Theses and Dissertations

May 2016

School Bond Referenda Reloaded: an Examination of a School District in Passing a Subsequent Bond Referendum After Failing to Pass Previous Bond Referenda

Eitan Yacov Benzaquen
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Follow this and additional works at: http://dc.uwm.edu/etd

Part of the Educational Administration and Supervision Commons

SCHOOL BOND REFERENDA RELOADED:

AN EXAMINATION OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT IN PASSING A SUBSEQUENT BOND

REFERENDUM AFTER FAILING TO PASS PREVIOUS BOND REFERENDA

by

Eitan Yacov Benzaquen

A Dissertation Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Urban Education

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2016

ABSTRACT

SCHOOL BOND REFERENDA RELOADED:
AN EXAMINATION OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT IN PASSING A SUBSEQUENT BOND
REFERENDUM AFTER FAILING TO PASS PREVIOUS BOND REFERENDA

by

Eitan Yacov Benzaquen

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016
Under the Supervision of Professor Dr. Rajeswari Swaminathan

In April 2008, the Wisconsin Erie School District attempted and failed to pass a school

bond referendum to renovate its high school. In November 2008, again the school district did not

pass a referendum. Interestingly, in the 2009-2010 school year, the district was successful in

passing a bond referendum. Although the original bond measure called for $45,600,000, the final

measure passed a bond of $35,190,000. All of these referenda attempts occurred within an

economic context of national and statewide recession. Since school referenda are mechanisms

for communities to voice their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with schools through voting for or

against the measure, this study explores how a community go from dissatisfaction to approval of

a similar bond referenda. Through interviewing participants, examining district archival records,

and analyzing 179 Erie newspaper articles reporting on the Erie referenda, this study answers:

How do the participants describe their perceptions of the interventions and surrounding factors

that led the Erie School District to the failure and eventual success in passing a school bond

referendum in the real-life context of their community? What can we learn from the Erie

participants' descriptions and explanations of a school district's bond referenda journey? This

study utilizes Piele and Hall's (1973) research to organize the factors and characteristics that affect bond referenda into three determinants: environmental, socioeconomic, and psychological. The environmental determinants that were found significant in this study were: election characteristics, information factors, and communication factors. The socioeconomic determinants that were found significant in this study were: status of the economy, tax impact, fiscal referenda incentives, personal communication, framing referenda from a needs perceptive, and positive public relations factors. The psychological determinants that were found significant in this study were: attitudes towards taxes, community involvement, and school officials. The implications for practice found in this study are: policy makers should commit to financially motivating school districts to renovate and repair; school leaders should seek out financial stimulus opportunities and frame their referenda measure as a savings opportunity; school districts should encourage a pro-referenda community group; school districts should analyze and incorporate the opposition; school districts should understand needs versus wants; and school districts should understand their own communal perception of hiring a consultant.

To

my wife,

my daughter and four sons,

and my parents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee faculty that would not let me fail, my wife that supported me with time, and three school districts that financially encouraged this dissertation.

I truly could not have completed this dissertation process without the hard working faculty of UW-Milwaukee. Going into the dissertation phase, I had Dr. Faith Crampton as a chair and we worked together nicely. Faith directed me toward my topic and fieldwork and reassured me that this would be a great dissertation. Unfortunately, Faith and UW-Milwaukee parted ways. I was given to Dr. Bill Kritek who met with me and continued to push me through the process. Bill retired, and Dr. Gail Schneider took over as my Committee Chair; however, Bill continued to guide me. Bill and Gail were great to work with and helped me through passing prelims and defending my proposal. Unfortunately, Gail retired, but by good luck, Dr. Rajeswari Swaminathan accepted the task of leading my committee. Raji has been awesome and supportive; she is everything anyone would want in a committee chair. Faith, Gail, Bill, and Raji have pushed me to adhere to a rigorous dissertation process, which has led to a quality dissertation. I appreciate all the time and effort the staff at UW-Milwaukee has put into my learning. It is Dr. Bill Kritek and Dr. Raji Swaminathan that have ensured that this story finishes with a happy ending. Thank you, thank you, and thank you.

My wife, Laura Benzaquen, continued to provide me time for the coursework, proposal, field work, and writing of this dissertation. Laura allowed me to work on my dissertation through the life events of: our daughter's birth on March 4, 2007; our first son's birth on August 31, 2008; my first Associate Principal position at Stoughton High School in September of 2008 (moved across Wisconsin); our third son's birth on October 10, 2010; our identical twin sons

birth on June 9, 2012; and my first head principal position at Hillcrest in Kenosha Unified School District (moved across Wisconsin again). Laura, this dissertation is as much yours as it is mine. Thank you, thank you, and thank you.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In April 2008, a Wisconsin school district that spent less than 84 percent (per pupil) of the school districts in the state and had a property tax rate that was about average for the state, attempted and failed to pass a school bond referendum to renovate its high school. In November 2008, again the school district did not pass a referendum to allow it to perform additions and renovations to high school, which would include a two-story classroom, pool and gymnasium renovations and expansion, demolishing a portion of the existing high school, improving the high school grounds and track, and constructing new tennis courts (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2015). Interestingly, in the 2009-2010 school year, the district was successful in passing a bond referendum allowing construction and additions to the high school, which included the following: classroom space, cafeteria, office, gymnasium, pool, athletic facilities, and roofs; heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems; and related demolition and site improvements (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2015). Although the original bond measure called for $45,600,000, the final measure passed a bond of $35,190,000. At the time, the failed Wisconsin school district referenda paralleled those of other school districts across the nation where taxpayers were unwilling or unable to finance school improvements. While the dire state of the United States economy dictated that many bond referenda fail, the eventual passing of the referendum offered a glimmer of hope that a successful campaign can be achieved.

According to the Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools (WINSS, 2010a), the Erie School District, the focus of this study, had 1,899 students enrolled during the

1

2009-2010 school year, 567 of them were enrolled in the high school. In the 2008-2009 school year, the Erie School District received $10,649,446 from the state of Wisconsin, $2,392,828 from the federal government, $8,055,778 from local property taxes, and $885,859 from other local revenue (WINSS, 2010b). These funding sources combined for a total of $21,983,911 or $11,450 per pupil (WINSS, 2010b). The school district encompasses an area of 94 square miles (Erie School District, n.d.). The school district operates five schools: three elementary schools (grades prekindergarten to 5), one middle school (grades 6 to 8) and one high school (grades 9 to 12) (Erie School District, n.d.). Nine board members serve three-year terms (Erie School District, n.d.).

The failed and finally successful referenda of the Erie School District provide an opportunity to understand the dynamics of the referenda process that were occurring in Wisconsin between 2007 and 2010. The lack of empirical data regarding Wisconsin school referenda combined with the importance of maintaining adequate educational facilities for school children create an important research opportunity for my dissertation. The purpose of this dissertation is to shed light on the activities and dynamics that led a community to pursue three similar consecutive referenda, from which the first two failed and the last one succeeded.

Role of Referenda in Wisconsin School Facilities Financing

Educational facilities are in such disrepair, and so many are in need of modernization—some have labeled it a national crisis (Long, 2011). Wisconsin's school districts have four main methods of financing facility needs: operating budgets, capital expansion funds, state trust fund loans, and general obligation promissory notes (bonds). "The most common method of capital

financing is the issuance of promissory notes and municipal bonds" (Larsen & Loppnow, n.d., p. 24). If a school board intends to issue a municipal bond, it may call for a referendum. Referendum is a procedure of submitting proposed law, constitutional amendments, or local government capital project to a ballot for voter approval or ratification (Shafritz, 2004). Placing a referendum on a ballot to voters prompts a capital campaign: "A nonprofit organization's fund-raising effort that focuses on raising money for major projects; for example, a new building, the repair or expansion of an old one…" (Shafritz, 2004, p.40).

In 1993, the Wisconsin legislature set a cap on the school district levy rate based on student enrollment and previous expenditures per pupil (Wisconsin Legislature). Due to this legislation, school districts must utilize the referendum process for renovating or expanding physical facilities and for exceeding the revenue limit for supporting educational programs. The process entails presenting facility needs, such as a renovation or expansion, to the community and convincing voters that the project is worthwhile. While some districts have a higher percentage of citizens who do not have school-age children than others, the community may see more value in a school project if there are more children in the community that would be affected.

