

THE MORRIS LEATHERMAN COMPANY

POST-REFERENDUM SURVEY REPORT *2022 South Washington County Public School District*

General Perspectives on the South Washington County Public School District:

The survey asked respondents about the general features of the School District.

From what you have heard or seen, what do you like most about the South Washington County School District?

	Residents	Parents
GOOD TEACHERS	24%	24%
EXCELLENT ACADEMICS	10%	16%
VARIETY OF PROGRAMS	13%	17%
SAFE	6%	4%
GOOD ACADEMICS	7%	3%
SPORTS	13%	7%
BROAD CURRICULUM	7%	6%
NICE BUILDINGS	6%	2%
TECHNOLOGY	5%	7%
GOOD COMMUNICATIONS	4%	8%
HIGH ACHIEVEMENT STATISTICS	0%	3%
SCATTERED	2%	2%
UNSURE	3%	1%

"Good teachers" leads both lists at 24%, followed by "excellent academics" at 10% among all residents and 16% among current parents, and "variety of programs" at 17% among present parents and 13% among all residents. All residents would add "sports," at 13%. Solid teaching, high-quality academics, and course programming remain the critical foci of both groups.

And, from what you have heard or seen, what do you think is the most serious issue facing the School District?

	Residents	Parents
LARGE CLASS SIZES	17%	21%
POOR PAST SPENDING	9%	8%

*2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023*

	Residents	Parents
HIGH TAXES	18%	14%
LACK OF FUNDING	13%	16%
DECLINING QUALITY	0%	0%
LACK OF DISCIPLINE	10%	5%
EQUITY ISSUES	3%	3%
TOO LIBERAL	3%	2%
STAFF SHORTAGES	2%	3%
LACK OF DIVERSITY	2%	2%
SCATTERED	3%	3%
NOTHING	9%	11%
UNSURE	11%	12%

Both groups list three key issues: "large class sizes," "high taxes," and "lack of funding." All residents would add "lack of discipline in the schools." Nine percent of all residents and 11% of current parents state there are "no serious issues" facing the School District; this group of "boosters" is about fifty percent higher than the Metropolitan Area norm.

Fiscal Credibility:

Establishing a rating of the School District's fiscal credibility requires using four queries: perceptions of spending effectiveness and efficiency and perceptions of a good value in return for property taxes.

South Washington County Public School Board and Administration spent tax money effectively and efficiently during the last several years.

	Residents	Parents
AGREE	64%	65%
DISAGREE	26%	25%
UNSURE	10%	9%

Almost two-thirds of both groups agree with the assertion.

When the South Washington Public Schools ask voters to approve a property tax increase, it is only a last resort after the School Board and Administration have considered all other budget alternatives.

	Residents	Parents
AGREE	55%	60%
DISAGREE	35%	30%
UNSURE	10%	9%

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

Fifty-five percent of all residents and 60% of current parents agree.

Our community receives good value from its investment in local public schools.

	Residents	Parents
AGREE	87%	92%
DISAGREE	5%	4%
UNSURE	8%	5%

Approximately nine-in-ten respondents believe the community receives a good value from its investment in local public schools.

South Washington County Schools are a good investment, and I would support a property tax increase to protect that investment.

	Residents	Parents
AGREE	56%	67%
DISAGREE	31%	18%
UNSURE	12%	14%

Majorities of each group agree with this powerful statement. The 31% disagreement level among all residents signifies that the School District and volunteer supporters must be aggressive in persuasion efforts.

Since the four levels of agreement are above 50%, the fiscal credibility of the School District is satisfactory.

Financial Management of the School District:

The questionnaire asked respondents about the financial management of the School District:

How would you rate the financial management of the South Washington County Schools – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

	Residents	Parents
EXCELLENT	10%	9%
GOOD	47%	55%
ONLY FAIR	34%	31%
POOR	5%	4%
UNSURE	4%	2%

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

The 57% positive rating among all residents is among the top quartile of Metropolitan Area school districts; however the 35% unfavorable rating among parents is troublesome.

