



Wausau School District

**FACILITIES SURVEY REPORT
October 2021**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Last April, voters in the Wausau School District were presented with two referendum questions. The first question was to provide appropriate staffing levels and support the behavioral, physical, social, emotional, and mental health of students. The second question was to address important facility needs.

While voters approved the first question, the second question was not approved.

The Board of Education requested that a survey be conducted as it works to find a solution to the district's facility needs that voters can support. The survey was organized and administered by the Donovan Group. The survey was anonymous, took about 15 minutes to complete, and was available from September 27 to October 15, 2021.

Information from the survey will be used by district leaders and the School Board to evaluate solutions that meet the district's needs, are financially responsible, and move the district community forward. For a survey of this kind, the more survey responses the better. However, there are a sufficient number of responses in this survey to assist the board in its efforts. Moreover, we found a high level of clarity and consistency in terms of the preferences expressed by participants. To that end, we do not believe that additional responses would have significantly changed the survey's results.

This report provides a summary of survey responses, along with analysis from the Donovan Group team.

PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

The survey was administered using the Donovan Group's survey engine. Efforts were made to ensure that all eligible respondents had the opportunity to take the survey, but that no respondents took it multiple times. In accordance with best practices in online research and to protect the security of the survey, internet protocol (IP) addresses were logged and each response was time-stamped.

While we do not detail our survey security protocols, if we have reason to believe that anyone has taken the survey more than once or that there is any fraud, those responses are removed.

To encourage residents to take the survey, the school district distributed a postcard to all district residents and used its various communication tools to increase participation.

Finally, it is worth noting that, by design, this data is not based on a scientific sample. Therefore, it should be treated as qualitative data that is similar to data from a large number of focus groups. Because we used a convenience sample, it would be methodologically inappropriate to carry out a regression analysis or attempt to calculate error. Our response pool to date is a solid one that provides sound data to the board.

SURVEY RESULTS

A total of 2,544 community members completed the survey, including three completed in Spanish. There were no completed responses to the Hmong version of the survey. To complete the survey, respondents must have clicked "submit" at the end of the survey and answered all of the required questions.

Below are the questions and their corresponding responses. The first set of data (in black) reflect the responses of all completed surveys. The second set of data (in blue) indicate responses from a comparison group of district residents who are not current parents of preschool or school-aged students, employees or students. The comparison group does include parents of former district students.

We typically find the comparison group to be a more accurate representation of the voting population. There were 701 completed results in the comparison group. This is an adequate comparison group, representing about 28% of the total respondents. The responses of this comparison group differed from the overall response pool for some questions, as noted in the analysis of those questions.

Below each question and results is some brief analysis from the Donovan Group team.

1) What is your age?*

18 or under	0.71%	0.43%
19–25	1.81%	2.57%
26–34	9.79%	1.57%
35–44	32.82%	4.71%
45–54	25.90%	12.70%
55–64	14.19%	28.96%
65 or over	14.78%	49.07%

Analysis: Generally, we find that those who are 65 and older tend to be under-represented in school district surveys. We are pleased that the respondent pool included about 15% of older residents. It is also typical for the comparison group to skew older than the larger group of respondents, which is the case here. Overall, the survey received a healthy balance of respondents across age groups, although we would have liked to have had more participation in the comparison group from those 44 and younger.

2) Where do you reside?*

City of Wausau	55.94%	63.48%
Town of Rib Mountain	16.23%	17.97%
Village of Maine	5.07%	4.42%
Town of Stettin	5.82%	3.85%
Town of Wausau	3.54%	2.14%
Town of Texas	3.54%	4.56%
Town of Berlin	1.81%	1.57%
Town of Hewitt	1.10%	0.57%
Other	6.96%	1.43%

Analysis: It is our understanding that this distribution largely mirrors the population of the district and therefore represents a good respondent pool. Note that the comparison group skewed nearly 8 percentage points more toward the city of Wausau. It is not clear why this was the case.

3) How long have you lived in the school district?*

Fewer than 2 years	4.80%	2.71%
Between 2 and 5 years	8.61%	3.00%
Between 5 and 10 years	11.79%	5.14%
Between 10 and 20 years	21.82%	10.13%
Between 20 and 30 years	15.84%	17.69%
More than 30 years	31.37%	61.34%
I do not live in the district	5.78%	0.00%

Analysis: We often find that newer residents and those who have lived for a long time in the school

district tend to differ significantly in their perceptions and opinions. While we would have liked to see a few more responses from those who have lived in the district for fewer than 10 years, this pool provides us with a solid representation of the overall district community.