The Wisconsin school infrastructure picture parallels that of the nation. Seventy-five percent of the school buildings in Wisconsin were built before 1970, and almost 25% were built before 1940 (WEAC Professional Development and Training Division, n.d.). In 1995, the United States General Accounting Office estimated that Wisconsin had nearly five billion dollars' worth of unmet school infrastructure needs (Thompson & Wood, 2005). With an ever-increasing aging of our countries educational facility infrastructure and an increase in the inability to maintain and

repair the school infrastructure currently utilized, a school facility predicament has occurred. Local to Wisconsin, from January 1, 2014, to January 1, 2015, twenty-seven school districts failed to pass referenda, leading to $300 million worth of infrastructure needs not being met in Wisconsin (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2015). Due to school districts being expected to provide advanced educational instructional opportunities, they must continually find ways to fund the latest technological and up-to-date school facilities.

School facilities are more important than ever in successfully educating children in the 21st century. For example, an education with state-of-the-art technology is critical to the success of students in a competitive, global marketplace. But school technology upgrades are complex and expensive. Renovations, repairs, and replacements in Wisconsin school facilities are mostly funded using local bonds. Wisconsin school districts have to strategize about how to ensure success in the referendum process. While some media present images of failing schools or schools in need of repair, the cost of educating children increases. In the United States, the educational expenditure per pupil has raised $512 from 2008 to 2012 (National Kids Count, 2015a). Furthermore, in Wisconsin the per-pupil educational expenditure over the same time period increased $598 (National Kids Count, 2015b). Thus, communities are asked to spend more on their local school facilities and the students attending those facilities, with a mixed supportive or unsupportive community reaction.

Referenda Elections and What They Mean

According to the Wisconsin Statue Chapter 67: Municipal Borrowing and Municipal Bonds (2016), a municipality may borrow money and issue bonds to finance any project.

"Project means the acquisition leasing, planning, design, construction, development, extension, enlargement, renovation, rebuilding, repair or improvement of land, waters, property, high-ways, buildings, equipment or facilities" (Wisconsin Legislation, p.2, 2016). A school district board with a majority vote may adopt a resolution to raise an amount of money by a bond issue, with the clerk publishing public notice and the majority of the school district electors adopting the referendum (Wisconsin Legislation, 2016).

It follows that school referenda are mechanisms for communities to voice their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with schools through voting for or against the measure. Positive school district characteristics, effective campaign techniques, favorable socioeconomic contexts, complimentary attitudes toward taxes, or approving attitudes toward school officials can lead voters to approve a school referendum. Lack of positive media attention, poor district communication, a negative perception of school officials, disliked or unpopular superintendents, or the perception of ungrateful teachers can lead voters to oppose a school referendum. Although a proposed project or facility is on the ballot, it is sometimes disgruntled voters' frustration with various aspects of the schools that is on the unwritten ballot. With so many possible reasons for approving or opposing a school district bond referendum, school administrators must understand the environmental, socioeconomic, and psychological dynamics involved in the referendum process.

Need for this Study

According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2010), between the 2007-2008 school year and the 2009-2010 school year, 86 school districts held 123 referenda attempts.

Sixty-seven (54.5%) of those referenda were successful, and 56 (45.5%) failed. Twenty-seven (31.4%) school districts attempted multiple referenda, and 7 (8.1%) school districts attempted three or more bond measures. The reasons that school districts seek bond referenda typically vary from year to year. However, the Erie School District is unique, because it is the only one between 2007 and 2010 that attempted to garner funds for the same purpose in all three bond referenda. Furthermore, the Erie School District is the only one to have failed twice and succeeded on the third attempt. With the Erie School districts referenda experiences and the complex contextual dynamics of school bond referenda experiences, the Erie School District's referenda process was an important phenomenon to study. The school district referendum process deserves close examination due to the high number of referenda held annually throughout the state of Wisconsin, due to the number of districts holding multiple referenda, and due to the necessity of understanding the 46% failure rate.

Purpose of this Study & Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the referendum process in one district, the Erie School District, as a case study to better understand the interrelated factors regarding the referendum process. With the need to understand the school bond referenda process and the factors that can make it successful or unsuccessful, this case presented the opportunity to analyze a community that was both successful and unsuccessful with similar attempts and similar involved stakeholders. This study utilizes two guiding questions:

- How do the participants describe their perceptions of the interventions and surrounding factors that led the Erie School District to the failure and eventual success in passing a

school bond referendum in the real-life context of their community?

- o What can we learn from the Erie participants' descriptions and explanations of a school district's bond referenda journey?

These questions guided this study to be able to explain the participants' actions and perceptions in going from one unsuccessful school bond referendum to another unsuccessful school bond referendum to a successful one. This study describes the interventions taken by the participants, illustrates specific themes that come out of the study, and enlightens future school districts and researchers from the real-life context of this community.

The Wisconsin school bond referenda process presented a unique and important research opportunity. The state funding realities created a need to understand the referenda process in the economic context. The previous research in the area of school bond referenda process and the complexity of the process calls for a comprehensive picture of the political landscape and action taken during the Erie referenda process. While the literature throughout the referenda discussion focuses on factors that positively promote successful campaigns and some factors that negatively influence the passage of a referenda, this study goes further by getting the in-depth perspectives of participants and their roles in the different referenda attempts. Similar to the research thus far on school referenda elections, this case study has its own environmental, socioeconomic, and psychological contexts.

Local Context

By an act of the state legislature, approved on March 19, 1878, the village of Erie was incorporated as a city. The city was divided into three wards, and provisions were made for

regular elections of city officials. It took the passing of city bonds to establish electricity and water in 1893, paved roads in 1903, and sewers in 1908.

The population of Erie grew from 7,338 in 2000 to 7,973 in 2010. Most of the residents (87.4%) were high school graduates, and 18.7% had a bachelor's degree or higher. There was a 59.4% homeownership rate with a median value of $155,300 for owner-occupied housing. Erie as a city had a 9.2% unemployment rate in 2010. The city's workforce was composed of 3,780 people over the age of 16 years working in the following occupations: 26.1% in management, business, science, and arts; 16.5% in service; 25.4% in sales and office; 7.9% in natural resources, construction, and maintenance; and 24.2% in production, transportation, and material moving. The top three industries in the city were manufacturing (26.3%), education/healthcare/social services (19.5%), and retail trade (15.4%). The median household income was $45,145, and the mean household income was $52,238. While 10.4% of people in the district fall below the poverty level, 12.4% are children under 18 years of age.

The mission of the school district was stated as following: "The school district of Erie, in partnership with our community, provides an environment of excellence and opportunity for all." Since the 2006-2007 school year, there has been an increase in enrollment from 1,816 students to 1,901 students. The race/ethnicity makeup of the school district has slightly changed over the same period. In the 2006-2007 school year, it was 87.5% Caucasian, 9.3% Hispanic, 1.8% African American, 1% American Indian, and 0.4% Asian. In the 2010-2011 school year, it was 83.1% Caucasian, 13.8% Hispanic, 1.6% African American, 0.9% American Indian, and 0.5% Asian. Students identified having a disability remained relatively constant: 16.3% in the 2006-2007 school year and 16.7% in the 2010-2011 school year. There was a dramatic increase in the

economically disadvantaged students from 2006 to 2011, from 24.6% to 39.3%. The percent of Spanish speakers increased from 5% in 2006 to 7.2% in 2011.

In the 2008-2009 Community Report that the school district published, the school district had the lowest attendance rate (less than 94%), the lowest graduation rate (less than 92%), the lowest post-graduation college success rate (less than 85%), and the highest dropout rate (2.41%) in its athletic conference.

Larger Economic Context

All of these referenda attempts were occurring within an economic context of national and statewide turmoil. Some of the economic challenges were:

- subprime mortgages mushroomed home foreclosures;

- financial institutions busted, with icons such as Lehman Brothers and AIG going belly up;

- a decreasing ability to loan led to a credit crunch where the government had to bail out America's lenders;

- national and Wisconsin auto makers shut down production lines;

- national and Wisconsin unemployment hit 30-year record highs the Dow Jones Industrial Average stock index saw a 40% drop, deflating workers' retirement accounts; and

- scandals from Bernard Madoff swindling billions in a Ponzi scheme to the heads of the car companies flying in private jets to AIG executives attending lavish retreats were discussed throughout the media.

Everyone already knew it, but the National Bureau of Economic Research officially stated on December 1, 2008, that a national recession had begun in December 2007.

Amid this economic turmoil, an increasing amount of money was still needed to meet the technological and ever-changing classroom, and the Wisconsin referenda continued to be an important educational issue. The research on school district referenda indicates many key factors, such as school district characteristics, election characteristics, voter demographic characteristics, voter psychological characteristics, informational factors, and political characteristics. But it is clear that school districts have no single method of putting together a referendum campaign, and school district financing is similar to that of previous decades.

