

ST. CLOUD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

REFERENDUM: COMMUNITY LISTENING PHASE
OVERVIEW

March 2016



Strategic Problems. Solved.

- Engagement Overview
- Observations
- Recommendations

The November referendum failed by a margin of 1,000 votes, with 53% of the voters voting against the referendum and 47% voting in support.

OFFICIAL ELECTION RESULTS	YES	NO	Difference	% Yes Voters	% No Voters	Total Voters
TOTALS	7,393	8,460	(1,067)	46.6%	53.3%	15,863
OAK HILL COMMUNITY SCHOOL	1,379	1,146	233	54.6%	45.4%	2,526
MADISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	807	844	(37)	48.8%	51.1%	1,652
TALAHI COMMUNITY SCHOOL	695	861	(166)	44.6%	55.3%	1,557
COLTS ACADEMY	685	784	(99)	46.6%	53.4%	1,469
APOLLO HIGH SCHOOL	621	777	(156)	44.4%	55.5%	1,400
ST AUGUSTA CITY HALL	435	835	(400)	34.1%	65.5%	1,274
WESTWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	588	560	28	51.2%	48.8%	1,148
TECH HIGH SCHOOL	473	635	(162)	42.7%	57.3%	1,108
DISCOVERY COMMUNITY SCHOOL	468	515	(47)	47.6%	52.4%	983
ABSENTEE	435	487	(52)	47.1%	52.8%	923
CLEARVIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	259	544	(285)	32.3%	67.7%	803
ST CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY	342	256	86	57.2%	42.8%	598
LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	132	171	(39)	43.6%	56.4%	303
ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY	74	45	29	62.2%	37.8%	119

Thirty-one percent of the 50,000 registered voters participated in the election, which is high compared to the “off” election year average of eighteen percent¹.



¹ Average provided by Morris Leatherman company.

After the referendum, district leadership decided to pause and gather feedback from the community through a series of Listening sessions (Focus groups).

- Objectives -

1. Better understand the common reasons as to why community members supported or voted against the referendum.
2. Better understand what recommendations they might have with respect to a future referendum.
3. Broaden and strengthen the district's relationships with business and community members.

The feedback would be used to determine “Next Steps” prior to a future referendum.

An Advisory group was formed with a mix of community members who supported and did not support the referendum.

1. Jama Alimad (Central MN Community Empowerment Organization)
2. Teresa Bohnen (Chamber of Commerce)
3. Barclay Carriar (Proviant Group)
4. Debbie Erickson (St. Cloud Area School District 742 School Board)
5. Patti Gartland (Greater St. Cloud Development Corporation)
6. Henry Gruber (Hank's Hauser)
7. Barry Kirchoff (Central Minnesota Small Business Development Center)
8. Dave Kleis (Mayor of St. Cloud)
9. Brian Myres (Myres Consulting)
10. Kevin Quinn (Marriott and Clearview Elementary PTA)
11. Tom Schlough (Partner for Student Success)
12. Wayne Schluchter (Schluchter Investment Advisors)
13. Ted Schmid (Lumber One)
14. Pat Welter (Partner for Student Success and Morgan Family Foundation)
15. Dennis Whipple (St. Cloud Area School District 742 School Board)
16. Steve Windfeldt (Preferred Credit Inc.)

The Advisory group helped recruit prospects to the focus groups and helped develop recommendations for next steps.

Role of the Advisory Group

- Recommend and recruit focus group prospects.
- Review feedback from focus group sessions.
- Provide input to recommendations.

Expectations

- Keep an open mind.
- Participate in a focus group.
- Listen in on other focus groups (if interested).
- Participate in monthly meetings Jan, Feb, Mar.

More than 600 community members were invited, of which there was a mix of supporters/non-supporters across the 150 participants.

	Location	Target Audience	Non-District	Yes Voters	No Voters	Did Not Vote	Non-St Cloud Residents	District Employees
1	Greater St. Cloud Development Corp.	Community	10	9	1			
2	St. Cloud Public Library	Community	12	4	8			
3	Liberty Bank (South)	Community	8	1	7			
4	Greater St. Cloud Development Corp.	Community	13	10	3			
	St. Augusta City Hall	St Augusta community	0	0	0	0	0	
5	St. Cloud Chamber	Community	3	1	0	1	1	
6	St. Cloud Chamber	Community	5	2	2		1	
7	Schlenner Wenner &Co	Community	7	1	6			
8	Schlenner Wenner &Co	Community	8	3	4	1		
9	Greater St. Cloud Development Corp.	Community	8	3	4	1		
10	Greater St. Cloud Development Corp.	Community	8	4	2	2		
11	Apollo	District employees	0					7
12	Clearview Elementary	Clearwater and Clear Lake communities	12	7	5			
13	Apollo	District employees	0					10
14	Greater St. Cloud Development Corp.	Community	11	5	4	2		
15	Apollo	District employees	0					9
16	Kennedy - Team Room	St Joseph community	12	10	2			
	Email responses from community members not able to attend sessions		7	3	4			
	Total Participants (Non-District sessions)		124	63	52	7	2	26
	% of Non-District participants			50.8%	41.9%	5.6%	1.6%	
	Total Participants		150					

The focus groups were designed to encourage all participants to share both things they liked and things about which they had concerns.

