert scale data, the best measure to use is the mode or most frequent response” (p. 1). The data from the Chi-square analysis were determined to be a second important analysis tool to ascertain whether a strategy or factor was influential by the researcher. McLaughlin (2010) explained that Chi-square tests are a common way to measure relationships in data. An analysis was conducted on the dependent variable, passage or failure of the referendum, to statements describing strategies or factor’s influence on the referendum, known as the independent variable.

To be considered a successful strategy or factor, the following statistical measures were used: mode scores of four or higher on positive Likert scales or two or lower on negative Likert scales. To be considered a factor that leads to failure, the following measures were used: mode scores of two or lower on positive Likert scales or four or

higher on negative Likert scales. For these analyses, a Chi-square value was not reported, the  $p$  value level of significance was  $p < .05$ .

The strategy that the respondents thought was most influential based upon the highest mode score on the positive scale was, "Campaign focused on the benefits to the children." The mode score was (5), and the  $p$  value score was  $p=.003$ . Two strategies appeared on both the positive and negative Likert scale. "Influential people participated on the steering committee," received a mode score of (4) on the positive scale and  $p$  value score of  $p=.002$ . On the negative scale, "Influential people participated on the steering committee," received a mode score of (1) and  $p$  value score of  $p=.009$ . "Focus on getting 'yes' votes," received a mode score of (4) on the positive scale and a  $p$  value score of  $p=.000$ . On the negative scale, "Focus on getting 'yes' votes, received a mode score of (1) and a  $p$  value score of  $p=.028$ . These three strategies could be viewed as very influential for superintendents to utilize as a campaign strategy.

The factor that the respondents thought was most influential based upon the highest mode score on the positive scale was, "Board support was unanimous." The mode score was (5), and the  $p$  value score was  $p=.000$ . "Voter trust in the superintendent and school board," represented an influential factor, according to the respondents, on both the positive and negative Likert scales. The mode score on the positive scale was (4) with a  $p$  value score of  $p=.000$ . The mode score on the negative scale was (1) with a  $p$  value score of  $p=.001$ . These factors could be viewed as very influential for superintendents to consider when contemplating committing to a school referendum.

Three factors were viewed as very detrimental to school referendums based upon the mode scores included: "Increased Tax Burden," "Organized Opposition," and



“Failure to get enough of the parent vote.” The first two received a mode score of (1), “No Positive Influence.” “Failure to get enough of the parent vote,” received a mode score of (2) “Very Little Positive Influence. “Superintendents should be cognizant of these factors when considering a referendum.

### **Limitations of the Findings**

The limitations of this study were related primarily to the design chosen by the researcher and the geographical area of the study.

1. The sample was a non-random, purposive sample, selecting superintendents who had recent attempts to pass referendums.
2. The location of the survey was the state of Missouri.
3. The lapse of time between the referendum and survey participation.
4. The population was limited to superintendents.
5. The survey instrument was created by the researcher.
6. The online survey was limited to those who chose to complete the survey.
7. The researcher relied on all respondents to answer all questions thoughtfully and honestly.

### **Conclusions**

A number of conclusions regarding the strategies and factors influencing public schools can be drawn based on the data presented in Chapter Four. These conclusions were obtained by studying the Likert statements with a significant mode score of four on a positive scale, and a two on the negative scale, and the  $p$  value from the Chi-square analysis of  $p < .05$ . The conclusions are presented in reference to the three original research questions.

**Research question one.** What do superintendents identify as strategies to use as prescriptive plans for successful school referendums?

A series of strategies were identified as influential by those respondents that took part in this survey. “Campaign focused on the benefits to the children,” had the highest mode score (5) “Very Strong Positive Influence,” on the positive Likert scale and a  $p$  value score of  $p=.001$ . School leaders should make sure that all election materials focus on the benefits to the children and elections that emphasize class-size and student safety are themes that generate positive reactions from voters (Crampton & Thompson, 2008; Holt, 2002; Leary, 2007; Theobald & Meyer, 2005).

“Focus on getting ‘yes’ voters’ to the polls,” appeared on the positive and negative Likert scale as being influential, according to the superintendents responding to the survey. On the positive Likert scale, the mode score was (4) “Strong Positive Influence,” with a  $p$  value score of  $p=.000$ , and the negative Likert scale had a mode score of (1) “No Negative Influence,” with a  $p$  value score of  $p=.028$ . The school’s referendum campaign should have every activity painstakingly planned and mapped toward getting the yes voters to the polls (Nagardeolekar & Merritt, 2006).

“Influential people participated on the steering committee,” appeared on the positive and negative Likert scale as being influential according to the superintendents responding to the survey. On the positive Likert scale, the mode score was (4) “Strong Positive Influence,” with a  $p$  value score of  $p=.032$ , and the negative Likert scale had a mode score of (1) “No Negative Influence,” with a  $p$  value score of  $p=.009$ . The steering committee should consist of as many trusted and supportive community leaders as possible (Holt et al., 2006; Vogel, 2006).

“Diverse citizen’s committee ran campaign,” appeared on the positive Likert scale as being influential according to the respondents. The mode score was a (4) “Strong Positive Influence,” with a  $p$  value score of  $p=.032$ . A citizens committee should consist of business leaders, parents, senior citizens, members of the Chamber of Commerce, realtors, and the ministerial alliance (Vogel, 2006).

“Clear district vision,” was influential according to the respondents and the significance level of the data analysis. The mode score was a (4) “Strong Positive Influence,” and the  $p$  value score of  $p=.003$ . The district vision should identify needs, priorities, implementation steps, provide clarity, and spark motivation (Carey, 2007; Dolph, 2006; Leary, 2007).

“Sense of urgency was communicated,” was influential according to the respondents and the significance level of the data analysis. The mode score was a (4) “Strong Positive Influence,” and the  $p$  value score of  $p=.001$ . Districts that can help voters recognize the importance of acting immediately; helps create an atmosphere for voting success (Leary, 2007).

“Focus on the undecided vote,” was influential according to the respondents and the significance level of the data analysis. The mode score was a (1) “No Negative Influence,” and the  $p$  value score of  $p=.030$ . Focus on the undecided vote can be the difference in election success (Holt et al., 2006).

“Staff participation in the referendum campaign,” was influential according to the respondents and the significance level of the data analysis. The mode score was a (4) “Strong Positive Influence,” and the  $p$  value score of  $p=.000$ . Enlisting teachers in the bond campaign is a fundamental strategy in bond election success (Hickey, 2007).

“Utilization of campaign election data bases,” was influential according to the respondents and the significance level of the data analysis. The mode score was a (4) “Strong Positive Influence,” and the  $p$  value score of  $p=.009$ . The use of election data bases will aid school districts with the identification of supporters, opponents, and those who are undecided that need persuasion (Fairbank, 2006).

**Research question two.** What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to success of school referendums?

A series of factors were identified as influential of those respondents that took part in this survey. “Board support was unanimous,” had the highest mode score (5) “Very Strong Positive Influence,” on the positive Likert scale and a  $p$  value score of  $p=.000$ . Before school leaders can consider bringing a referendum before the voters, unanimous support from the board is a must (Holt et al., 2006).

“Voter trust in the superintendent and school board,” appeared on the positive and negative Likert scale as being influential according to the superintendents responding to the survey. On the positive Likert scale, the mode score was (4) “Strong Positive Influence,” with a  $p$  value score of  $p=.000$ , and the negative Likert scale had a mode score of (1) “No Negative Influence,” with a  $p$  value score of  $p=.001$ . Referendums fail each year because school districts do not fully recognize the link between trust and the referendum’s success (Leary, 2007).

“Senior citizens,” were influential according to the respondents and the significance level of the data analysis. On the negative Likert scale, the mode score was (2) “Very Little Negative Influence,” with a  $p$  value score of  $p=.000$ . Concern with the

senior vote is unfounded and that elderly residents tend to align themselves with younger households when they have grandchildren in school (Fletcher & Kenny, 2008).

“Multiple Issues on the ballot,” was influential according to the respondents and significance level of the data analysis. On the negative Likert scale, the mode score was (1) “No Negative Influence,” with a  $p$  value score of  $p=.000$ . Multiple issues on a ballot is often detrimental to school referendums (Faltys, 2006). The mode score and the  $p$  value scores from this study was counter to the findings by Faltys (2006). The rate of passage for schools in this study was 85% for those with multiple issues on the ballot compared to 66% with single issues.