The survey asked about the adequacy of the funding of the schools:

Do you think South Washington County Schools are adequately funded?

	Residents	Parents
YES	53%	42%
NO	40%	56%
UNSURE	6%	2%

Most residents think the South Washington County Schools are adequately funded; while only 42% of current parents believe the same. The School District must illustrate why this assertion is false in the prequel to any referendum attempt. A significant obstacle to establishing this case is the legislative discussions about "fully funding" education.

Related Perceptions:

The next series of questions explores potential issues for the School District which could impact referendum voting:

I trust the South Washington County School Board and Administration to do what is right for children in this District.

	Residents	Parents
AGREE	79%	86%
DISAGREE	12%	9%
UNSURE	8%	5%

Both samples post percentages just above the suburban norm for agreement with this assertion.

I am satisfied with the School District's decision-making process.

	Residents	Parents
AGREE	73%	79%
DISAGREE	17%	18%
UNSURE	10%	3%

The decision-making process is not an issue in the South Washington County Public School District.

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

The District does a good job communicating important issues and decisions to residents.

	Residents	Parents
AGREE	70%	85%
DISAGREE	25%	13%
UNSURE	4%	2%

The 70% agreement among all residents and the 85% agreement among current parents places the South Washington County Public Schools within the top decile across Metropolitan Area suburban school districts.

The School Board and Administration effectively involve community leaders, parents, and interested citizens in decisions about the schools.

	Residents	Parents
AGREE	68%	79%
DISAGREE	26%	18%
UNSURE	6%	4%

Both levels of agreement with this statement place the South Washington County Public Schools within the top quartile across Metropolitan Area suburban school districts.

Quality of Education:

District residents give a high rating to the quality of local schools.

How would you rate the quality of education the South Washington County Public Schools provided – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

	Residents	Parents
EXCELLENT	21%	33%
GOOD	68%	64%
ONLY FAIR	9%	3%
POOR	1%	1%
UNSURE	1%	0%

Among all residents, a diminished 21%, a decrease of 11% in two years, rate the Public Schools as "excellent." Thirty-three percent of current parents rate the School District as "excellent," a level lower than the suburban norm. These "excellent" ratings show a significant shift and place the School District in the third quartile among Greater Metropolitan Area school districts.

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

Job Performance Ratings:

Initially, the questionnaire questioned respondents about their attention to School District matters:

Would you say you follow the work of the School Board and Administration in the South Washington County Public School District – very closely, somewhat closely, not very closely, or do you not follow their work at all?

	Residents	Parents
VERY CLOSELY	6%	15%
SOMEWHAT CLOSELY	39%	59%
NOT VERY CLOSELY	42%	23%
NOT AT ALL	13%	3%
UNSURE	0%	0%

Forty-five percent of all residents, a 17% drop in five years, report following the work of the School Board and Administration at least "somewhat closely;" A higher 74% of current parents report they follow at least "somewhat closely." This level of interest among parents is below the average of Metropolitan Area suburban school districts.

The survey asked residents to evaluate the job performances of the School Board, District Administration, and instructional staff.

Overall, how would you rate the job performance of the South Washington County School Board – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

	Residents	Parents
EXCELLENT	8%	13%
GOOD	56%	62%
ONLY FAIR	25%	20%
POOR	4%	4%
UNSURE	7%	1%

The School Board has solid ratings compared with other suburban districts. The positive ratings posted by both groups are within the top quartile of Metropolitan Area suburban school districts.

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

How would you rate the performance of the Superintendent and District Administration – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

	Residents	Parents
EXCELLENT	15%	19%
GOOD	49%	51%
ONLY FAIR	23%	24%
POOR	3%	2%
UNSURE	10%	5%

The job performance of the District's Administration, including the Superintendent, is also higher than the suburban norm. The 64% positive rating among all residents and the 70% favorable rating among current parents are within the top quartile of Metropolitan Area suburban school districts.