- Questions -

➤ Nov 3rd Referendum Discussions:

- What did you like that positively affected your vote (influenced you to vote “Yes”)?
- What did you like that did not affect your vote?
- What caused you concern that did not affect your vote?
- What caused you concern that negatively affected your vote (influenced you to vote “No”)?

Think in terms of the decision-making process to develop the solution, the solution itself, the cost of the solution, voting site logistics, etc..

➤ The Future:

- What adjustments would you recommend making to a referendum in the future (process, solution, logistics, etc.)?

The goal was to identify common themes that showed up across the sessions and across supporters/non-supporters.

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- Engagement Overview
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The following reasons were consistently mentioned as things supporters and/or non-supporters “liked” about the referendum.

1. Tech is old and something needs to be done.
2. A new school is good for our community
 - Strong education, strong community, strong business (economic health).
 - Improve the perception of the community/attract people.
3. The new facility supports modern/future educational needs.
4. The new facility brings more Tech extra-curricular activities together on one campus.

Conclusion:

There is no debate that Tech is old and something needs to be done.

Additionally, participants consistently shared broad community and educational benefits as things they liked about the referendum, as opposed to specific technical details.

The following reasons were consistently mentioned as “concerns” of supporters and/or non-supporters.

Lack of a Clear Vision

1. Campaign was about a building, as opposed to benefits and outcomes for children, business, and community.
2. Campaign message was not clear.

Lack of Trust

1. The cost estimates lacked detail, accuracy, and credibility (Tech remodel, Tech maintenance, and new school construction).
2. Referendum felt like an ultimatum (with maintenance costs).
3. No plan for current Tech site.
4. Reduction in polling places (seemed manipulative).
5. Perception the 90 person task force outcome was pre-determined¹.
6. Not able to answer questions/Lack of transparency.
7. Adjacent issues: DAO building, Clark field, Roofing article, Cultural tensions.

Lack of Broad Community Support

1. The business community was not perceived as engaged or supportive.

Conclusion:

\$167million requires support and justification.

The lack of a vision, combined with numerous trust issues, and negative feelings about adjacent issues caused concern leading up to the referendum.

And, not enough community leaders were engaged in an organized manner to provide credibility and help alleviate concerns.

The following topics were not mentioned as consistently in the Listening sessions, but did highlight consistent differences in opinions.

1. **Number of questions on the ballot**
 - Community needs choice vs. choice will lead to confusion.
2. **Apollo as part of the referendum**
 - Liked that it was included; buying votes; unsure about Apollo upgrade.
3. **Technology and Security as part of the referendum**
 - Very important; like that it was included; just do it without a referendum.
 - Operating expense; should not be financed over 20 yrs.
4. **Date of the next referendum**
 - November; won't be ready in Nov.; bring when ready; bring during a general election.
5. **Number of high schools (mentioned less frequently)**
 - Some participants in Clearwater and St Joseph feel strongly about a need for their own high school (not all).
 - Some participants across the St. Cloud area expressed interest in a smaller school model and others in a one school model.
6. **South St. Cloud location (mentioned less frequently)**
 - Supports community growth; too far from center; will cause segregation.

Conclusion:

Any adjustments to these topics need more community input and thought to make informed decisions.