Methodology

The purpose of applying a case study is to explain, describe, illustrate, and enlighten (Yin, 2009). In terms of the technical characteristics of this study, a case study inquiry will be used. The phenomenon relied on multiple and converging sources of evidence and benefited from past theoretical propositions to cope with the technically distinctive situation where there are many more variables than data points (Yin, 2009). The number and complexity of variables involved in understanding the characteristics in a school district that held two failed referenda campaigns and then succeeded in a campaign are so great that a case study inquiry is needed. This case study builds on multiple sources of evidence, which will be collected through internal district documents, external community documents, archival records, and one-on-one focused interviews.

This study considered the political and economic realities of the time period and explored the communications used through all three referenda. The study took a qualitative case study approach to examine, explore, and understand school referenda. This study took a wider view of a district that experienced three referenda in three years and presented a comprehensive picture of the processes that the district went through. The Erie district provided a rare opportunity to examine the process in both failed and successful bond referenda with the active participants such as the school district superintendent, the local print media reporter, a school consultant, and pro-referenda activists staying relatively constant and available to provide their perspectives. All of these factors together provided an exceptional opportunity to comprehensively examine the referendum process.

While studying and analyzing information and propositions throughout this study, there was some common and recurring language. A bond is considered "a written promise, generally under seal, to pay a specified sum of money, called the face value, at a fixed time in the future, called the date of maturity, and carrying interest at a fixed rate, usually payable periodically" (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2008, para. 25). A school bond referendum is when registered voters of a school district decide whether the school is permitted to complete a sale of bonds for school facility needs, for which the taxpayers are financially responsible. A school district passes a school bond referendum when a majority of registered voters within a school district vote for permitting a sale of bonds for school facility needs rather than against it. Conversely, a school bond referendum fails when fewer registered voters within a school district vote for permitting a sale of bonds for school facility needs rather than against it.

Limitations of This Study

   The time period of this study was during a unique economic era, which may limit the study's generalizability. Because the referenda studied took place between 2008 and 2010, the interviewees were in the position of looking at the past experiences through a uniquely current economic lens. September 2008 marked the beginning of one of the worst financial crises in the United States since the Great Depression (Bernard, 2010). Thus, this study may have had different results if it had been conducted before 2008. Furthermore, experiences that occurred after the referenda may have caused the same participants to have different responses to the questions being posed. Thus, this study is not generalizable over time.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

My study of the Wisconsin school bond referenda process used the comprehensive characteristics that Piele and Hall used in 1973 to summarize and analyze research on school district bond referenda. Their book titled *Budgets, Bonds, and Ballots* was more than the usual bibliographical essay; it prompted a serious reassessment of the social mythology of local control of education. In the preface, Piele and Hall (1973) write: "This book summarizes and analyzes more than a decade of empirical research on voting in school financial elections…The material we have reviewed consists of more than 100 research reports from several academic disciplines and employs a wide variety of techniques and methods" (N.P.). Piele and Hall intended to "systematically and objectively catalogue the findings from a significant body of literature…[and] evaluate the findings and relate them to each other" (N.P.). When presenting the research findings and propositions, they were forced to inventory, classify, catalogue, and evaluate; the result was the creation of a framework that has been referred to and utilized by financial election researchers for nearly 40 years (Lifto & Senden, 2010).

"The research of Philip Piele and John Hall, completed 35 years ago, still provide the foundation for many contemporary dissertations and scholarly works on this topic [educational referenda process]" (Lifto & Senden, 2010). Many authors build on Piele and Hall's "magastudy", taking bond referenda researcher forward into today's world (Lifto & Senden, 2010). Piele and Hall (1973) organized the factors and characteristics that affect bond referenda into three determinants:

- o Environmental determinants composed of school district characteristics, election
  characteristics, information flow, communication, and campaign techniques
- o Socioeconomic determinants composed of economic determinants and social
  determinants
- o Psychological determinants composed of partisan and nonpartisan attitudes and
  attitudes toward taxes, community, government and school officials, and conflict

The factors and characteristics taken into account by Piele and Hall were comprehensive and evaluated an exhaustive and expansive amount of literature associated with school financial elections. More recent research such as Lifto and Senden (2010), Godown (2011), Lambert (2012), Gong (2012), O'Connor (2011), and Werner (2012) has investigated various parts of the three determinants in depth and indicates that bond referenda are more complicated in today's world, but the findings continue to note the comprehensive categories. Thus, this study related recent literature to the three comprehensive categories identified nearly four decades ago by Piele and Hall. Many recent studies informed my investigation of the possible factors and characteristics that affect school bond referenda. By using the Piele and Hall's framework, this study was able to work from a common vocabulary when creating and implementing research, which perpetuated consistency and control for researchers working in the field of school bond referenda.

Environmental Determinants

School district characteristics. Research has identified some school district characteristics that affect bond issues: the district superintendent, the district school board, the

bond's tax implications, and the community type. The district superintendent plays a vital role in any school bond measure. Hockersmith (2001) affirmed that the superintendent plays a major role in communicating the need for the bond issue before and during the campaign. Mobley (2007), while studying rural school districts in Mississippi, found that the superintendent's role as spokesperson contributed to the failure of school bond elections. Edward D. Lifto (1995) studied four public school districts in the St. Paul and Minneapolis area. He randomly selected two districts that were successful in passing bond referenda and two districts that were unsuccessful. Quality relationships between the superintendent and the school board, staff, and community affected the superintendent's involvement and perceived contributions and the perceptions of the superintendent's leadership style to be significantly influenced by the people's perception of the school district and the merits of the bond (Lifto, 1995). On the other hand, as Neill (2003) was identifying effective strategies of bond campaigns in Kansas, he found that superintendents who led successful campaigns emphasized the relationship of the bond issue to the district's educational goals.

The school board has been identified as important in the passing of school bond referenda. Charles L. Weathersby (2002) investigated 23 school districts that successfully passed bond issues in Mississippi, while in-depth analysis was completed on one rural, one municipal, and one suburban district. Weathersby (2002) suggests that school districts should give special attention to securing unanimous school board support as a strategy for passing bond issues. Mobley (2007) echoes Weathersby's findings, noting that school board support must be unanimous and strong enough that board members work together publicly to support the bond issue. In addition to helping pass school bond referenda, Faltys (2006) found, through studying

the Navasota Independent School District (Texas), that the public trust in the school board was statistically significant through a Chi-square analysis of the factors.

In terms of the tax implications of bond issues, smaller millage requests in school bond referenda are more likely to succeed (Poncelet, 1999). Hinson (2001) concurs, finding that the amount of tax increase yields a significant difference: The higher the tax rate, the less likely the bond issue is to pass. In New Jersey, Friedland's (2002) study found four variables that account for nearly half of the probability of referendum approval; of these four variables, one was referendum cost. Clemens (2003) studied seven Orange County (California) school districts and found that the perceived affordability of the bond to homeowners was the most important issue in whether the bond passed or not. More recently, Faltys (2006) ascertained that providing information to voters prior to the election on the cost of the tax increase for the average home significantly impacted the successful passage of a referendum.

The relationship between the type of community and the passage of bond referenda was examined by Ryan (2005), who studied 70 school districts in Missouri by community type. Ryan found that rural communities had the highest success rates of passing referenda (90.9% approval rate), and mixed rural communities had the lowest rate of success passing referenda (60.7% approval rate). While Ryan found no significant relationships between community type and levy amount, significant relationships were discovered between the levy outcome and the district enrollment in small rural communities and in older growing suburban communities. Jeannie M. Henry (1987) analyzed the South Carolina School Board Association's analysis of 42 referenda campaigns from 1973 to 1986. The analysis discussed attributes of school districts and bond size in passing and failing of bond referenda. Smaller school districts fare better, school districts with

16

fewer registered voters won more often, and smaller bond issues led to more success in passing the referenda.

      Election characteristics. Some research has demonstrated that certain election characteristics influence the passing or failure of school bond referenda. Poncelet (1999) examined empirical correlations of successful and unsuccessful financial referenda in Ohio school districts and found that election type, issue type, mills, and region (degree of urbanization, poverty level, socioeconomic status, and size) seem to be determining factors in school bond passage. Election type, issue type and mills correctly predict 62% of referenda outcomes. Poncelet (1999) also found that emergency and limited operating levies are more likely to succeed than bond issues. Poncelet (1999) found less consistently that the rate of passing is highest in primary election years, followed by general election years; special election years were associated with the lowest rates of passing of school district bond referenda. Hinson (2001) found that the time of year yielded significant differences in the passing and failing rate of school district bond referenda from surveying the superintendents of all Missouri school districts that had bond issues on the ballot between 1995-1998 and examined archival data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

      Beckham (2001) examined the influence of technology inclusion in determining outcomes of school bond issues in Oklahoma and found that the percentage of technology funding in bond issues was significant. When the technology funding percentage increased, the affirmative voting percentage increased. Two factors emerged as significant when a logistic regression was performed to identify predictors of the outcomes of school bond referenda: the percentage of technology funding in bond issues and the fiscal year of the bond election. When

17

using frequencies to calculate the odds ratio of the percentage of technology funding, it was

found that as technology funding increased in a bond issue, the chances of election success

increased. Beckham (2001) concluded that the odds of a bond issue passing were almost six

times greater if the bond issue contained at least some funding for technology compared to a

bond issue with no technology funding.

Clemens's (2003) research indicates that we should pay close attention to legislation and

state practices surrounding bond referenda procedures. Clemens found that an overriding issue in

the success of bond elections was the use of the 55% super-majority passing rate allowed at the

time under California legislation. Although my study takes place in Wisconsin and does not

occur in the same legislative context, some legislation surrounding Wisconsin school referenda

may affect the outcomes of elections. Ryan (2005) found no significant relationships between the

numbers of referenda on the district ballot, but Faltys (2006) determined that detailed

information on bond plans and the opportunity to vote on more than one proposition were pre-

election factors leading to successful passage.

Researchers indicate that successful bond referenda have a prerequisite of a researched

strategy. Lifto (1995) distinguished between pre-election strategies, policy strategies, political

strategies, organizational strategies, and communication strategies and determined that all should

be in place prior to and during a bond campaign. A strategy discussed by Theobold and Meier

(2002) is utilizing the knowledge of the districts uncontrollable factors. Utilizing a

comprehensive planned campaign strategy is necessary for success in a school finance election

(Lifto & Senden, 2010; Weatherby, 2002). School districts should research voter history to

anticipate the total number of yes votes needed and ensure that many yes votes go to the poll

(Cannon & Cannon, 1997; Lifto & Senden, 2010). Every school district has particular strategies that are useful in pursuing a school bond referendum. It is important for each school district to research and seek out those particular strategies.

Information factors. By far the most researched characteristics regarding school district bond referenda in the last 10 years are information factors. Noted throughout the research are committee contribution, communication emphasis, promoting needs in a positive manner, use of a bond consultant, registering voters, and leadership interaction characteristics. Lifto and Senden (2004) encourage school district leaders to become students of sound research and successful practices involved in passing bond referenda. In 2010, Lifto and Senden again pushed leaders to understand that winning bond campaigns utilize research-based strategies to a greater extent and in a more effective manner. In a sense, Lifto and Senden ask: How can you use the correct strategy without knowing what all the strategies are?

A key idea discussed by Nunnery and Kimbrough (1971) is the use of a team approach in planning. School elections are so complex and expansive that a team approach is a prerequisite, not a luxury. Some examples of team members that may be sought after are political specialists, organizers, communication specialists, and campaign planners. An election campaign needs educators, lay citizens, and staff members to take a team approach with the school leaders and specialists in order to achieve success. These community partners and players are important, and relationships should be developed early (Brazier, 2009). Geurink (2006) studied the passing of school district finance referendum in Wisconsin and found an overwhelming need to use an advisory committee to provide leadership in promoting the project. Pappalardo (2005) found similar results when studying the strategies used by superintendents, chief business officials, and

school board members in 10 school districts that had held successful general bond elections. Pappalardo suggested an important campaign strategy was the use of an oversight committee. All of the districts that Clemens (2003) studied had provided a year-round public relations and information effort and the bond committee had hired a bond consultant to organize and run the campaigns, emphasizing the importance of the role of the bond committee. Hinson (2001) noted that the length of the campaign and the use of a local campaign committee yielded significant differences in passing or failing of school district bond referenda.

Some noteworthy informational factors that affect the passing of school district referenda were registration of voters and leadership participation. Pappalardo (2005) suggested that registering voters is an important campaign strategy that should be utilized. Hockersmith (2001) found that the most effective strategies for success were registration of voters and vote by mail. To succeed, the district and committee must identify voters who support the bond and make sure that they vote (Lode, 1999). According to Lifto and Senden (2004), a voter file with key details about voters, parents, preschool families, and past supporters is a powerful tool when planning, canvassing, targeting, and utilizing get-out-the-vote strategies. By combining data on past voter participation with current voter files, campaign leaders can predict future voting behaviors (Lifto & Senden, 2004). Demographic mapping involves combining current census data and registered voter and parent data found in the voter file to create a useful display of information, which allows school and volunteer leaders to understand the school district and strategically plan and execute the campaign.

Communication. The importance of communication with the community is discussed throughout the literature. "Communication is instrumental in the passage of a construction bond

election" (Florence, 2014, p. i). In an increasingly complex and information-driven society, communication between the school district and the public is essential to maintaining the public's trust in schools, outlining important issues to tax payers, and informing voters of school budgets (Knight, 2013). Some factors influencing the passing of school bond referenda were strong internal and external communication and effective use of mass media (Lode, 1999). Continuous and effective communication creates a favorable climate for future referenda (Henry, 1987; Holt, 1993). Ongoing and targeted communication encourages development of a comprehensive election plan (Lifto & Senden, 2010). Communication theory and practice is one of two aspects that establish the base from which all the work surrounding a construction bond election must be framed (Florence, 2014).

Linda Florence (2014) was able to test a handbook for superintendents in strategies and practices that assist in passing bond referenda. The handbook outlined foundation is teaching and learning connection, evaluating school community relationships, garnering support, creating the communication plan, enlist key community leaders, develop and publish the long-range facilities plan, identify construction projects and costs, conduct a survey, select consultants, develop bond calendar, create campaign literature and organize activities, communicate with media, and utilize contemporary marketing strategies (Florence, 2014). One of the most crucial aspects that needed to be added into the handbook after field testing was communication theory and practice. Florence (2014) discusses formal and informal communication, one-way and two-way communication, communication with internal and external publics, and communication as a leadership skill. After field testing the handbook, communication was added to and revised due to its significance.

There is an overwhelming need to use effective communication with the community; this is central to success (Geurink, 2006; Barin, Gallagher & Moore, 2010). Effective communication is vital, but understanding the lack of communication can also be critical in leading to failed bond referenda. As described by Bagin et al. (2008): "If a school district does not maintain ongoing and clear communications with its parents and taxpayers on finance and budget issues, confusion and distrust can develop" (p. 297). While school districts often incorporate strategies and timelines for communicating with the community in their communication plans, sometimes over looked are the internal communications. Internal communications are extremely important and lead to an improved district's image in the community and will lead to gaining support of constituents in a bond referenda attempt (Bagin et al., 2010).

With a less welcoming political environment toward bond requests today, school districts have to find ways of selling their bond attempt, making sure to begin years before asking, communicating and cultivating the vision and need for a facility investment is a must (Stover, 2012). According to Pappalardo (2005), phone banking (a form of community communication) was the communication strategy that yielded the highest average effectiveness rating. Lifto and Senden (2004) discuss utilizing a community survey to align the community's values for spending and the district's needs. Lifto and Senden (2004) suggest administering a 12 to14 minute survey to a random sample of registered voters who are drawn from the voter file. This survey will provide the school district vital information necessary for understanding the community's opinion and support. Lode's (1999) analysis of two school districts in Iowa that were successful and two that were unsuccessful emphasized the importance of an organized,

participatory, and well-represented group of community members that promoted the school bond measure.

Superintendents who led successful campaigns emphasized communication with the community (Neill, 2003). Superintendents who led unsuccessful campaigns used fewer communication strategies and placed greater emphasis on reaching all stakeholders through door-to-door campaigning and telephone campaigns; they were less likely to conduct letters-to-the-editor campaigns and develop media support, which are important communication methods (Neill, 2003). Ongoing and targeted communication encourages the school district to go past developing a compelling message that is directed toward voters prior to elections and rather engage in high-quality ongoing communication throughout the year (Lifto & Senden, 2004). A successful campaign utilizes ongoing communication to develop understanding of core and subordinate messages, then targets the messages to the appropriate audiences (Lifto & Senden, 2004). Again, utilizing prior elements such as a voter file and cross-tabulated results from a community survey allows an effective communication strategy to be planned and executed (Lifto & Senden, 2004).

Weathersby (2002) indicates that school districts should pay close attention to and utilize unpaid media coverage for community communication, noting that the most significant strategy is involving the community and especially parent-teacher organizations-in assessing, planning, and promoting the school bond issue. Kinsall (2000) found that only one election campaign strategy, door-to-door canvassing and literature distribution, significantly affected bond issue success. George Cannon, district superintendent, and Peg Cannon, volunteer coordinator, successfully passed a $59 million property tax package for school renovations in Monroe,

Louisiana. The district had not passed a major tax proposal for 24 years. The authors purport that school bond "campaigns are an exercise in communications, with equal emphasis on listening to your constituents and then developing and presenting your message" (1997, p. 35).

A common form of communication that was found in various studies and articles was media involvement. Effective use of media is an influential factor in passing school bond referenda (Lode, 1999). Encouraging media presentations and utilizing media coverage are important in developing and executing a school bond campaign (Polka, 1993; Weathersby, 2002). Conferring with mass media personnel leads to a better understanding of public opinion (Nunnery & Kimbrough, 1971). Meetings with journalists to discuss the direction of the district and the community's role can create valuable positive promotional messages and media coverage about the school district (Cannon & Cannon, 1997). Knight (2013) showed that the employment of public relationship personnel is fundamental to the open, clear, and concise communication between the school district and the public. Media coverage is identified through the literature as an excellent tool for communicating with the public.

Campaign techniques. Researchers have noted an overwhelming need to remain positive throughout the campaign to ensure passing of a bond referendum, regardless of the opposition involved (Geurink, 2006). This can be difficult while discussing the needs of a school district. While the opposition may not be persuaded to change its opinions, supporters and undecided voters need to be targeted in order to succeed (Henry, 1987). Securing feedback to identify the community's stress points and perceptions are key components in building a strong bond campaign (Nunnery & Kimbrough, 1971; Polka, 1993). A pre-election factor that can lead to success is individual campus activities promoting needs (Faltys, 2006). Districts should

conduct a needs assessment to pass bond issues (Weathersby, 2002). Most districts that succeed at passing a general obligation bond election develop a detailed, site-specific, budgeted list of projects that would be implemented as a result of a successful bond passage (Hockersmit, 2001). Furthermore, three campaign strategies positively affect passing a bond referenda: it is focused on the benefits to the children of the community, influential participation occurs on the advisory committee, and concerted attempt to get the "yes" voters to the poll (Stauffacher, 2012).

The facility needs often times are the foundation of curricular or instructional needs. For example, a school must have up-to-date science classrooms to implement up-to-date science curriculum and instruction. Furthermore, federal mandated programs such as special education are unable to be fully integrated without up-to-date facilities. All too often, special education programing takes place in an isolated location of the school, often the only handicap accessible location in the building. In order to bring forward best practices surrounding special education service which takes place in all of the school classrooms, facilities will have to support all locations (Capper & Frattura, 2008). Explaining district needs while staying positive leads to a successful school campaign (Geurink, 2006).

Nick A. Theobold and Kenneth J. Meier (2002) examined 695 successful school bond elections in Texas between 1997 and 2001. Theobold and Meier (2002) extrapolate that, "bond elections are sensitive to needs, costs, resources, and measures of self-interest" (p. 12). In order to pass school bonds, there must be a need for the school district to attain a willingness to pay for the production of public goods (Theobold & Meier, 2002). It is important to have a clear and purposeful vision when attempting to win a bond election (Brazier, 2009).

Many researchers found a positive correlation between the utilization of a consultant and the passing of bond issues. Consultants can provide valuable services to a school district, offering expertise and guidance in get-out-the-vote strategies, fundraising, budgets, and print materials (Pappalardo, 2005). Hockersmit (2001) found that the use of a campaign consultant was one of the most effective tactics for conducting successful bond elections. Conversely, two researchers did not find a positive correlation between the use of a consultant and successful passing of school district referenda. Schrom (2004) described the case of a bond election consultant who initiated a district's use of marketing in a generic, symbolic manner with little use of data to inform decisions on campaign strategies. This caused a significant loss of resources, such as money, people, and time. In another study, the use of a public relations firm was beneficial, but so few districts use them that Hinson (2001) could not deem this a significant factor.

Individuality is discussed by various researchers and is seen as a needed perspective in school election campaigns. Individuality takes the form of the district's uncontrollable factors, such as student involvement, timelines, voting behaviors, personnel activities, bond rationale, tax rate, and special interest groups and others (Greig, 1991; Holt, 1993; Lifto & Senden, 2004; Mancini, 1987; Polka, 1993). Smaller school districts fare better because they have the ability to examine the individualized alternative strategies (Henry, 1987; Nunnery & Kimbrough, 1971). No single election strategy explains the passing or failure of a school bond, but successful attributes are universal and failures are not (Holt, 1993; Nehls, 1991). While research as part of the comprehensive campaign planning is necessary (Lifto & Senden, 2004), every district will have to cater its actions to the district's particular circumstances.

Socioeconomic Determinants

Even though recent research on school bond referenda has not focused on voter demographic characteristics, they have been explored in some studies. Poncelet (1999) found that district typology seemed to be a determining factor in the passing or failure of bond referenda. Typology was defined as the district's urbanization, socio-economic status, poverty level, and size as it relates to election outcome, issue type, millage amount requested, and region. Kinsall (2000) interestingly found that the socioeconomic level of a community served by a school district had no significant effect on school bond election success. Schrom (2004) found that external forces such as patriotism and civic duty were important factors in determining the school bond outcome; in fact, patriotism and civic duty superseded marketing efforts. Faltys (2006) found that currently having children in the school district was a significant demographic variable increasing success in bond referenda. Linette P. Fox and Thomas B. Priest (2005) examined support for school bonds among minority group members in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. According to Fox and Priest, although self-interest is often utilized to explain voter policy choices in school financing, such as parenthood or children in the school being used as measurements of self-interest, it was not found to be related to support for bonds.

Various socioeconomic conditions lead to a greater need for school financial elections. A factor discussed by some researchers was the need-based perspective of school bond referenda. A comprehensive understanding of the community's needs gained through conducting a needs assessment will lead to greater community involvement and support (Holt, 1993; Weathersby, 2002). Community involvement will naturally flow out of the community's perceived needs because bond elections are sensitive to the community's needs (Greig, 1991; Theobold & Meier,

2002). Research indicates that communities are more likely to support a referendum if they perceive a real need for the school bond.

While Robert Nehls (1991) was studying why some California public school district bonds between 1983 and 1990 passed and others failed, the overall conclusion was that no single election strategy explained the passing or failing of a bond measure. Other findings indicated that school bond referenda were more likely to pass if the community determined the dollar amount of the bond rather than the architectural calculations (Nehls, 1991). Nehls argued that substantiation of the need for the bond and community surveys predicted success of school bond measures. Planning campaign strategies, such as a positive public relations program that makes an effort to avoid organized opposition is helpful, but every community must be seen as unique and thus will adopt a unique planning and campaigning design (Nehls, 1991).

Psychological Determinants

Conflict. Voters' overall satisfaction with the school district does not predict the outcome of bond issues (Lifto, 1995). Research warns that organized opposition has a significant negative impact on the outcome of bond elections (Mobley, 2007). Identification of citizens' opinions toward the proposal through a formal or informal survey or poll is vital prior to an election, because "community conflict is a barrier to bond election success" (Lifto, 1995, p. 265). Bond opposition used media and created strong controversy surrounding bond elections (Mobley, 2007). In Friedland's (2002) study, four variables account for nearly half of the probability of referenda approval, and two of them are voter psychological characteristics and political

characteristics: successful elections were more likely in districts without organized opposition and with parent support (Friedland, 2002).

Community. By far the most common factor for passing school bond referenda is community involvement. Establishing a grassroots effort of meaningful community involvement provides the crucial ownership and commitment needed by the community to be successful in a school referendum campaign (Cannon & Cannon, 1997; Greig, 1991; Lifto & Senden, 2004; Polka, 1993). School districts must utilize community members such as neighbors and friends who are major influences in the vote (Henry, 1987; Nunnery & Kimbrough, 1971). Involving the community in assessing (community surveys), planning (citizen committees), and promoting (community meetings and mailings) school bond issues is imperative in passing a school bond (Lifto & Senden, 2004; Lode, 1995; Mancini, 1987; Weathersby, 2002). Garnering the public view through building a pyramid of community involvement, having the public determine the bond dollar amount, and surveying their perceptions of the school district and the merit of the bond are paramount to successful bond campaigns (Lifto, 1995; Nehls, 1991). Understanding the needs of the community, which come directly from the community, must happen for success (Holt, 1993). Furthermore, a school district must bring the community into the decision-making process, deciding the tax package that is needed (Cannon & Cannon, 1997).

Another key idea urged by Nunnery and Kimbrough (1971) is a broad base of citizen involvement. Community involvement is a function of the community's knowledge of school needs and problems. Broad citizen participation is encouraged because neighbors and friends are a major influence in voter decision-making. Citizen involvement should start promptly with citizen aid in deciding the proposal to be presented and continuing through the actual vote.

29

Nunnery and Kimbrough (1971) note that community involvement cannot occur just prior to the election process and dissipate after the election; it is continuous and merely intensifies in a given direction during the election process.

Walter S. Polka (1993), the assistant superintendent of a suburban school district in New York, outlined the plans and techniques to effectively establish a communication system between the school and community that facilitate a successful bond election. After losing two bond referenda in 1989 and 1990, the election campaign process was modified and went on to win 1,166 yes votes to 607 no votes in 1991. After winning, Polka encouraged others involved in passing bond referenda to follow 10 guidelines: (1) develop a networking system, encouraging commitment in as many people as possible; (2) provide meaningful community involvement, developing ownership of the content and the process; (3) enable constant feedback to identify the community's stress points; (4) spotlight the advisors, making sure the community knows that the advisors are community members who truly believe that there is a need; (5) encourage as much media presentation as possible; (6) establish a timeline of activities and ensure that everyone follows them; (7) ensure that the district brochure is informative, attractive, and has a consistent message; (8) pick a well-established festive date for the election; (9) solicit involvement from other groups to develop and orchestrate the day of the vote program; and (10) involve a broad spectrum of student activities, from the orchestra and band to an art and dance display.

The likelihood of a successful outcome of school bond referenda increases with having a public relations program that has ongoing communication (Lifto, 1995). The degree of citizen and interest group support was highly rated as a factor influencing the outcome of bond referenda (Pappalardo, 2005). School districts must utilize as many members of the community

30

as possible, specifically community groups and school personnel (Henry, 1987). "Perhaps most importantly, it's vital to deal with the public honestly and fairly, presenting them with sufficient amounts of factual information" (Henry, 1987, p. 27).

David Mancini (1987) analyzed 133 Ohio school districts to estimate the variables in school referenda that predict a successful campaign. Successful elections are most probable if the school district establishes a citizen committee, limits the length of the campaign, appropriately finances the campaign, support from special interest groups, sways the opposition, secures governing body endorsement, and involves senior citizens (Mancini, 1987).

Carleton R. Holt (1993) analyzed two successful school districts and two unsuccessful school districts in South Dakota. Holt determined that factors in successful passing of school bond campaigns were universal, while factors leading to the failure of school bond campaigns were specific to the situation. Salient factors included an engaged citizen committee, a comprehensive understanding of the needs of the community, effective communication, personal and direct campaign activities, and appeal to the appropriate target audience (Holt, 1993).

As previously mentioned regarding voter demographic characteristics, patriotism and civic duty were important factors in determining the outcome of school bond referenda, and these factors, coupled with the long-term relationship between the community and the district, made bond passing inevitable (Schrom, 2004). Schrom notes that Buttle's definition of marketing as "mutually satisfying long-term relationships" (1996, p.1) might be better than Kotler's, "to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets to achieve instructional objectives" (1991, p.6). Careful examination of the opinions and concerns of stakeholders by the district superintendent leads to successful campaigns (Neill, 2003). Paying

attention to psychological and political characteristics also seems to be important in bond issue elections.

Government and school officials. Michael Y. Nunnery and Ralph B. Kimbrough (1971) provided key ideas to the development of winning school election campaign strategies. The first key was that school leaders and personnel must be involved in political activity, which is essential to influencing citizens in making positive school decisions. Since well-organized political activity is a necessary ingredient to educational change, school leaders must assume a major role in organizing the political movements within their districts. The traditional conception of school leaders and political activity being separate is not practical or effective today; political leadership should be continuous rather than sporadic efforts associated with intensive election campaigns.

Similarly, Sally Jo Haymann Nelson explained the dynamics in one school district that failed four referenda attempts and their eventual success. The referenda process was affected by various voter and district characteristics, but the district marketing promotions could not overcome the internal politics of the district (Nelson, 1998). The district only went on to win when they were able to ameliorate the long standing community dissatisfaction with fiscal policy, closed schools, and the perception that there was a lack of integrity of the school board and administration.

A common theme throughout the literature is the importance of public officials. While the specific public official varies, the literature agrees that a positive outlook and the involvement of public officials aid in the successful passing of a school referendum. Securing a government body endorsement such as school board members and district superintendents is

critical to passing school referenda (Fox & Priest, 2005; Mancini, 1987). Unanimous school board support and strong superintendent involvement are argued to be key components of a strategic referendum campaign (Lifto, 1995; Weathersby, 2002). School leaders and teachers are often overlooked as public officials, but they are necessary to a successful school bond measure and should be involved in the process (Nunnery & Kimbrough, 1971; Theobold & Meier, 2002).

Superintendent leadership was seen throughout the literature as critical to the success of school district bond issues. Fox and Priest (2005) argue that trust in public officials, such as school board members and the district superintendent, is critical in voter policy choices, such as school bonds. Superintendents who led successful campaigns emphasized communication with the community and targeted stakeholders who had a vested interest in the issue surrounding the bond (Neill, 2003). They placed their limited resources into providing information to district stakeholders who were interested in the issue and who had a higher probability of voting (Neill, 2003). Districts should devote extra attention to involving community leaders (Weathersby, 2002). Overall, the research demonstrated that school districts should pay close attention to information factors.

Types of Referenda Research

There are studies that survey or examine many districts in a region or state. For example Stauffacher (2012), Nelhs (1991), Fox & Priest (2005), Neill (2003), Hinson (2001), Kinsall (2000), Friedland (2002), Brazier (2009), Kraus (2009), Godown (2011), Gong (2012), Lambert (2012), Knight (2013), Florence (2014), Packer (2013) examine many school districts. While the case study literature documents a series of different factors that are responsible for the success or

failure of school bond referenda attempts, typically, these studies have focused on successful cases. For example, Werner (2012), Cannon & Cannon (1997), Weathersby (2002), Theobold & Meier (2002), Hockersmith (2001) and Bohrer (1998), Pappalardo (2005), O'connor (2011), looked at successful referenda cases. Very few case studies look at what we can learn from failed referenda, only Mobley (2007) and Russo (2010). There are few studies such as; Holt (1993), Lifto (1995), and Lode (1999) that have examined cases that have had both failure and success; furthermore, they research different district with different contexts. There is only a few studies that examined the same district both passing and failing bond referenda; these are Polka (1993), Nelson (1998) and Faltys (2006). While the focus on multiple cases has certain advantages such as being able to look across cases for similarities, the result is that they present discrepancies since the contexts of the cases are so dissimilar. Therefore, in this study, I focused on a single district over time to examine both failure and success, so that it serves as an exemplar for stakeholders and researchers who are interested in finding the factors that can lead to success despite previous failed attempts.

The existing literature looks at environmental, socio-economic, and psychological factors (Piele and Hall, 1973). However, the meta-analysis by Piele & Hall (1973) and Lifto & Senden (2010) relies on other researchers and their multiple cases at different time periods, different sites, and different contexts. This study contributes to the literature by providing a case that has relative consistency in terms of context, major participants, and community over a period of time.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative research is a fixed activity that unearths the observer and their world through making a set of interpretive and material practices visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2010). These practices transform the world and turn the world into a series of representations of people's documentations and expressions of their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2010). Qualitative research in the high levels of university research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach. Qualitative case study research occurs by studying things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of them in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2010).

Almost all of the research on factors that influence school bond referenda were multiple-case designs to analyze multiple places, such as schools or districts at one point in time, such as in one given year. This type of research allows for time and the general environment to be held relatively constant while examining replicable or rival cases. However, this forces the limitation of having a great amount of variation from school to school or district to district. The school district context matters; aspects such as city population, district's educational composition, comparative wealth, type of city (rural, urban, suburban), and workforce make-up can make a difference in voter turnout and the referenda process. The many factors and characteristics that influence school bond referenda is one reason this study chose a single school district that lost two referenda and succeeded in passing a similar referendum, warranting a single qualitative

case study inquiry design. Such a design provided the opportunity to explore how this school district made its journey from failing two attempts to pass school bond referenda to passing a referendum.

This study took into account the previous propositions found in the literature when conducting and analyzing the data. The study supports the current literature propositions and fosters new propositions. The common factors that were exposed as important to passing a school bond referendum were: school district characteristics (superintendent, school board, tax implications, and community type); election characteristics (election type, inclusion of technology, and current state legislation); voter demographic characteristics (typology, socioeconomic level, patriotism, having school-aged children in the district); information factors (a positive outlook, a needs-based perspective, the use of consultants, committee work, effective communication, leadership, and registering voters); and voter psychological and political characteristics (overall satisfaction and citizen and interest groups).

While this study paid close attention to these propositions throughout the data collection and analysis, new propositions were exposed during the study due to the qualitative in-depth design of the research. Historically, in a positivist paradigm the format for propositional knowledge is theory or testable hypotheses. The object of seeking knowledge is theory development, and the theory provides for prediction and control (Lincoln, 2010). The case study inquiry that was used in this study had a goal of deepening understanding of a phenomenon or a case with no prediction or control needed.

Qualitative research is interpretive, critical, and political. Interpretive is an interactive process shaped by the researcher's and the participants' personal history, gender, social class,

36

race, and ethnicity; Critical refers to understanding the dialectical and hermeneutic nature of interdisciplinary inquiry that prevents keeping previously separated traditional disciplines apart. Lastly, political is to say that science is power; all research has political implications, thus, there is no value-free science. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2010)

Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao (2004a) state that a case study refers to researching a small number of cases (sometimes only one) in considerable depth. Lewis-Beck and colleagues further note that the aim of a case study is to capture the uniqueness of a case rather than advancing empirical or theoretical conclusions. Thus, it is often argued that case studies have an inductive orientation. Robert K. Yin (2009) outlines the relevant situations for case study. The case study answers the how or why form of the research question, requires no control of behavioral events, and focuses on contemporary events. This investigation was a relevant situation for a case study, because it: explores one Wisconsin school district in depth; aims to explore the context, moment, and participants involved in the referenda process; did not have control over the referenda events; and was contemporary.

Robert E. Stake (1995) distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. If the study is being undertaken because there is a need to learn about a particular case and not to further learning about other cases or about a general problem, then the case study is intrinsic. On the other hand, an instrumental case study is about a particular case that provides general understanding or insight into a research question. Instrumental case studies are performed to understand something other than the particular case. The intent of this study was intrinsic; it explored how a school district that was unsuccessful twice in the referenda process became successful. However, this study became instrumental in providing other petitioners or researchers

an in-depth analysis of how one school district that had been unsuccessful in passing school bond referenda was finally successful.

Merriam-Webster (2010) defines case study as "an intensive analysis of an individual unit [as a person or community] stressing development factors in relation to environment" (para. 1). Yin (2009) provides a more complex twofold technical definition of case study. First, a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not substantially apparent (Yin, 2009). Second, a case study inquiry manages the strictly distinctive situation where there are many more variables of interest than data points, resulting in a reliance on multiple sources of evidence, data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and is assisted from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009).

The scope of this study utilizes an empirical case study methodology to understand the contemporary phenomenon of a school district that was unsuccessful twice at passing a bond referendum and then was successful. School bond referenda are composed of real-life significant, contextual conditions, such as school district characteristics, election characteristics, voting demographics, informational factors, and psychological and political characteristics. While the boundaries between the school bond referenda and context in this study were not clearly evident, the contextual conditions were highly pertinent to the school bond referenda phenomenon. Thus, the empirical case study design allowed for the in-depth investigation of the phenomenon of a particular school district that refused to pass two school bond referenda and then successfully passed a referendum of similar value.

The technical characteristics of this study entail a case study inquiry because the school bond referenda phenomenon needs multiple and converging sources of evidence, with past literature propositions as a foundation, to explore and understand the technically distinctive situation where there were many more variables than data points. The amount and complexity of variables involved in understanding the characteristics in this school district were great enough that a case study inquiry was needed. Furthermore, qualitative modes of analysis are excellent for tracking the perspective of cultural values or actions and the directions to which they lead as they are constructed and reconstructed (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004b).

The application of a case study design explains, describes, illustrates, and enlightens (Yin, 2009). This case study explains the links between the participants' actions and the conditional factors when the Erie School District went from being unsuccessful to successful at passing school bond referenda. This case study describes the participants' perceptions of the interventions and surrounding factors that led the Erie School District to find success in passing a bond referendum in the real-life context of this community. This study illustrates certain thematic topics that emerged from the participants' descriptions and explanations of the Erie School District's bond referenda journey. Last, this case study enlightens practitioners and researchers who wish to understand more deeply this district's interventions and conditions surrounding its school bond referenda.

The case study adds to and develops analytical theory. While this single case study cannot be generalized, the consistent themes that occur through many replications of this type of case study may lead toward generalizability. In fact, scientific facts are not based on single experiments but rather on multiple sets of experiments that replicate the same phenomenon under

different conditions (Yin, 2009). Like experiments, case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions, not populations (Yin, 2009). Thus, while this case study does not expand the statistical generalization in school bond referenda, it does expand the analytical generalization. As this case study added to the research on school bond referenda, we found overlapping factors with other studies about school districts that were unsuccessful in passing bond referenda and then became successful. However, this case study does not aim to generalize other districts' experiences but rather provides an in-depth account of the experiences of one particular school district.

Data Collection

While collecting data, this study understood that data can be extensive and routinely come from multiple sources, including documents, pictures, and media (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004b). Denzin and Lincoln (2010) note the use of a variety of empirical materials; case studies, personal experiences, introspections, life stories, interviews, artifacts, cultural texts, observations, historic perspectives, and visual texts all describe moments and meaning in individuals' lives. This study committed to deploying a wide range of interconnected and interpretive practices to make the phenomenon more visible. It used multiple sources of evidence, which was collected through analysis of internal school district documents, external community documents, archival records, and one-on-one focused interviews. Access to essential evidence such as documents, records, and interviews in the district was practical due to the small size of the school district.

One type of evidence collected during this study was internal district documents. It was found that the district maintained documents and data on each referenda and the process preceding every referenda. The documents are considered internal when the producer of the document is an employee of the school district. Internal documentation was divided into two categories: individual and mass. An internal document is considered individual when it is produced by a single individual and expressed as only that person's ideas. Examples of individual internal district documents are individual e-mails, memos, and notes. An internal document is considered a mass document when it is intended to reach an audience. Examples of this type of documentation include mass e-mails, memos for wide distribution, school board minutes, and district publications. These internal documents were used to triangulate and verify the participants' interventions and perceptions.

Another type of evidence collected was external personal and communal documents. An external document is one published by a person or organization that was not employed by the school district. The document is considered personal if it is produced by a single person. Examples of external personal records are notes, e-mails, and signs. The document is considered communal when an organization or more than one person produces it. Examples of external communal documents are newspaper articles and advocate organization publications. External personal and communal documents are used to verify and triangulate participant or community interventions and perceptions.

Another type of evidence collected was archival records, such as United States census data, Department of Public Instruction referenda records, district budget and personnel records, and survey data. The archival records were a significant aspect of this study; they assisted in

constructing the context in which the referenda were unsuccessful or successful. The archival

records were used to carefully document the nature of the community, including economic data.

Creswell (2008) stated that the first step in the process of collecting qualitative data is

identifying the people you plan to study. This study conducted focused interviews with various

board members presiding during the various bond referenda attempts, including the mayor, the

district superintendent, various community members without school-age children at the time of

the referenda, a parent with children enrolled in the district during the time of the referenda, a

teacher employed by the district during the time of the bond referenda, and the high school

principal.

Due to their direct relationship with the bond referenda, this study utilized purposeful

sampling when conducting focused interviews with the mayor, the district superintendent, the

school board members, and the high school principal. However, with the community members,

parents, and teachers, the study utilized snowball sampling. The mayor, the district

superintendent, the school board members, and the high school principal were asked to

recommend community members, parents, and teachers who actively supported the referenda,

and community members, parents, and teachers who actively opposed the referenda. Any person

recommended by more than one interviewee was automatically asked to participate and be

interviewed.

A qualitative interview happens when a researcher asks a participant open-ended

questions and records their responses (Creswell, 2008). The interview protocol (see Appendix)

was generated prior to the interviews. All questions were written with simple language to ensure

maximum participant understanding. The questions were developed to gain insight about the

participants' involvement with each referendum, perception of the district's planning, relationship with the concepts and people involved, actions relevant to each referendum, perception of the community perspective, and the overall process. The questions were designed to be open ended so that concepts, ideas, and experiences would emerge through the interview. Follow-up questions were used to verify, clarify, and better understand the interviewees' responses. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed to aid in record keeping and analysis. The interviews were conducted between March 11, 2013, and December 9, 2013. Each interview participant was given a five dollar gift certificate in appreciation of his or her time.

In terms of the interviews, this study attempted to decrease interview-based qualitative studies' potential limitations during interviews with participants. Table 1 outlines the interview-based issues that this study attempted to limit.

Table 1

Interview-based Qualitative Study Potential Limitations and Remedies

Potential Interview-based Qualitative Limitation	Attempted Remedy
Interviewees offering little information	Used follow up questions
Time constrains for participants	Made sure an extra half hour was scheduled for each interview
Level of questioning not matching the informant's ability	Used simple terminology
Emotional outbursts	Held interview in the participant's suggested location for comfort

Addressing participants who do not want to be interviewed	Allowed participant to skip questions if needed and provided gift certificate for their time
Moving from the icebreaker to the interview questions	Allowed time to get to know each other and did not start recording till the questions began
Interviewees straying from questions	Reiterated questions when needed
Personal biases	Kept an open-mind about participants and there answers, gave each participant visual and oral confirmation of agreement and understanding
Memory loss	Interviewer answered factual questions posed by interviewee, such as timeline of events.

The questions and participants varied as new information emerged during data collection. As conflicting data emerged from the interviews, further interviews were conducted to determine the reason for the conflicting data. The importance of the interview evidence was determined by the number of times an interviewee mentioned the same topic. Objectivity was a point of concern in this study, because capturing participant viewpoints was difficult in practice. Various participants presented different views on different occasions. Furthermore, what was presented by the participant might have been an external gloss on the issue, not the participant's true beliefs (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004b). However, multiple, at times competing narratives on the same events helped in gaining a deeper understanding of different perspectives on the same issue.

Kidder and Judd (Yin, 2009) summarize construct validity as identifying the correct operational measurements for the concepts being studied. Yin (2009) outlines three tactics to

maintain construct validity: use of multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, and having a key informant review the draft case study report.

Qualitative research is inherently multi method; the use of multi methods and triangulation attempts to secure an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Flick, 2002). During data collection, multiple sources of evidence were used: documents, archival records, one-on-one focused interviews, and direct observations. The use of multiple sources of evidence enables the study to utilize data triangulation and convergence of evidence (Yin, 2009), thus strengthening its construct validity. Flick (2002) argues that objective reality cannot be captured and that triangulation does not provide a tool for validation but rather an alternative to validation. It is a strategy that adds rigor, breath, complexity, richness, and depth. Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (2010) assert that triangulation may not be the best image for qualitative research and that a crystal or crystallization better describes the form and process of triangulation. In either case, this study explored multiple versions of a context simultaneously to become immersed in a refracted reality.

During data collection, a chain of evidence was maintained to increase reliability and construct validity (Yin, 2009). A database was used to organize all the data and categorized according to four factors: (1) the data found, (2) the place or person providing the data, (3) the date the evidence was found, and (4) the investigator notes. Using a "database markedly increases the reliability of the entire case study" (Yin, 2009, p.119). The database reveals the actual evidence recorded and the circumstances under which it was collected, allowing the findings and summary to sufficiently cite relevant portions of the case study (Yin, 2009). The chain of evidence was maintained throughout the data collection process from the case study

interviews to the summary and findings.

The following information was maintained and given to the participants in the study. All interviewees were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Data was managed by adhering to ethical standards, including anonymity, throughout the data collection process to ensure that only named members of research teams have access to the data and the data are kept secure throughout the project (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004b). Confidentiality was strictly followed by not discussing the answers that participants provide with anyone else. All recordings and transcriptions were kept in a lock-box. The researcher was the only one with a key to the box, and only the dissertation chair and researcher were able to review the recordings and transcriptions.

Similarly, the name of the district remains confidential. Before collecting data, permission was acquired to enter the school district and school sites to obtain information from the various participants. Preliminary discussion with the superintendent rendered a positive confirmation that a study of the district and the process of the various referenda were well received. Furthermore, consent was obtained from community individuals who were not involved with the school district but were involved in the referenda. This access required multiple levels of approval from the school district superintendent, the high school principal, the teachers, the parents, and the community members. The artifacts gathered throughout the fieldwork were kept in a locked file cabinet. Furthermore, permission from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee Institutional Review Board was attained to ensure that the participants' rights are protected.

Data Analysis

The data collected (interviews and artifacts) throughout the data collection process was turned into derived text that was analyzed for their values, categories, and themes The process of moving data from description to analysis and then finally interpreting it and relating it to theory or practice are all part of the data process in this study. (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004b) This study employed qualitative data analysis, examining significant aspects of the written and oral accounts that participants presented and the articles published in the local newspaper. This study utilized qualitative data analysis techniques to bring forward the factors that participants both individually and as a collective found significant. This study used the frequency of an issue or remedy that was mentioned by a participant, the amount of emphasis a participant placed on an issue or remedy, and when more than one participant raised the same issue or remedy as an indicator of the items' significance (Creswell, 2008; Yin, 2009).

Each interview was audio taped for the purposes of recording and transcribing the interviews, so that they may be analyzed. Some participants had been paraphrased or quoted in various newspaper articles which were also utilized for the analysis. This study was able to search out key words, phrases, and components of the interviews by utilizing the transcribed documents or news articles "find" feature. The "find" feature provided the amount a word or phrase was given and the ability to go directly to the specific point in the interview or article that the word or phrase was mentioned by the participant. Utilizing this technique with each participant's responses to what was significant in each of the referenda attempts brought forth word, phrases, and components that individuals and groups of participants found significant. After frequency was obtained, to find the significance and the degree to which one issue was

considered more important than another, a thematic analysis was employed. Similar themes were grouped together, for example, perceptions around each issue were grouped together for analysis. Interview questions were arranged in a manner to elicit the significant aspects of each referendum attempt, such as opposition to, proponents of, and their perspective on what went wrong or what went right (see Appendix).

A preliminary exploratory analysis was performed to obtain a general sense of the data, to generate data logging ideas, preliminary organization of the data, and to consider the need for more data (Creswell, 2008). The Erie newspaper provided preliminary exploration and guidance to understanding the Erie referenda process. The 179 news articles providing a timeline of events, a report of critical events of the referenda process, and some participants accounts of the events as they were happening. These articles and their content were analyzed through the literature propositions that were brought up: school district characteristics, election characteristics, communication, voter demographic characteristics, information factors, campaign techniques, economic factors, social factors, attitude towards taxes, community involvement, and school officials. This provided valuable context and start of exploration when analyzing the participants' interviews.

Analysis was performed to further understand the participants' perspectives and identify its significance. To help make sense of the data, it was divided into segments or categories. One segmentation was by referendum attempts: first referendum attempt, second referendum attempt, and third referendum attempt. This allowed the study to analyze the various referenda on their own merits. Another set of codes was 'versus' codes (Saldana, 2012) being a failing referenda or passing referenda. Versus codes allow the researcher to look at an issue through oppositional

stances. This allowed the study to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the failing Erie school bond referenda attempts and the successful school bond referendum attempt. This process allowed the study to dissect the themes relevant to specific referenda and to multiple referenda, enabling this study to develop a rich explanation for the outcome and to compare the explanation with the outcomes (Yin, 2009).

Chapter 4

The Erie Story: Exploring Reasons for Failure and Success

This case study examines one school district and its successive bond referendum processes to understand the interventions that occurred to move from failure to success. This chapter presents a background of the Erie School District, historical referenda measures, the participant involvement in the referenda process, some driving reasons behind the referenda, and the various characteristics and activities associated with each referendum.

This study examines the referenda experience of the Erie School District, starting in 2004, when a committee assembled to come up with a list of high school facility needs. The process continued and in 2006, the Erie School Board learned about the high school facility needs. Next, two failed referenda attempts took place in April 2008 and November 2008. Finally, in November 2010, Erie School District passed the third referendum attempt. The eventual passing of the referendum is significant, because the school district and community had attempted three times to pass an expensive referendum during an economic turmoil. The process can be divided into three attempts: the period from 2004 to 2008 as the first referendum attempt, 2008 as the second referendum, and 2010 as the last referendum attempt. The case study focuses on the first and third attempts in detail, since they were the most important in terms of learning about failure and eventual success in passing school bond referenda. However, in the interest of continuity and some key points that emerge in the second attempt, a less detailed snapshot is also provided in this chapter.

In order to understand the context of the referenda, it is important to be familiar with

relevant information about the Village of Erie, the Erie School District, and Erie School District's past referenda experiences.

Village of Erie

By an act of the Wisconsin State Legislature, approved on March 19, 1878, the Village of Erie was incorporated as a city. The city was divided into three wards, and provisions were made for regular elections of city officials. It took the passing of city bonds to establish electricity and water in 1893, paved roads in 1903, and sewers in 1908.

The population of Erie grew from 7,338 in 2000 to 7,973 in 2010. