



Augusta Area School District's Capital Referenda

DESIGNED BY CESA 10

Research

The Augusta Area School District serves 625 students in grades PK-12 in West Central Wisconsin. The District had a long list of critical maintenance projects that its budget couldn't handle. However, with 15.4% of the population living in poverty, it wasn't sure the community would support a referendum. The District set a goal to identify and prioritize facility needs based on community perception.

The objectives to achieve this goal included:

- » Creating a list of **proposed facility improvement projects** and estimated costs
- » **Designing a layout** of how each addition would fit into the District's footprint
- » Disseminating a **community survey** to prioritize projects
- » Releasing **informational videos** on each identified need
- » Analyzing the **survey results** to determine the next steps
- » Publishing the **findings** on the District's website and social media channels

The District's research-gathering methods paid off. The informational videos were viewed over 3,000 times, and the survey received a 32% response rate, with 77% of respondents indicating the District should pursue a referendum. The day after the survey went out, the District got a phone call from a resident pledging to **donate \$2.5 million** toward construction costs. With the high community support and generous donation, the District decided to plan for a November 2022 referendum.



Planning

The District put two questions on the ballot, one for \$10.5 million to address capital improvements and maintenance repairs and another for \$4.5 million to build a new gymnasium. The District knew its audience included the 1,500 people who lived in the City of Augusta and all or part of the seven surrounding townships. Word of mouth was important in this rural community, so its strategy was to reach the highest volume of voters in the most cost-effective manner.

Tactics to achieve this included:

- » Cultivating a **comprehensive mailing list** of all registered voters
- » Recruiting community members to form a **YES group** and aid in communication efforts
- » Creating a **communication calendar** using various delivery channels
- » Contacting community groups to speak at **in-person events**

The District was successful in its planning efforts. Administrative staff worked with county officials to obtain poll lists from previous elections, and the District Administrator spoke at the Augusta Legion, Fire Department, and Senior Center. Local citizens formed a YES group, and **100 yard signs** were proudly displayed around town. The District budgeted \$5,000 for all referendum campaign marketing materials.



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Implementation

A **mood board** was created early in the campaign outlining school-branded colors, fonts, and architectural renderings. A unique **referendum logo** was designed and included in all marketing materials. A mix of print and digital communication methods was created to align with the District's strategy. The District knew **social media posts** and **videos** resonated with parents and younger voters, while the baby boomer generation appreciated direct mail **newsletters** and **postcards**. The newspaper printed **op-ed articles** and **advertisements**, and a local television station **interviewed** the District Administrator on referendum details. **Business flyers** were printed and hung in area establishments, **backpack flyers** were sent home with students, and **foam core signage** was displayed at both schools' entrances.

The District relied on its **communication calendar** for disseminating the materials, and all marketing collateral included a **website** residents could visit to learn more. The website was updated often and contained answers to **frequently asked questions** and a tax impact calculator. Following the election, a **banner** thanking voters for their support was placed on the website.



Evaluation

The referendum was a success! Both questions passed with more than a 62% approval rating. The District achieved its goal of presenting referendum questions that fit the community's wants and budget. Survey results indicated strong community engagement, and forming a YES group and speaking at various community events furthered that resolve. A mix of print and digital tactics satisfied the District's strategy to cost-effectively reach the highest volume of voters. The projects were recently bid out, with **construction** slated to start on June 1, 2023. The District plans to keep the community abreast of its progress through monthly construction updates on its website and social media channels.