How would you rate the performance of the teachers and instructional staff in the South Washington County Public Schools – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

	Residents	Parents
EXCELLENT	44%	64%
GOOD	45%	34%
ONLY FAIR	5%	2%
POOR	0%	0%
UNSURE	6%	0%

Teachers and instructional staff are very well-regarded and should participate visibly in the District's information campaign and any grassroots persuasion campaign. The job rating of the instructional staff is nine percent above the suburban norm in both cases.

Tax Climate:

The questionnaire asked respondents two questions about their current taxation level. Both total property taxes, in general, and school taxes, in particular, were considered.

Compared to neighboring cities, do you consider total property taxes in your community to be very high, somewhat high, about average, somewhat low, or very low?

	Residents	Parents
VERY HIGH	22%	14%
SOMEWHAT HIGH	38%	37%
ABOUT AVERAGE	37%	44%
SOMEWHAT LOW	0%	0%
VERY LOW	0%	0%
UNSURE	3%	5%

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

Compared to other neighboring school districts, do you think that school taxes in the South Washington County Public School District are very high, somewhat high, about average, somewhat low, or very low?

	Residents	Parents
VERY HIGH	17%	12%
SOMEWHAT HIGH	35%	32%
ABOUT AVERAGE	39%	46%
SOMEWHAT LOW	0%	0%
VERY LOW	0%	0%
UNSURE	8%	10%

With less than 50% of both samples seeing their entire property and school taxes as "about average," the property tax climate in the School District is "hostile."

Looking Backwards: The August 2022 Bond Referendum:

Interviewers reminded respondents the School District asked voters to approve a bond referendum this past August.

The questionnaire initially asked:

Did you feel very informed about this bond referendum proposal, somewhat informed, not too informed, or not at all informed?

	Residents	Parents
VERY INFORMED	10%	17%
SOMEWHAT INFORMED	45%	55%
NOT TOO INFORMED	34%	25%
NOT AT ALL INFORMED	10%	3%
UNSURE	1%	0%

Both groups' information levels are shallow compared to successful referendum efforts.

The survey next asked interviewees:

Did you vote in the August 9th Bond Referendum this year?

	Residents	Parents
YES	35%	45%
NO	63%	54%
REFUSED	2%	2%

The turnout among parents is meager and proved to be a hurdle for the referendum.

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

The survey asked respondents who had not voted:

Can you tell me one or two reasons why you did not vote in the referendum?

	Residents	Parents
NO TIME/BUSY	24%	32%
NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION	19%	33%
NO CHILDREN IN SCHOOL DISTRICT	17%	0%
FORGOT	13%	15%
AGE/ILLNESS	11%	3%
NOT INTERESTED	11%	8%
THOUGHT IT WOULD PASS	4%	7%
SCATTERED	0%	3%
REFUSED	1%	0%

The three primary reasons for not voting in both groups are "no time/busy," "not enough information," and "forgot."

The questionnaire informed referendum voters:

South Washington County School District had a bond referendum that would have provided \$462,000,000 for improvements, including building additions and new schools. It failed 34%-to-66%.

Did you support or oppose the bond referendum?

	Residents	Parents
SUPPORT	33%	48%
OPPOSE	65%	51%
REFUSED	2%	3%

Not even participating current parents post a majority in favor of the proposal.

Interviewers asked:

What was the major reason you opposed the bond referendum?

	Residents	Parents
TAXES TOO HIGH	31%	29%
POOR PAST SPENDING	23%	17%
INFLATION/POOR ECONOMY	13%	15%
LACK OF INFORMATION	13%	13%

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

	Residents	Parents
COST TOO HIGH	6%	17%
NOT NEEDED	5%	4%
DOING TOO MUCH	4%	2%
NOT TRANSPARENT	3%	2%
NO CHILDREN	2%	0%

Four dominant reasons for opposition within both groups include: "taxes are too high," "poor past spending," "inflation/poor economy," and "lack of information." Current parents add a fifth reason, "cost is too high."

