



Donovan Group
School Communications

School District of Onalaska

**COMMUNITY SURVEY REPORT
June 2022**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The School District of Onalaska has been evaluating the district's facility needs and possible solutions. The Board of Education's efforts began with a study of facilities, followed by the creation of a Facilities Task Force Committee that included residents from throughout the district, along with district staff and leaders in construction and design to provide additional support. The Facilities Task Force Committee met multiple times before submitting its recommendations.

The board is also considering renewing its current operational referendum to address rising expenses related to inflation and inadequate funding support from the state over the past decade.

The Board of Education and district administration requested that a survey be conducted. The survey was administered by the Donovan Group. Input from community members through the survey will be used to evaluate solutions that meet the community's needs, are financially responsible, and move the district and community forward.

Should the district decide to place an operational referendum and/or capital question on the November 2022 ballot, the information from the survey will help determine the size and potential tax impact of that question.

It is worth noting that, for most of the survey questions, there was a high level of clarity and consistency in terms of the preferences expressed by survey takers. To that end, it is unlikely that more 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 sent a postcard with information about how to access the survey to all households. The district also used its multiple communication tools to remind stakeholders to complete the survey while it was open. The survey was open from May 18 to June 3, 2022.

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 1,089 community members completed the survey. More than 99 percent of those who completed the survey did so online. To complete the survey, respondents must have clicked "submit" at the end of the online survey and answered all of the required questions, or answered all of the required questions on the paper copy.

Below are the questions and their corresponding responses. The first set of data (in black) reflects the responses of all completed surveys. The second set of data (in blue) indicates 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.

The third set of data, starting with Question No. 8 (in red), provides a weighted average of those who are affiliated with the district and the comparison group. In most districts, about 70 percent of eligible voters do not have an affiliation with the district, which is why that group was given a .70 weight. Those who are affiliated with the district received a .30 weight.

We typically find the comparison group to be a more accurate representation of the general population than all respondents. There were 327 completed results in the comparison group, representing a little more than 30 percent of the total respondents. The responses of this comparison group differed significantly from the overall response pool for some questions, as noted in the analysis of those questions.

Below each question and result is a brief analysis from the Donovan Group team.

1) What is your age?*

18 or under	4.68%	3.36%
19–25	1.47%	2.14%
26–34	8.26%	5.20%
35–44	33.43%	5.20%
45–54	25.34%	10.40%
55–64	12.30%	26.30%
65 or over	14.51%	47.40%

Analysis: Generally, we find that those who are 65 and older tend to be underrepresented in school district surveys. We are pleased that the all-respondent group included nearly 15 percent of those residents, and that the comparison group was more than 47 percent. It is also typical for the comparison group to skew older than the larger group of respondents, which is the case here; nearly 74 percent of the comparison group was 55 or older. Overall, the survey received a healthy balance of respondents across all age groups, although we would have liked to see more participation from those ages 34 and younger.

2) Where do you reside?*

City of Onalaska	80.62%	91.44%
Town of Onalaska	6.43%	6.42%
Town of Medary	2.66%	1.53%
Town of Hamilton	0.18%	0.00%
City of La Crosse	3.58%	0.61%
Other	6.52%	0.00%

Analysis: It is our understanding that this distribution largely mirrors the population of the district and therefore represents a good respondent pool. It was interesting that the City of Onalaska had nearly 11 percent more participation in the comparison group than the all-respondent group.

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

Fewer than 2 years	5.23%	4.28%
Between 2 and 5 years	10.01%	6.42%
Between 5 and 10 years	19.56%	10.70%
Between 10 and 20 years	26.72%	15.60%
Between 20 and 30 years	12.03%	22.32%
More than 30 years	15.89%	40.67%
I do not live in the District	10.56%	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 five years, this pool provides us with a solid representation of the overall district community. It is also apparent that once residents move into the Onalaska community, they tend to stay for a long time.

