

RMS Case Study 142 – SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Background:** Research & Marketing Strategies (RMS) was engaged to conduct both qualitative and quantitative focus groups for a school district in New York State. The focus of the research was related to the district's facilities planning initiatives. The district formerly had two propositions to the voters involving capital improvements – both of which were voted down (*only 33% voted in favor*). The school board wanted to know what the voters in the community supported and which parts of the propositions they were against. From the research, the District was looking to retool the facilities propositions and move forward with a second community referendum vote.
- Methodology:** First, qualitative research was conducted among key constituencies in the community. Focus group participants were recruited from various facets of the community (*school and non-school related*) such as parents with and without children in the district, senior citizens, teachers living in and outside of the district, parents with college-aged children, special education stakeholders, community associations, chamber members, custodial staff, elected officials, high school seniors, and the PTA. Following the two focus groups conducted, an online survey was developed that was made available to the community at large. Topical areas covered awareness, satisfaction with the district, feedback on the prior capital improvement project, and initiatives moving forward.
- Findings:** After two fully attended focus groups (*24 participants*) and 467 online surveys were completed, the district was able to make decisions based on statistically reliable data from key constituencies and the community-at-large. The research revealed that the community wanted the district to:
- Publicize more in newspapers, newsletters and on the website;
 - Inform the community on the strategic planning vision (making it a rolling document);
 - Create a prioritized list of initiatives for future capital improvement projects providing more explanation;
 - Expand educational curriculum including non-college focused high school options; and
 - Continue to improve two-way dialogue with all facets of the community giving everyone an opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process. Both the focus groups and the survey in itself served as the first step to this communications process.
- Results:** Heeding the advice of RMS and its research, a new capital improvement project was proposed the following academic year. It was approved by a resounding 66% of voters. By retooling their capital improvement plans and priorities, the district was able to position itself for the next 10 to 15 years. In a major local newspaper, the Superintendent was quoted as saying - "A lot of homework was done. The board worked hard on listening to the community and putting together something that was not only fiscally responsible, but also a project that would meet the district's needs. The board is certainly pleased with the support of the community."