“Small voter turnout,” was influential according to the respondents and significance level of the data analysis. On the negative Likert scale, the mode score was (1) “No Negative Influence,” with a  $p$  value score of  $p=.005$ . Large voter turnout can be a critical factor in election success (Holt, 2002). The results from this study indicate a small voter turnout had no negative influence.

**Research question three.** What existing factors do superintendents identify that lead to failure of school referendums?

Three factors were viewed as detrimental based upon the mode scores of respondents of this study. None of the factors met the significant  $p$  value of  $p < .05$ . “Increased tax burden,” was viewed as significant based upon the mode score (1) “No Positive Influence,” on the positive Likert scale. School leaders should consider carefully the percentage of tax increase (Holt, 2002).

“Organized opposition,” was viewed as significant based upon the mode score (1) “No Positive Influence,” on the positive Likert scale. Organized opposition is always a negative influence when attempting to increase taxes (Bock, 2008).

“Failure to get enough of the parent vote,” was viewed as significant based upon the mode score (1) “No Positive Influence,” on the positive Likert scale.

### **Implications for Practice**

To create a successful referendum, school leaders must be aware of the factors and strategies that can influence their next referendum (Holt, 2002). Cullen (2008) stated it best when he said, “A referendum campaign is not a thing or event. It must be an ongoing, daily process in your district” (p. 1). The complicated nature of asking people to open their pocketbooks and say yes to a school tax increase is a science and an art (Cullen, 2008).

Many of the issues of convincing voters to support referendums begin with a “Clear district vision.” Clemons et al. (2010) suggested that the district’s five-year master plan create that vision. The creation of this plan involves input from a variety of demographic groups, like parents, senior citizens, and staff, which helps solidify support for the plan (Clemons et al., 2010). The community support and communication of this plan can enhance trust in the superintendent and the school board which was identified as very influential by superintendents in this study. Lafee (2009) suggested administrators need to become transparent with their motives and the commitment to the vision will lend itself to support.

One of the negative factors detrimental to referendums identified in this study was, “Failure to get enough of the parent vote.” Getting input from parents on the five-

year master plan and asking their feedback through surveys can ensure that their ideas are considered in developing the vision for the school (O'Brien, 2008). Other groups that would be represented in creating the visionary plan would be senior citizens and staff. District leaders will need to convince voters without children to support school spending (Cellini et al., 2008; Fletcher & Kenney, 2008; Hickey, 2007; Holt, 2002; Johnson & Ingle, 2008; O'Brien, 2008; Powers, 2005; "10 Steps," 2010). Staff members have a strong network of influence and when they are kept informed they are more likely to be supportive (Clemons et al., 2010). Many of these steps in creating a "Clear district vision" go a long way toward answering the first question of this study, "What do superintendents identify as strategies to use as prescriptive plans for successful school referendums?"

Before a referendum can be undertaken, school leaders must be sure that "Board support is unanimous." Dissention among the board can be disastrous for school districts when attempting to pass a referendum (Nagardeolekar & Merritt, 2006). Also, districts that have a history of making decisions based upon what is best for the children and can demonstrate a sense of urgency can ensure that a referendum has a solid foundation before the referendum is initiated. Holt (2002) maintained that the referendum campaign should emphasize the needs of the children. Johnson and Ingle (2008) found that school districts were more successful in referendum campaigns if they focused on this strategy.

The strategies that a district employs in the referendum campaign can have a profound influence on the voting outcome. Having a "Diverse citizen's committee" was believed to be influential based upon superintendents' responses. This task force should have the latitude to make recommendations, present findings to the community, and

communicate the message to garner community support (Janovich, 2010). “Influential people participated on the steering committee,” would also be an important strategy based upon the respondents in this study. This committee should also be sure to take advantage of election data bases to identify the supportive *yes* vote.

School leaders should do everything in their power to minimize the impact of the tax increase to voters (Holt, 2002). Last, school leaders should do whatever necessary to limit “organized opposition.” Leaders should be very cognizant of detrimental factors in their communities and be proactive in attempting to reduce their impact (Faltys, 2006).