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

I do not have children *	7.35%	11.90%
I have children who are younger than 4-year-old kindergarten/ elementary age *	9.83%	0.00%
I have children in 4-year-old kindergarten *	5.97%	0.00%
I have children who currently attend an Onalaska public school (K-12) *	51.33%	0.00%
I have children who graduated from or previously attended an Onalaska public school (K-12) *	28.01%	52.29%
I have grandchildren who currently attend or have attended an Onalaska public school (K-12) *	6.61%	18.96%
I have children who currently attend or have attended a private school *	6.43%	8.87%
I have grandchildren who currently attend or have attended a private school *	1.93%	6.12%
My children are home-schooled	0.28%	0.31%
I attended an Onalaska public school *	12.95%	13.46%
I am a community member who never had children attend an Onalaska public school (K-12) *	7.99%	21.71%
I am an Onalaska public school employee *	15.61%	0.00%
I am an Onalaska public school student	3.40%	0.00%
Other *	1.65%	14.07%

Analysis: No surprises here. The all respondent pool is meaningfully diverse in terms of participants and connections to the school district. Note that nearly 19 percent of the comparison group have a grandchild who currently attends or has attended a district school, but that more than 53 percent had a child who graduated from or previously attended a district school.

In addition, it is interesting to note that less than 14 percent of the all respondent and comparison groups attended district schools. That is quite a bit lower than we see in most districts.

5) If your child(ren) currently attend(s) an Onalaska public school, what school(s) do they attend? Please check all that apply.

Pre-K partner site program	2.86%
Eagle Bluff Elementary School	24.15%
Irving Pertzsch Elementary School	15.38%
Northern Hills Elementary School	21.11%
Onalaska Middle School	42.04%
Onalaska High School	44.19%
I do not have school-aged children	0.18%

Analysis: *It is our understanding that the respondent pool roughly reflects the district's current enrollment numbers. The survey received a good response rate from individuals who have school-aged children.*

6) Where do you get your information about Onalaska schools (Please select all that apply)?*

Parent organizations	17.91%	4.28%
Friends and/or neighbors	36.64%	40.67%
My children and their friends	32.87%	12.23%
District or school websites	61.25%	32.72%
Mailings from the district	64.92%	75.54%
School newsletters	48.76%	11.31%
School Board meetings	13.22%	8.26%
Teachers and staff	43.53%	15.90%
<i>La Crosse Tribune</i>	25.16%	48.93%
<i>The Courier</i> (print or online)	18.09%	36.39%
Local radio	8.63%	17.13%
Facebook	29.29%	19.27%
Other	3.12%	6.12%

Analysis: *There were four options — district or school websites, mailings from the district, school newsletters, and teachers and staff — that received more than 43 percent from all respondents. The only option to receive more than 50 percent from the comparison group was mailings from the district, although the two area newspapers scored significantly higher with the comparison group than all respondents. We would encourage the district to use this data to determine the best communication tools for reaching specific audiences going forward.*

7) Why do you visit the District website? (Please check all that apply)*

PowerSchool Parent Access (check grades, schedules, etc.)	66.84%	7.48%
Search for upcoming events/view calendar	76.47%	50.47%
Access staff contact information	48.66%	10.28%
To view lunch menus	22.99%	4.67%
To view sports/co-curricular schedules	47.06%	35.51%
To learn more about the school district's current events	36.90%	50.47%
To view District policies, bylaws and guidelines	26.20%	26.17%
Review School Board agendas/minutes	39.57%	28.04%
Other	3.21%	4.67%

Analysis: The clear top response among all respondents was to search for upcoming events/view calendar, while the PowerPoint School tool to check grades and student schedules was a clear second. The only two offerings to receive more than 50 percent from the comparison group were search for upcoming events/view calendar and to learn more about district policies, bylaws and guidelines. Based on the results of the previous question, this is not surprising. The district may want to consider tailoring how it displays information on its website for certain audiences based on why they visit the site.

8) I am satisfied with the School District of Onalaska.*

Strongly agree	37.10%	36.39%	37.09%
Agree	54.91%	56.88%	55.32%
Disagree	6.15%	5.20%	5.05%
Strongly disagree	1.84%	1.53%	1.55%

Analysis: More than 92 percent of all respondents are satisfied with the district. It was interesting to see that number at 93 percent for the comparison group. Most districts that ask us to do surveys see a 15-20 percent drop between the two groups. These numbers are 10-plus percentage points higher than we are seeing with other districts we work with in Wisconsin over the past couple years. This points to how well the community believes the district did during the pandemic.

9) How would you describe the District to someone not familiar with it?