Interviewers instructed residents:

I want to read you a short list of factors that may or may not have entered into your decision about the proposal. For each, tell me if it was a consideration in your decision or was not a consideration at all. Then, if it were a consideration, please tell me if it was a major or a minor factor.

Interviewers queried respondents about four voting factors. The table below arrays each element with the percent reporting it was not a factor and the percent saying it was a major factor in their decision.

Consideration	Residents		Parents	
	Not	Major	Not	Major
With the recent pandemic and economic uncertainty, now is not the time to ask residents to increase school funding.	15%	83%	15%	76%
My property taxes are already too high.	15%	75%	20%	63%
I did not see a compelling need for the School District's funding request.	12%	66%	23%	51%
I disagreed with the solutions offered in the bond referendum	25%	65%	26%	59%
There seemed to be no significant negative consequences if the fund requests were not approved.	21%	49%	26%	39%
I did not receive enough detailed information about the proposal.	42%	48%	45%	39%

The four factors, shaded in red in the table above, play a significant role in adverse voting decisions.

Long-Term Facilities Planning:

Interviewers reminded respondents:

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

For the last several years, South Washington County Schools have been discussing options for a long-term facilities plan, one that will gain community support and meet current and future space and educational needs. Architectural and engineering experts assessed the existing schools, including the quality of classrooms, the adequacy of space, security measures, safety, air quality, and operating costs.

Respondents were then asked:

Would you say you have followed these discussions very closely, somewhat closely, not that closely, or not following at all?

	Residents	Parents
VERY CLOSELY	7%	14%
SOMEWHAT CLOSELY	37%	56%
NOT THAT CLOSELY	44%	23%
NOT FOLLOWING AT ALL	13%	6%
UNSURE	0%	0%

Forty-four percent of all residents and 70% of current parents "closely follow" these discussions. Given the longevity of the planning process, among residents this level is underwhelming.

The survey asked residents:

Do you think the District has done a good job involving parents, local citizens, and community leaders in discussing future facilities' needs? Do you feel strongly that way?

	Residents	Parents
STRONGLY YES	12%	12%
YES	55%	62%
NO	28%	20%
STRONGLY NO	1%	2%
UNSURE	5%	5%

Solid majorities of both groups believe the District did a good job of involving parents, local citizens, and community leaders in the discussions.

Considering these discussions, do you believe the District has regarded a range of approaches to find a plan benefiting students and staff in the South Washington County Schools? Do you feel strongly that way?

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

	Residents	Parents
STRONGLY YES	14%	17%
YES	52%	58%
NO	23%	17%
STRONGLY NO	2%	1%
UNSURE	10%	8%

Again, solid majorities of both groups believe the District has considered a range of approaches to finding a plan benefiting students and school staff.

Do you believe the District has considered various approaches to find a plan fair to local taxpayers? Do you feel strongly that way?

	Residents	Parents
STRONGLY YES	10%	14%
YES	42%	43%
NO	33%	28%
STRONGLY NO	6%	6%
UNSURE	9%	10%

Lower majorities in both groups think the District considered a range of approaches fair to local taxpayers. Thirty-nine percent of all residents and 34% of current parents do not believe this was the case.

Housing Growth in the School District:

The survey asked respondents a series of six questions about housing growth in the School District:

From what you have heard or seen, do you believe housing growth has been increasing or remaining about the same during the past five years?

	Residents	Parents
INCREASING	69%	78%
REMAINING ABOUT THE SAME	29%	20%
UNSURE	3%	2%

Strong majorities believe housing growth has been increasing during the past five years.

Do you believe housing growth will increase over the next five years?

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

	Residents	Parents
YES	63%	69%
NO	25%	21%
UNSURE	12%	10%

Strong majorities also believe housing growth will increase over the next five years.

From what you have heard or seen, do you think student enrollment in the South Washington County Schools has increased or remained about the same over the past five years?

	Residents	Parents
INCREASED	64%	75%
REMAINED ABOUT THE SAME	26%	20%
UNSURE	9%	5%

Strong majorities of both samples think student enrollment in the South Washington County Schools increased during the past five years.

Do you think student enrollment in the District will increase over the next five years?

	Residents	Parents
YES	63%	62%
NO	23%	19%
UNSURE	15%	19%

Strong majorities of both groups think student enrollment in the District will increase over the next five years.

Do you think South Washington County Schools has enough space to accommodate enrollment five years from now?

	Residents	Parents
YES	44%	51%
NO	36%	37%
UNSURE	20%	13%

Significant levels of all residents and current parents think the School District has enough school space to accommodate enrollment five years from now.

Do you think overcrowding is an issue at any District's high schools? If yes, which ones?

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

	Residents	Parents
YES/EAST RIDGE	11%	13%
YES/PARK COTTAGE GROVE	7%	8%
YES/WOODBURY	7%	13%
YES/ALL	3%	2%
NO	58%	54%
UNSURE	14%	11%

Majorities in both groups do not think overcrowding is an issue at any of the District's high schools. The most significant percentages in both groups point to problems at East Ridge and Woodbury High Schools.

School Attendance Boundaries:

Respondents were asked a pair of questions about school attendance boundaries.

How important is it to you to limit the number of students impacted by school boundary changes – very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?

	Residents	Parents
VERY IMPORTANT	34%	42%
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	42%	43%
NOT TOO IMPORTANT	15%	10%
NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	7%	2%
UNSURE	3%	3%

Seventy-six percent of all residents and 85% of current parents think it is "important" to limit the number of students impacted by school boundary changes.

How important is it to you that elementary school students attend an elementary school in the city they live in – very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?

	Residents	Parents
VERY IMPORTANT	27%	38%
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	36%	38%
NOT TOO IMPORTANT	24%	17%
NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT	10%	6%
UNSURE	3%	2%

Slightly lower percentages in each sample, although still majorities, view it as "important" for elementary school students to attend a school in the city where they reside.

Voter Predispositions:

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

Residents were first asked a trio of queries about their initial reactions to a property tax increase for the South Washington County Public Schools without having any specific information about the proposed request.

Which of the following three statements best describes your feelings?

A) I would vote against almost any tax increases for the schools;

B) I would vote for a tax increase under some conditions but against it under other conditions; OR

C) I would vote for almost any tax increases for the schools recommended by the School Board.

	Residents	Parents
STATEMENT A	29%	12%
STATEMENT B	49%	49%
STATEMENT C	21%	38%
NONE OF THE ABOVE (VOL)	0%	1%
UNSURE	1%	1%

Among all residents, the quick difference – Statement C percentage minus statement A share – is -8%, indicating that supporters start EIGHT percent behind tax increase opponents at the beginning of a referendum campaign. A clear majority among Statement B respondents is critical to the referendum's ultimate success. Among current parents, the quick difference is +26, indicating tax increase supporters start 26% ahead of opponents at the dawn of the campaign.

Next year, the South Washington County School Board may ask voters to approve a bond referendum to provide funding for facilities' needs.

How much would you be willing to pay in additional property taxes to fund this bond referendum? How about _____ per month?

	Residents	Parents
NOTHING	34%	15%
\$10.00 PER MONTH	28%	29%
\$20.00 PER MONTH	16%	20%
\$30.00 PER MONTH	7%	12%
\$40.00 PER MONTH	2%	2%
\$50.00 PER MONTH	2%	2%
\$60.00 PER MONTH	0%	1%
OVER \$60.00 PER MONTH	0%	2%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	12%	18%

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

Among residents, the median is \$8.93 per month or \$107.16 per year; among current parents, the median rises to \$14.32 per month or \$171.84 per year. A challenging finding for any new referendum attempt is the 34% of all residents opposing any increase.

Then, the questionnaire queried respondents about their support for a property tax increase for each of the 14 proposals. The table below arrays each bond referendum component's support and opposition to a tax increase.

Component	Residents		Parents	
	Supp	Oppo	Supp	Oppo
Construction of secured entrances at schools in need of them	67%	30%	66%	31%
Construction of classroom additions at high schools	66%	34%	73%	27%
Renovation and expansion of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, or STEM spaces, at high schools	64%	33%	71%	26%
Construction of classroom additions at middle schools	63%	34%	66%	31%
Renovation and expansion of Career and Technical Education spaces at high schools	60%	38%	64%	31%
Enhancements to performing arts spaces	59%	39%	68%	30%
Construction of classroom additions at elementary schools	54%	43%	62%	35%
Renovation of elementary schools to create flexible learning spaces	53%	43%	61%	36%
Renovation of kitchens, cafeterias, and restrooms to accommodate growth and students' needs	53%	44%	62%	36%
Construction of additional early learning spaces across the District	52%	42%	63%	34%
Enhancements to playgrounds at elementary schools and Early Childhood Centers	51%	43%	60%	37%
Construction of a centrally located District Service Center	45%	49%	58%	38%
Purchase land for future use	42%	53%	49%	48%
Enhancements to athletic facilities, including artificial turf, digital scoreboards, and stadium improvements	42%	57%	61%	38%

Four components exhibit strong support in both groups: above 60% and at least a 20% favorable gap between support and opposition. Three parts register the same level of support among current parents. As in most school districts across Minnesota, purchasing land for future use has become very controversial.

Respondents were asked for a summary judgment about these components:

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

Overall, do these improvements sound like a good idea or a bad idea? Do you feel strongly that way?

	Residents	Parents
GOOD IDEA/STRONGLY	8%	11%
GOOD IDEA	51%	56%
BAD IDEA	26%	24%
BAD IDEA/STRONGLY	9%	4%
UNSURE/REFUSED	5%	6%

The levels of "bad ideas" will challenge a new referendum. With 35% of all residents and 28% of current parents viewing the improvements as a "bad idea," these levels suggest a solid base for opposition activities in any campaign. Both groups particularly object to two components: "purchasing land" and "enhancing athletic facilities."

Facts about the School District:

Interviewees were read a list of five facts about South Washington County Schools and asked if they knew each one. The table below shows the awareness of each point.

Facts about the South Washington County School District	Residents	Parents
The South Washington County School District is the sixth largest District in Minnesota, with 18,600 students.	52%	56%
East Ridge High School is currently over its capacity by more than twenty percent.	40%	47%
Resident growth is projected to increase by about 8,000 new homes in the next ten years.	39%	44%
In less than ten years, the School District may be adding about 3,500 students.	38%	54%
Fifteen South Washington County School District schools are projected to be over capacity in the next ten years.	35%	43%

Specific knowledge about the South Washington County School District is uniformly low, especially after an information and marketing campaign during the recent referendum. In the run-up to the campaign, the School District should target a knowledge level of about 65%.

Communications Issues:

Respondents were initially asked:

What is your principal source of information about the South Washington County School District and its activities?

*2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023*

	Residents	Parents
DISTRICT WEBSITE	21%	35%
LOCAL NEWSPAPER	19%	1%
WORD-OF-MOUTH	18%	4%
DISTRICT NEWSLETTER	15%	24%
SOCIAL MEDIA	14%	7%
E-MAIL	4%	13%
DISTRICT STAFF	4%	9%
MAILINGS	2%	0%
MEETINGS	0%	2%
SCATTERED	3%	5%

Residents list five statistically significant sources of information: "District website," "local newspaper," "word-of-mouth," "District newsletter," and "social media" – reaching 87% of residents. Current parents post five statistically significant information sources: "District website," "District newsletter," "e-mail," "District staff," and "social media" – reaching 88% of parents. The information and persuasion campaigns will need to use a multi-media-channels approach.

Next, the survey ascertained respondents' preferred sources of information:

How would you prefer to receive information about the School District?

	Residents	Parents
DISTRICT WEBSITE	27%	33%
DISTRICT NEWSLETTER	16%	25%
LOCAL NEWSPAPER	14%	1%
SOCIAL MEDIA	13%	6%
WORD-OF-MOUTH	10%	3%
E-MAIL	9%	20%
MAILINGS	6%	5%
DISTRICT STAFF	2%	5%
SCATTERED	3%	2%

Preferred information sources parallel current usage. Unsurprisingly, residents are more reliant on print and informal sources than current parent reliance on electronic sources.

Then, the survey queried respondents about using ten potential sources of information about the School District. The table below arrays each source according to its impact – considered a "major source" of information – and the source's reach – considered at least a "minor source" of information.

**2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023**

Source of School District Information	Residents		Parents	
	Impact	Reach	Impact	Reach
The District's e-newsletter, "Family Connect"	27%	49%	62%	89%
The local newspaper	27%	56%	7%	34%
The School District's website	39%	62%	65%	90%
Teachers and other School District employees	17%	39%	44%	76%
Twitter	6%	22%	6%	27%
Facebook	12%	35%	14%	48%
YouTube	3%	9%	3%	12%
Nextdoor	11%	34%	12%	33%
Friends and family	33%	76%	26%	78%
Other parents of School District children	18%	62%	30%	84%

Three sources of information score impact levels above 25% in both groups: "Family Connects," the "School District website," and "friends and family." All residents add the "local newspaper" to their list, while current parents add "teachers and other School District employees" and "other parents of School District children." The reach of each information source correlates strongly with its impact, except for "Facebook" among current parents, which has a higher-than-expected reach.

Recommendations:

1. After a major defeat of a referendum proposal, School Districts suffer shaken confidence, higher tax resistance, and general malaise among its past vital constituencies. The 66%-34% defeat of the last bond referendum proposal resulted in the appearance of these cracks in the referendum foundations. The South Washington County Schools are in a position where it will be essential to engage in a longer-than-usual information and persuasion campaign to regain lost ground.
2. Examining the usual pro-referenda constituencies in past South Washington County School District ballot proposals, deficiencies of minimum support levels for a successful election are across the board. The table below shows critical population segments, the minimum required level of support for past referenda, and the deficit in the 2022 bond referendum.

Population Segment	Minimum	Deficit
Residents for ten or fewer years	65%	-22%
Residents less than 35 years old	53%	-3%
Households containing preschoolers	80%	-39%
Households containing current SWC District students	59%	-26%
Alum parents/guardians	50%	-35%
Renters	60%	-35%

*2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023*

Population Segment	Minimum	Deficit
Owners of less than \$500,000 homes	55%	-8%
Men	52%	-22%
Women	60%	-23%
Woodbury residents	60%	-25%
Cottage Grove residents	50%	-13%
Saint Paul Park residents	40%	-26%
Newport residents	53%	-26%

A more aggressive information campaign by the School District and a very aggressive advocacy effort by a grassroots volunteer committee will be essential to regain lost ground.