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

1. A longitudinal study. The economic conditions in Missouri from November 2009 through November 2011 would be best characterized as a recession. The economic conditions in this snapshot of time could have been influenced by the economy. To better ensure that results could be generalized over time, a longitudinal study would be best.
2. Surveys should be sent out within two weeks of the referendum. To ensure the most accurate recollection of the strategies utilized and the factors influencing the outcome the referendums, surveys should be sent out within a few weeks post referendum.
3. A mix of quantitative and qualitative study methods could be conducted. Simple survey instruments limit honest discourse and qualitative studies allow the expansion responses away from compartmentalized answers.
4. Surveys could be sent out to groups including senior citizens, parents, staff, and business leaders. Superintendents are the most knowledgeable people



about the referendum details, but biases can exist and the perspective can be limited. The utilization of a cross-section of demographic groups could yield additional critical information.

5. Survey instrument. A Likert scale instrument has multiple options for response. A more simplistic instrument of “yes” the strategy was influential, or “no” it was of no influence would avoid confusion in responses.

### **Summary**

The need for school districts to be successful in future referendums will continue to be a priority. There is reason to believe that school district leaders can be focused on influential strategies and factors that will lead to the next successful election. This descriptive study revealed that there are nine strategies that can become part of the prescriptive plan for future elections. District leaders must be cognizant of factors that can influence the outcome of the next vote and be proactive in taking steps to reduce likelihood that negative factors could sabotage future elections.

## Appendix A

### Survey Instrument

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 1. Did your last school referendum pass? (Select one)                             | Yes No   |
| 2. What month was it held? (Select one). November, February, June, April, August. |          |
| 3. Was the referendum during an even or odd year? (Select one).                   | Even Odd |
| 4. Were there any other issues being voted on? (non- school related)              | Yes No   |

### Superintendents, please select the response that best represents your experience with your last school referendum.

### Rate the following statements 1-5, 1=No Positive Influence 2=Very Little Positive Influence 3= Some Positive Influence 4=Strong Positive Influence 5=Very Strong Positive Influence NA Not Applicable.

- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
| 1. Voter trust in the superintendent and school board.        | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 2. Campaign focused on the benefits to the children.          | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 3. Staff participation in the formulation of the referendum.  | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 4. Staff participation in the referendum process.             | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 5. Administration and board of education kept a low profile.  | 1 2 3 4 5 NA |
| 6. Diverse citizen's committee ran campaign.                  | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 7. Community surveys gauged support.                          | 1 2 3 4 5 NA |
| 8. Influential people participated on the steering committee. | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 9. Senior citizens participated on the steering committee.    | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 10. Media's involvement in the campaign.                      | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 11. Utilization of architects and consultants.                | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 12. Designs kept simple and utilizing existing capital funds. | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 13. Board support was unanimous.                              | 1 2 3 4 5 NA |
| 14. Focus on getting "yes" voters to the polls.               | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 15. Focus on the undecided vote.                              | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 16. Campaign sought to reach all voters.                      | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 17. Utilization of campaign election data bases.              | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 18. Sense of urgency was communicated.                        | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 19. Consequences were defined if referendum failed.           | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 20. Increased tax burden.                                     | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 21. Organized opposition.                                     | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 22. Failure to get enough of the parent vote                  | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 23. Brief campaign.   | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 24. Senior citizens.  | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 25. The state of the economy.                                 | 1 2 3 4 5    |
| 26. Past failures.  | 1 2 3 4 5 NA |
| 27. Clear district vision.                                    | 1 2 3 4 5    |

**Rate the following statements 1-5, 1=No Negative Influence 2=Very Little Negative Influence 3= Some Negative Influence 4=Strong Negative Influence 5=Very Strong Negative Influence NA Not Applicable.**

28. Voter trust in the superintendent and school board.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Campaign focused on the benefits to the children.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Staff participation in the referendum process.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Staff participation in the referendum campaign.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Administration and board of education kept a low profile.	1	2	3	4	5 NA
33. Diverse citizen's committee ran campaign.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Community surveys gauged support.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Influential people participated on the steering committee.	1	2	3	4	5
36. Senior citizens participated on the steering committee.	1	2	3	4	5
37. Media's involvement in the campaign.	1	2	3	4	5
38. Utilization of architects and consultant.	1	2	3	4	5
39. Designs kept simple and utilizing existing capital funds.	1	2	3	4	5
40. Board support was unanimous.	1	2	3	4	5
41. Focus on getting "yes" voters to the polls.	1	2	3	4	5
42. Focus on the undecided vote.	1	2	3	4	5
43. Campaign sought to reach all voters.	1	2	3	4	5
44. Utilization of campaign election data bases.	1	2	3	4	5
45. Sense of urgency was communicated.	1	2	3	4	5
46. Consequences were defined if referendum failed.	1	2	3	4	5
47. Increased tax burden.	1	2	3	4	5
48. Organized opposition.	1	2	3	4	5
49. Senior citizens.	1	2	3	4	5
50. The state of the economy.	1	2	3	4	5
51. Past failures.	1	2	3	4	5 NA
52. Failure to get enough of the parent vote.	1	2	3	4	5
53. Unclear campaign messages.	1	2	3	4	5
54. Multiple issues on the ballot.	1	2	3	4	5 NA
55. A large voter turnout.	1	2	3	4	5 NA
56. A small voter turnout.	1	2	3	4	5

**Strategies Used**

57. Which strategies were used on the referendum? Check each that applies.  
 Newspaper\_\_ TV\_\_ Radio\_\_ Yard signs \_\_Slogans \_\_Public speaking  
 engagements \_\_ e-mail \_\_Face book \_\_District websites\_\_ Community  
 meetings\_\_
58. Short answer. As you reflect on the referendum process, what would you do differently next time?

## Appendix B

### Lindenwood University

#### School of Education

209 S. Kings highway

St. Charles, Missouri 63301

#### Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

#### “Strategies and Factors Influencing Public School Referendums”

Principal Investigator: Alan Stauffacher

Telephone: 660-xxx-xxxx, E-mail: alan.stauffacher@xxx

Participant\_\_\_\_\_

Contact information\_\_\_\_\_

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Alan Stauffacher under the guidance of Dr. Kathy Grover. The purpose of this research is to find a prescriptive plan to assist school districts in passing referendums.
2. a) Your participation will involve responding to a short electronic survey.  
b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be 5-10 minutes.  
  
Approximately 144 school districts will be involved in this research.
3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.
4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about strategies used to pass school referendums.
5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
6. Every effort will be made to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study

and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location. You may make a copy of this consent form for your records.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, would like a copy of the results, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Alan Stauffacher (660-xxx-xxxx) or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Kathy Grover (417-xxx-xxxx). You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs, at 636-949-4846.

By completing the survey, you consent to participate in this study.

Thank you for your time,

Alan N. Stauffacher

Date: March 19, 2012

## Appendix C

March, 19, 2012

Dear Superintendent,

I am writing to request your participation in my doctoral dissertation research project at Lindenwood University. I believe the information gathered through this study will positively contribute to the body of knowledge in the identification of strategies and factors influencing public school referendums.

The purpose of the study is to help schools obtain a prescriptive plan to passing school referendums.

Attached is an electronic survey. Your participation in this research study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity are assured.

If you have questions, you can reach me at 660-xxx-xxxx or by electronic mail at alan.stauffacher@xxx. Dr. Kathy Grover, my dissertation advisor for this research project, may be contacted by electronic mail at groverk@xxx or by phone at 417-xxx-xxxx.

**By completing this survey, you consent to participate in this study.**

Thank you for your time,

Alan Stauffacher

Doctoral Candidate

Lindenwood University

## Appendix D

April 3, 2012

Dear Superintendent,

This is a follow-up e-mail to the one I sent on March 19, 2012. I am writing to request your participation in my doctoral dissertation research project at Lindenwood University. I believe the information gathered through this study will positively contribute to the body of knowledge in the identification of strategies and factors influencing public school referendums.

The purpose of the study is to help schools obtain a prescriptive plan to passing school referendums.

Attached is an electronic document survey. Your participation in this research study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity are assured.

If you have questions, you can reach me at 660-xxx-xxxx or by electronic mail at alan.stauffacher@xxx. Dr. Kathy Grover, my dissertation advisor for this research project, may be contacted by electronic mail at groverk@xxx or by phone at 417-xxx-xxxx.

**By completing this survey, you consent to participate in this study.**

Thank you for your time,

Alan Stauffacher

Doctoral Candidate

Lindenwood University

**Appendix E**

&lt;Telephone Script&gt;

Bonding Agents

August 22, 2011

Hello, my name is Alan Stauffacher, and I am a Doctoral student at Lindenwood University. I am currently working on my dissertation, A Study of *Strategies Used in School Referendums*. I was hoping <company name> would be able to assist me in obtaining a list of schools who have utilized your services over the past three years. If possible, I would like to obtain a list of those districts regardless of their success in their referendum election. Thank you for your time and assistance in this important study.

Sincerely,

Alan Stauffacher

Doctoral Candidate

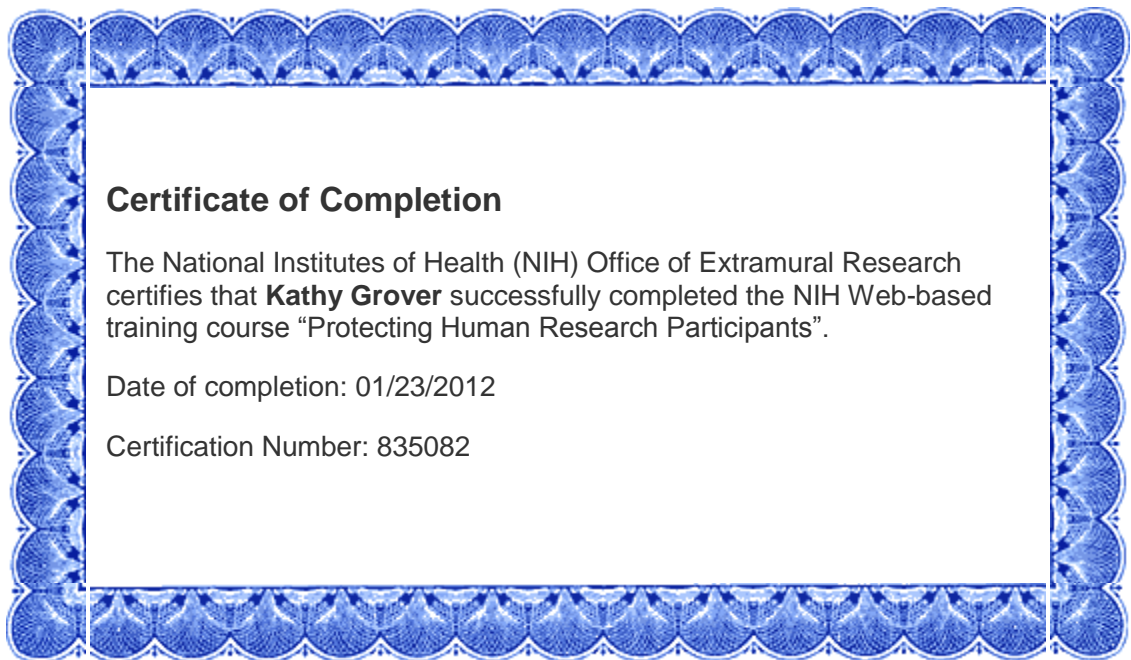
Lindenwood University



## Appendix F



## Appendix G



## Appendix H

### Lindenwold University Institutional Review Board Disposition Report

**To: Alan N. Stauffacher**

**CC: Dr. Kathy Grover; Dr. Sherry DeVore; Dr. Terry Reid**

**IRB Project Number 12-63**

**Title: *Strategies and Factors Influencing Public School Referendums***

The IRB has reviewed your application for research, and it has been approved.

*Thank you.*

***Dana Klar***

Dana Klar

Institutional Review Board Chair

Date: 3/09/12

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### **Vita**

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Academic studies have resulted in an Education Specialist Degree from Missouri State University, a Master of Education Degree in Educational Administration from Missouri State University, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Drury University.