Summary: Including those who took the survey, but did not complete it, approximately 1,675 responses were provided. Respondents used this open-ended question to leave a wide variety of responses regarding the school district as it attempts to address facility needs. In examining the responses, we found they tended to fall into several overall categories:

- Very strong school district, with quality and caring staff and lots of rigor
- Lots of community and parent support
- Lots of opportunities for students with regards to athletics and other extracurriculars
- Some commented on a lack of diversity among students and staff, along with requests for additional opportunities like music, fine arts, robotics. etc.
- A small number of respondents complained about the Board of Education, property taxes, COVID measures, inclusivity issues, and a perceived lack of fiscal responsibility

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

- Some very good and great teachers, a lot of opportunities for students, overall a quality education with great preparation for college.
- I speak highly of our district staff, administration, staff/admin. relationship, board, parents, and community as a whole. Onalaska is a great place to be!
- Great. School ratings are very good. Our children are learning so much.
- I find the district divided (by building) and behind in education times. I feel like there is a depth of "tradition" that is missing out on the forward progress of education.
- Balanced, fair district that strives to provide for all students' needs.
- The staff at all levels have always been the best. Putting students first and their families. The administration has met the many challenges they face serving the various families that live in our community.
- The School District of Onalaska is a small district with a big district feel. The district has a large range of socio-economic status considering the population. The district is a wonderful district to work or enroll a family in.

10) How familiar are you with the identified school district's facility needs?*

I am very familiar with the district's facility needs	25.80%	15.29%	19.10%
I am somewhat familiar with the district's facility needs	51.33%	54.13%	53.32%
I have no familiarity with the district's facility needs	22.87%	30.58%	27.59%

Analysis: More than 77 percent of all respondents and more than 69 percent of the comparison group indicated they were well informed or had some familiarity with the facility challenges the district is facing and the process the board is using to find solutions. But with 22.87 to 30.58 percent, depending on the group, having no familiarity with the process, there appears to be ample opportunity for the district to continue to engage stakeholders in the coming months.

11) I believe the school district's most urgent financial needs must be addressed now.

Strongly agree	45.36%	29.66%	35.96%
Agree	42.33%	45.57%	44.29%
Disagree	9.46%	18.96%	15.08%
Strongly disagree	2.85%	5.81%	4.66%

Analysis: In most cases, the percentage of respondents who strongly agree or agree to this question or statement 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, it is encouraging to have more than 87 percent support from all respondents, 80 percent support from the weighted group, and 75 percent support from the comparison group.

12) How likely are you to support an operational referendum on the November 2022 ballot?

I would definitely support it	50.60%	29.66%	37.96%
I would probably support it	34.62%	39.76%	37.78%
I would probably not support it	8.54%	18.35%	14.44%
I would definitely not support it	6.24%	12.23%	9.82%

Analysis: More than 85 percent of all respondents indicated they would definitely or probably support an operational referendum question in November. The weighted category still had more than 75 percent support, while the comparison group had more than 69 percent support. This may bode well for the district if the right amount and tax impact are determined.

13) We anticipate that the effects of the pandemic will have a lasting impact on students. Would you support additional operational funds through a referendum to continue and sustain programs and services to accelerate student learning and address social-emotional/mental health needs in response to the pandemic?

Strongly agree	48.85%	29.97%	36.85%
Agree	31.68%	35.78%	34.67%
Disagree	12.58%	22.32%	18.69%
Strongly disagree	6.89%	11.93%	9.79%

Analysis: More than 80 percent of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they would support

additional operational funds through a referendum to continue and sustain programs and services related to student learning and social-emotional and mental health in response to the pandemic. Support from the comparison group to this question was still at more than 65 percent. Again, this indicates the community supports the efforts of the district during the pandemic.

14) Option 1: I would vote "yes" on a referendum question to renew the 2018 operational referendum that would increase the revenue limit by \$900,000 in Year 1, \$4.45 million in Year 2, \$4.65 million in Year 3, \$4.85 million in Year 4, and \$5.05 million in Year 5 if the projected tax impact remained below or close to the current rate of \$790 on each \$100,000 of fair market value, based on the information provided above.

I would definitely support it	44.08%	26.61%	33.54%
I would probably support it	39.21%	41.90%	40.76%
I would probably not support it	9.83%	18.04%	14.81%
I would definitely not support it	6.89%	13.46%	10.90%

Analysis: More than 83 percent of all respondents indicated they would definitely or probably support the Option 1 operational referendum question in November. The weighted category still had more than 74 percent support, while the comparison group had more than 68 percent support. These numbers are higher than we are seeing in most Wisconsin districts that are considering operational referendums in the fall.