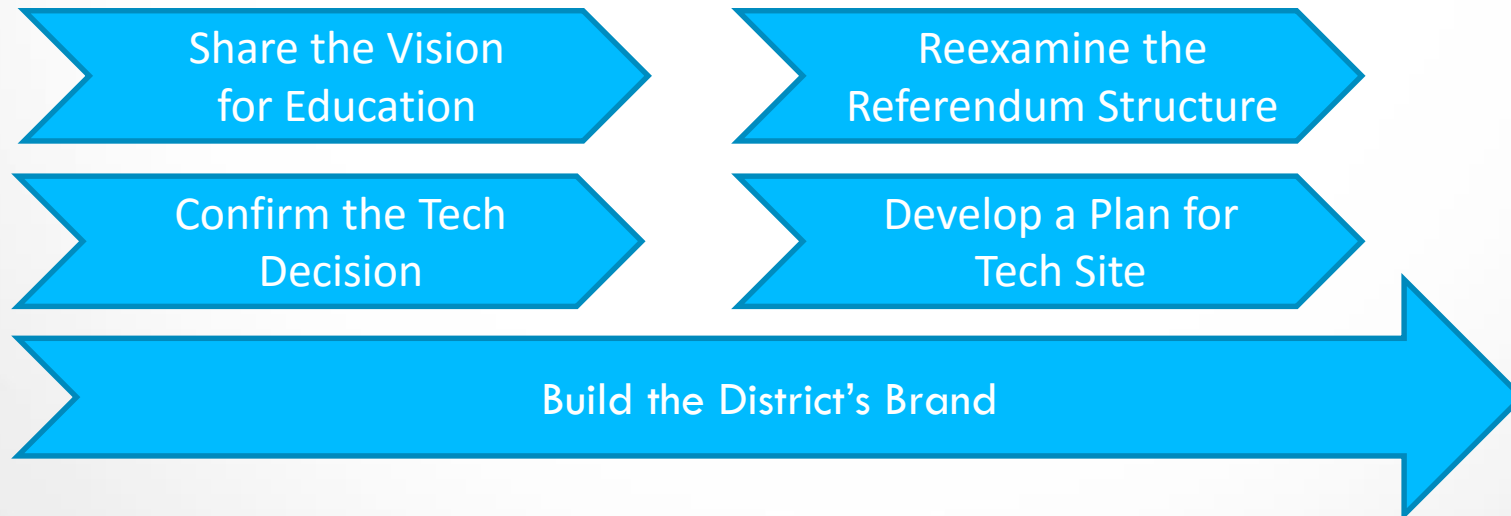
- Engagement Overview
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The following recommendations were developed with input from the Advisory group based on common feedback across the focus groups.

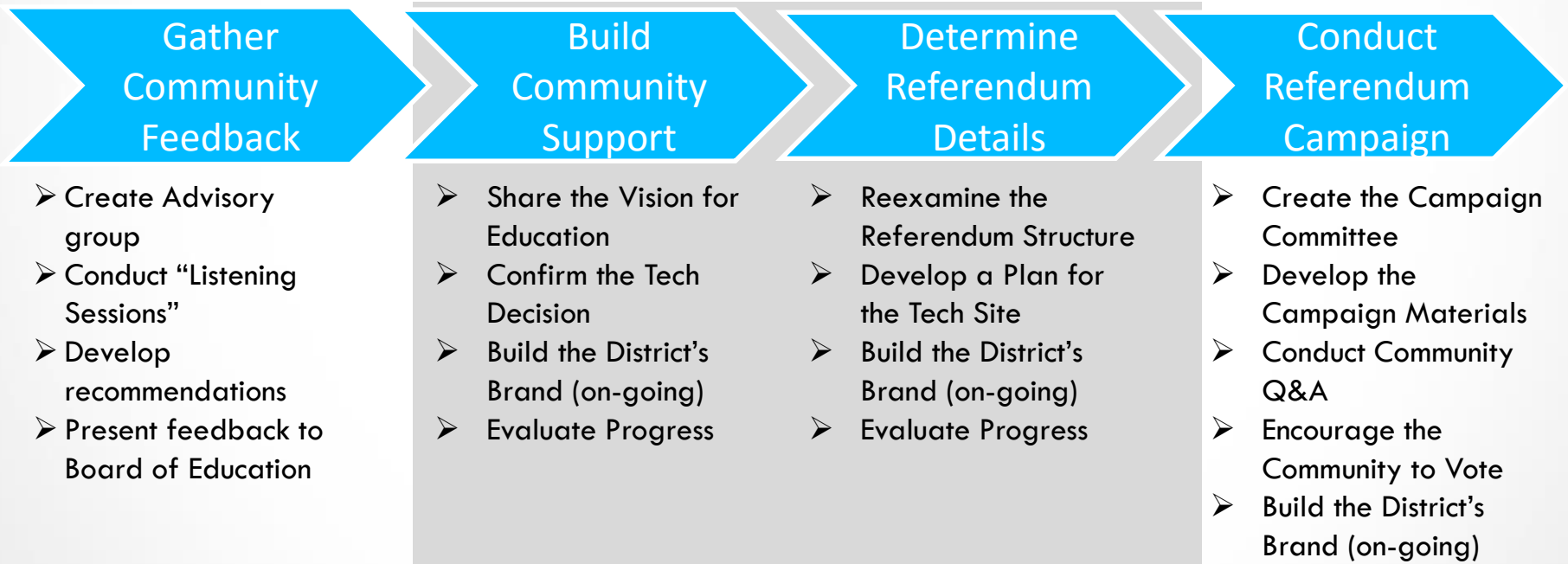
Primary Goals:

1. Bring the community together around a shared vision for education.
2. Broaden the district's community support network.
3. Establish more credibility with the community.

Initiatives: The following five initiatives are being recommended as work that needs to be done to make progress towards the goals prior to the next referendum campaign¹:



From a prioritization point of view, it is recommended that the district focus on sharing the vision for education, finalizing the decision on Tech, and starting to promote the positive within the district.



Once completed, the district can move on to the referendum structure and developing a plan for the Tech site.