4) Please check all of the following that apply to you.*

I have school-aged children (ages 4+)	44.65%	0.00%
I have preschool-aged children (ages 0-3)	8.29%	0.00%
I have children who currently attend a Wausau School District school	49.69%	0.00%
I have children who graduated from or previously attended a Wausau School District school	34.91%	65.05%
I have grandchildren who currently attend or have attended a Wausau School District school	9.79%	26.68%
I have attended a Wausau School District school	31.76%	32.67%
I am a community member who has never had children attending a Wausau School District school	7.39%	17.83%
I am currently a student at a Wausau School District school	0.51%	0.00%
I am currently employed by the Wausau School District	20.24%	0.00%
Other	2.99%	8.84%

Analysis: *No surprises here. The response pool is meaningfully diverse in terms of participants' connections to the school district. Note that nearly 65 percent of the comparison group have a child who graduated from or previously attended a Wausau School District school and almost 33 percent attended a Wausau School District school.*

5) If you have school-aged children, which schools do your children currently attend? (Select all that apply. If you do not have school-aged children, you may skip this question.)

Wausau East High School	15.67%
Wausau West High School	22.80%
Horace Mann Middle School	14.08%
John Muir Middle School	18.13%
Franklin Elementary School	3.26%
Grant Elementary School	2.38%
Hawthorn Hills Elementary School	2.55%
Hewitt-Texas Elementary School	2.99%
G.D. Jones Elementary School	3.17%
Lincoln Elementary School	1.58%
Maine Elementary School	4.93%
John Marshall Elementary School	3.79%
Rib Mountain Elementary School	5.19%
Riverview Elementary School	9.42%
South Mountain Elementary School	5.63%
Stettin Elementary School	9.51%
Thomas Jefferson Elementary School	3.87%
Wausau Area Virtual Education (WAVE)	1.76%
Enrich, Excel, Achieve (EEA) Learning Academy Charter (Grades 6-12)	0.35%
Wausau Area Montessori Charter School (Grades K-6)	3.43%
4K and Early Childhood	4.40%
Public school outside of the District	2.02%

Private school	4.40%
I do not have school-aged children	0.00%
My children are homeschooled	0.79%
Other	2.29%

Analysis: *It is our understanding that the response pool roughly reflects the district's current enrollment numbers. Ideally, we would like to see a few more responses from community members whose children are homeschooled, enrolled in another public or private school district, or do not have school-aged children.*

6) Where do you get information about the Wausau School District? (Select all that apply.)

Parent organizations	17.73%	7.28%
Friends or neighbors	37.58%	42.80%
My children and their friends	30.23%	15.55%
District mailings	48.78%	47.08%
District website	52.67%	34.81%
School newsletters (email)	54.83%	7.70%
District newsletters (email)	42.18%	13.41%
School board meetings	36.79%	27.67%
Teachers and staff	47.92%	32.95%
Wausau Daily Herald (online or hard copy)	25.00%	41.23%
Wausau Pilot & Review (online)	40.45%	54.35%
Local blogs	3.42%	4.14%
Local television	37.74%	63.48%
Local radio	16.23%	27.82%
Facebook	34.04%	29.67%
Twitter	1.81%	1.57%
Other	2.12%	3.14%

Analysis: *Typically, we find that district mailings, district/school emails, and social media can be overrepresented for this question, as respondents likely learned about the survey through those channels. These responses are in line with what we would usually see in a survey like this. There also appears to be strong word of mouth amongst friends and neighbors and teachers and staff.*

Most comparison groups naturally get district-related information from sources not directly connected to a school district. Interestingly, the comparison group has higher percentages than overall respondents for the Wausau Pilot & Review (online) and local television. Also noteworthy is that nearly 30 percent of the comparison group gets their information from Facebook. This number may be artificially high, as the district used social media to increase awareness of the survey.

7) I am satisfied with the Wausau School District.

Strongly agree	9.22%	6.72%
Agree	52.26%	42.78%
Disagree	22.06%	27.90%
Strongly disagree	9.93%	13.88%
No opinion	6.54%	8.73%

Analysis: *Not surprisingly, there is stronger satisfaction with the Wausau School District among all*

survey respondents versus the comparison group. That is typically the case, although the 12 percent difference may be in part due to the turbulence related to COVID-19.

8) On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely would you be to recommend the Wausau School District to a friend, colleague or family member? (A score of zero indicates you would not recommend the district, while a score of 10 indicates you would be extremely likely to recommend the district.)