15) Option 2: I would vote "yes" on a referendum question to renew the 2018 operational referendum that would increase the revenue limit by \$1.25 million in Year 1, \$4.8 million in Year 2, \$5 million in Year 3, \$5.2 million in Year 4, and \$5.4 million in Year 5 if the projected tax impact remained below or close to the current rate of \$790 on each \$100,000 of fair market value, based on the information provided above.

I would definitely support it	40.68%	24.46%	30.85%
I would probably support it	34.62%	30.89%	32.38%
I would probably not support it	15.70%	27.22%	22.71%
I would definitely not support it	9.00%	17.43%	14.05%

Analysis: More than 75 percent of all respondents indicated they would definitely or probably support the Option 2 operational referendum question in November. The weighted category still had more than 63 percent support, while the comparison group had more than 55 percent support. Those are 8-13 percentage points lower, depending on the group, than the previous statement.

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

Strongly agree	53.35%	32.72%	40.92%
Agree	33.79%	43.12%	39.50%
Disagree	9.09%	17.13%	13.88%
Strongly disagree	3.76%	7.03%	5.70%

Analysis: In most cases, the percentage of respondents who strongly agree or agree to this question or statement 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 more than 89 percent support from all respondents, 80 percent support from the weighted group,

and nearly 76 percent support from the comparison group, is encouraging and bodes well if the right facility solution is determined.

17) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question to address the facility needs as described above at Onalaska Middle School.

Strongly agree	56.38%	37.00%	44.69%
Agree	30.67%	37.61%	34.80%
Disagree	7.81%	17.13%	13.66%
Strongly disagree	5.14%	8.26%	6.85%

Analysis: More than 87 percent of all respondents indicated they would vote "yes" on a referendum question to address the facility needs at Onalaska Middle School. Support for that statement was more than 79 percent for the weighted group and more than 74 percent for the comparison group, indicating there is wide support to address facility needs at that school.

18) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question to address the facility needs as described above at Onalaska High School.

Strongly agree	48.48%	29.36%	36.83%
Agree	34.80%	39.45%	37.68%
Disagree	11.11%	21.41%	17.54%
Strongly disagree	5.60%	9.79%	7.96%

Analysis: More than 83 percent of all respondents indicated they would vote "yes" on a referendum question to address the facility needs at Onalaska High School. Support for that statement was more than 74 percent for the weighted group and nearly 69 percent for the comparison group.

19) I believe the district should pursue a partnership with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater La Crosse in order to provide space for programming to the children of Onalaska.

Strongly agree	41.40%	30.34%	34.73%
Agree	42.33%	43.96%	43.25%
Disagree	12.01%	18.27%	15.77%
Strongly disagree	4.25%	7.43%	6.24%

Analysis: Nearly 84 percent of all respondents strongly agree or agree that the district should pursue a partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater La Crosse to provide space for programming to the children of Onalaska. Support for that statement was nearly 78 percent for the weighted group and more than 74 percent for the comparison group.

20) I believe any referendum question concerning Onalaska Middle School should include additional dedicated and shared space for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater La Crosse.

Strongly agree	33.67%	26.23%	29.33%
Agree	44.13%	41.98%	42.71%
Disagree	16.37%	22.53%	20.14%
Strongly disagree	5.83%	9.26%	7.82%

Analysis: It was interesting to see the percentages drop a few points among all three groups to the statement about including additional dedicated and shared space for the Boys & Girls Club of Greater La Crosse at Onalaska Middle School. However, nearly 78 percent of all respondents supported the statement, while more than 72 percent of the weighted group and more than 68 percent of the comparison group supported it.

21) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question to address the facility needs as described above at Onalaska Middle School if the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater La Crosse contributed at least \$3 million to the cost of the project as part of a partnership with the school district.

Strongly agree	41.44%	29.10%	34.07%
Agree	41.63%	44.89%	43.57%
Disagree	11.29%	16.41%	14.48%
Strongly disagree	5.64%	9.60%	8.03%

Analysis: It was interesting to see support among all three groups increase a few percentage points when we included that the Boys & Girls Club of Greater La Crosse contributes at least \$3 million to the cost of the project. More than 83 percent of all respondents agreed with that statement, while nearly 78 percent of the weighted group and nearly 74 percent of the comparison group supported it.

22) I would vote "yes" on a \$50 million capital investment question that addressed all of the identified needs at a renovated Onalaska Middle School, having a tax impact of \$103 per year on each \$100,000 of fair market value, based on the information provided above.

I would definitely support it	42.61%	24.16%	31.23%
I would probably support it	39.12%	40.98%	40.49%
I would probably not support it	9.92%	18.35%	15.14%
I would definitely not support it	8.36%	16.51%	13.15%

Analysis: Nearly 82 percent of all respondents indicated they would definitely or probably support a \$50 million capital investment question that addressed identified needs at a renovated Onalaska Middle School in November. The weighted category still had nearly 72 percent support and the comparison group had more than 65 percent support.

23) I would vote "yes" on a \$75 million capital investment question that addressed all of the identified needs at a renovated Onalaska Middle School and the most pressing needs at Onalaska High School, having a tax impact of \$173 per year on each \$100,000 of fair market value, based on the information provided above.

I would definitely support it	33.52%	17.13%	23.42%
I would probably support it	38.02%	29.36%	33.65%
I would probably not support it	16.35%	28.44%	24.02%
I would definitely not support it	12.12%	25.08%	19.93%

Analysis: Support among all three groups dropped by more than 10 percent when it came to supporting a \$75 million capital investment question that addressed identified needs at a renovated Onalaska Middle School and the most pressing needs at Onalaska High School. Still, more than 71 percent of all respondents indicated they would definitely or probably support the plan, while more than 56 percent of the weighted group said they would support it.

24) I would vote "yes" on a \$110 million capital investment question that addressed all of the identified needs at a renovated Onalaska Middle School and Onalaska High School, having a tax impact of \$273 per year on each \$100,000 of fair market value, based on the information provided above.

I would definitely support it	27.55%	12.84%	18.46%
I would probably support it	31.86%	21.41%	25.24%
I would probably not support it	23.42%	32.42%	29.16%
I would definitely not support it	17.17%	33.33%	27.14%

Analysis: Support among all three groups dropped even more when it came to supporting a \$110 million capital investment question that addressed all of the identified needs at a renovated Onalaska Middle School and Onalaska High School. While more than 59 percent of all respondents definitely or probably would support the plan, the percentage dropped to about 44 percent of the weighted group. Support from the comparison group was a little over 34 percent.

25) Please use the space below to provide additional information you feel the Board of Education should keep in mind as it considers an operational and/or capital (facilities) referendum.

Summary: Approximately 200 responses were provided. Respondents used this open-ended question to leave a variety of responses regarding the school district as it looks to address facility needs. In examining the responses, we found that they tended to fall into several overall categories:

- *Concerns about what expenditures have been cut to make budgets work in recent years*
- *More explanation about why there are budget challenges, especially considering that enrollment has not been growing in the district*
- *More support for addressing middle school facility needs than high school, although some noted each level needs a new building*
- *Majority of comments came from those who indicated they probably would not or definitely would not support referendum questions*
- *Concerns about trying to address these challenges with rising inflation, increases in property taxes, war in Europe, etc.*

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

- *Taxes stink but at least here they would go to something to help the community. We are in a tough spot with some of our building very much lacking. Teachers feel our salary is not competitive with other offers they receive even though we are told that it is. Teachers stay or leave based on building level leadership. If we allow our facilities to continue to erode, personal relationships with the principals might not be enough to keep teachers.*
- *Time to increase the size of both the middle and high schools. Take them from 1999 to 2022!*
- *My child will be attending OMS in the next couple of years and I am extremely concerned about the state of the middle school. I worry taxpayers will vote no if the increases taxes are too large.*
- *I agree OMS has significant needs and should be addressed but not sure I would include the high school in this at this time. I feel the middle school needs are way more and should be addressed first.*
- *Mental health should be a major priority. Weekly individual counseling classes as well as mental health classes to help the kids get along. I've been told there is a zero bullying tolerance but my child is bullied daily.*
- *The middle school really needs updates, that place is really depressing. The hallways are very tight and crowded. the lack of a main entrance is a huge security issue.*