3. The School District will need to cut the cost per year for the average household significantly. Ideally, the following proposal should increase property taxes by no more than \$200.00 per year on the average valued home. The projects for inclusion in the net proposal should limit financial commitments for "enhancement to playgrounds," "centrally located District Service Center," "construction of additional early learning spaces across the District," "enhancement to athletic facilities," and "land purchases for future use." A more palatable list would include "enhanced security," "classroom additions," "Career and Technical Education spaces at the high schools," "renovation and expansion of STEM spaces at the high schools," which should account for the preponderance of funding.
4. The knowledge levels about the growth and needs in the School District are appallingly low. The District should consider a pre-referendum "facts" campaign to increase residents' awareness of the current population and enrollment levels.
5. Communication and mobilization efforts should bear in mind one fundamental split between the parents and non-parent groups. While parents are technologically proficient and rely upon electronic communications, non-parents still lean toward paper and conversational sources. This segmentation has one great advantage: better targeting of messages to specific audiences.

School District Demographics:

The typical adult School District resident lived there for 14.5 years. Forty-one percent resided in the School District for less than ten years, 21% lived there for 10-to-20 years, and 38% resided there for over 20 years. The typical adult resident is 47.0 years old. Twenty-one percent posted ages under 35 years old, 23% are 35-44 years old, 24% are 45-54, and 31% are over 55 years old.

***2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023***

Twenty-nine percent of the households report the presence of current South Washington County Public School students. Eleven percent enroll their students in other public schools, home schools, charter schools, or parochial and private schools. The remainder, 61%, does not have school-aged children in residence. Among "empty-nesters," 38% report their children had been in South Washington County Public Schools. Households containing South Washington County students say the following breakdown in grade levels: 38% have elementary school children, 41% have middle school students, and 39% have high school students. Eighteen percent of households contain preschoolers.

Thirteen percent rent their present residence. The typical homeowner reported a property value of \$350,000.00. Twenty-seven percent post property values of less than \$300,000.00. Thirty-three percent post property values of \$300,000.00-\$400,000.00, and 17% report property values of \$400,000-\$500,000.00. Nine percent have homes valued over \$500,000.00. Forty-six percent report they are fiscally stressed – either their monthly expenses exceed current income, or monthly payments leave little or no savings aside. Fifty-three percent report no fiscal stress – either managing comfortably and putting some money aside or managing very well. Women and men are equally represented in the sample. Fifty-six percent live in Woodbury, while 34% reside in Cottage Grove. Five percent live in Saint Paul Park, and four percent reside in Newport. One percent report living in the remainder of the School District.

Parents of Children in School District Demographics:

The typical adult parent lived there for 11.3 years. Twenty percent resided in the School District for less than five years, 27% lived there for 5-to-10 years, 26% lived there for 10-20 years, and 27% resided there for over 20 years. The typical parent is 41.7 years old. Twenty-three percent posted ages under 35, thirty-nine percent are 35-44, thirty-two percent are 45-54, and seven percent are over 55 years old.

Forty-three percent of parent households have elementary school children, 44% have middle school students, and 38% have children in high school. Twenty-three percent of these households contain preschoolers.

Eleven percent rent their present residence. The typical homeowner reported a property value of \$365,500.00. Twenty-five percent post property values of less than \$300,000.00. Twenty-nine percent post property values of \$300,000.00-\$400,000.00, and 33% report over \$400,000.00. Thirty-seven percent report they are fiscally stressed – either their monthly expenses exceed current income, or monthly expenses leave little or no savings. Sixty-three percent report no fiscal stress – either managing comfortably and putting some money aside or managing very well. Women outnumber men by 18% in the sample.

***2023 South Washington County School District
Post-Referendum Study
February 2023***

Methodology:

This report shows the survey results of a study administered to 500 randomly selected adult residents and 400 parents of South Washington County Public Schools children. Professional interviewers conducted the survey by telephone between December 1st and 16th, 2022. The typical respondent took fourteen minutes to complete the questionnaire. The non-response rate is 5.0%. The adult resident results of the study are projectable to all adult South Washington County School District residents within $\pm 4.5\%$ in 95 out of 100 cases. Similarly, the parent sample results are projectable to all parents of current South Washington County Public Schools students within $\pm 5.0\%$ in 95 out of 100 times.