0	4.38%	5.32%
1	2.92%	4.02%
2	3.27%	4.17%
3	4.81%	6.75%
4	5.17%	5.60%
5	15.11%	19.68%
6	9.11%	7.18%
7	13.85%	12.50%
8	21.10%	15.95%
9	9.86%	8.62%
10	10.41%	10.20%

Analysis: We often look at scores in the 7-10 range on this question as being a good measure of what respondents think about their school district. Based on that, having 54 percent of parents with school-aged children and 47 percent of the comparison group rating the Wausau School District in that range is a decent response.

These numbers also point to an opportunity for the district to continue communicating the benefits of the Wausau School District.

9) How would you describe the Wausau School District to someone who is not familiar with it?

Summary: More than 1,430 responses were provided. Respondents used this open-ended question to leave a wide variety of responses regarding the school district, with very few of the responses actually related to facility needs. In examining the responses, we found that they tended to fall into several overall categories:

- Different educational experiences depending on where you live and attend school.
- Concerns about the political divide impacting the district, including the Board of Education.
- Questions about focus on athletics at the expense of academics and other extracurriculars.

Below is a sampling of each of these common themes. (Responses have not been edited.)

- WSD tries to do what is right.
- WSD provides a high quality education.
- WSD is very welcoming and truly has the interests of students as their No. 1 priority.
- WSD needs work/improvement and needs to be transparent.

10) How familiar are you with the school district's facility needs and the process the Board is using to find solutions?

I am very well informed of the needs and process	26.14%	23.40%
I have some familiarity with the needs and process	59.43%	66.62%
I have no knowledge of the needs and process	14.43%	9.99%

Analysis: This is a well-informed respondent pool, and these are the types of numbers we hope to see in a survey like this one. Because individuals who take district surveys tend to be some of the more engaged community members overall, they are also likely to also be active voters. To that end, the fact that nearly 86% of respondents and 90% of the comparison group are at least somewhat familiar with the needs and processes the district has used to find solutions is encouraging.

11) I believe the district's facility needs must be addressed now.

Strongly agree	34.98%	22.82%
Agree	45.28%	41.08%
Disagree	15.02%	26.25%
Strongly disagree	4.72%	9.84%

Analysis: In most cases, the percentage of respondents who strongly agree or agree to this question tends to be higher than the support for specific solutions. This question often sets the ceiling for support for specific solutions. As we often witness, the all-respondent group, which is parent-heavy, is almost always more likely to agree or strongly agree that needs must be addressed now. However, to have nearly 64 percent support from the comparison group suggests the likelihood that the appropriate referendum question will pass.

12) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question to address Outdated Facility Systems and Deferred Maintenance needs, as described.

Strongly agree	42.65%	28.82%
Agree	41.23%	42.94%
Disagree	10.38%	16.69%
Strongly disagree	5.74%	11.55%

Analysis: Here, we saw strong support among all respondents and the comparison group.

13) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question to address Safety and Security needs, as described.

Strongly agree	42.89%	28.96%
Agree	39.07%	40.94%
Disagree	12.54%	19.83%
Strongly disagree	5.50%	10.27%

Analysis: Strong support among all respondents and the comparison group.

14) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question to address Outdated Instructional Environment needs, as described.

Strongly agree	39.58%	25.96%
Agree	37.85%	35.24%
Disagree	15.88%	26.25%
Strongly disagree	6.68%	12.55%

Analysis: Note that the level of support among all respondents drops by about 5%, while the comparison group support is about 10% less than the previous two questions. However, this still reflects a strong level of support.

15) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question to address Solutions for Co-curricular and Fine Arts Facilities needs, as described.

Strongly agree	32.08%	22.40%
Agree	34.67%	27.53%
Disagree	21.38%	30.96%
Strongly disagree	11.87%	19.12%

Analysis: While there is still strong support among all respondents, the level of support from the comparison group is just over 50%. That is not surprising when it comes to a question about fine arts and co-curricular facilities.

16) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question if I felt it was the correct solution to address the district's needs and it had no tax increase over the current year, based on the information presented above.

Strongly agree	42.30%	28.53%
Agree	43.08%	46.93%
Disagree	9.59%	14.12%
Strongly disagree	5.03%	10.41%

Analysis: Strong support among all respondents and the comparison group.

17) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question if I felt it was the correct solution to address the district's needs and additional facility needs and it had a tax impact of \$35 over current taxes for every \$100,000 of equalized value based on the information presented above.

Strongly agree	32.98%	21.97%
Agree	35.34%	30.10%
Disagree	21.07%	29.24%
Strongly disagree	10.61%	18.69%

Analysis: The level of support drops from 85% to 68% among all respondents compared to the previous question, while the comparison group is just over 50%. This suggests that any solution that includes a tax increase, no matter how small, may be met with more resistance.

18) I would vote "yes" on Option #1, a \$150 million investment question having a tax impact of \$0 increase over current year, based on the information presented above.

Strongly agree	41.31%	29.24%
Agree	39.58%	40.80%
Disagree	11.87%	16.55%
Strongly disagree	7.23%	13.41%

Analysis: Strong support among all respondents and the comparison group. Having more than 80 percent of all respondents and 70 percent of the comparison group support this question now that they see an overall number and no tax increase again suggests that the if the right referendum question is asked it will pass. However, it does not mean a referendum question will garner that level of support.

19) I would vote "yes" on Option #2, a \$200 million investment question based on the option outlined above, having a tax impact of \$35 over current taxes for every \$100,000 of equalized value, based on the information presented above.

Strongly agree	30.19%	19.40%
Agree	33.57%	28.25%
Disagree	23.78%	31.24%
Strongly disagree	12.46%	21.11%

Analysis: Strong support among all respondents; however, support from the comparison group is just under 48%. Based on the responses to this question, and the fact in most school districts about 70% or more of eligible voters do not have school-aged children, it would be difficult to see voters approving even a modest tax increase for facilities needs at this time.

20) It is critically important that all students have access to all high school programming.

Strongly agree	49.41%	38.94%
Agree	39.66%	44.65%
Disagree	7.59%	11.84%
Strongly disagree	3.34%	4.56%

Analysis: Strong support among all respondents and the comparison group, although not surprising. Note below that when respondents learn more about what implications there might be to make high school programming equitable, the support drops.

21) It is critically important that all students have access to all high school co-curricular programs.

Strongly agree	43.95%	33.38%
Agree	40.13%	43.94%
Disagree	11.56%	16.83%
Strongly disagree	4.36%	5.85%

Analysis: Strong support among all respondents and the comparison group.

22) I would support a dual-campus model, based on the description above, to ensure all high school students have access to the same level of programming.

Strongly agree	29.95%	23.97%
Agree	35.22%	38.52%
Disagree	18.40%	22.54%
Strongly disagree	16.43%	14.98%

Analysis: It is noteworthy that the comparison group (at 62.66%) nearly supports this at the level of the all-respondent group (65.23%). This may require more discussion with parents and/or staff.

23) I would support merging two or more elementary schools to accomplish the goals listed above.

Strongly agree	21.50%	17.54%
Agree	35.41%	38.55%
Disagree	25.56%	28.26%
Strongly disagree	17.53%	15.65%

Analysis: It is noteworthy that support among all respondents versus the comparison group is nearly identical, at approximately 56% each. In all likelihood, parents of school-aged children at the elementary level will be less likely to support, especially if one of their neighborhood schools would possibly close.

24) I would support merging two or more elementary schools to accomplish the goals listed above even if it impacts the school(s) where children from my family attend.

Strongly agree	19.24%	15.38%
Agree	34.53%	38.31%
Disagree	26.60%	28.85%
Strongly disagree	19.64%	17.46%

Analysis: Note that the comparison group is 10% more likely to agree or strongly agree with this idea. Parents of school-aged children are always less likely to support merging of schools and/or boundary changes than the larger community, which may see this as a district being more efficient.

25) Please use the space below to provide any additional information to the Board as it considers this and other solutions to address the district's facility needs.

Summary: Respondents used this open-ended question to leave a wide variety of responses regarding the school district, its facility needs, and potential solutions to those needs, with more than 850 responses provided. In examining the responses, we found that they tended to fall into several overall categories:

- Concerns about a possible tax increase.
- Concerns about transportation and larger class sizes if schools are closed or merged.
- Support for closing or merging schools if it results in less spending and lower taxes.
- Concerns about asking a combined question about fine arts and athletics.

Below is a sampling of each of these common themes. (Responses have not been edited.)

- I am not a fan of the dual high school. I would want to see some data from other districts about

how well this has worked. I think there are benefits to a 4-year school.

- I am fine with merging but as long as it also helps with the size of the classrooms. ... If they stay the same or get bigger, then no.
- I believe elementary schools need strong neighborhood identity.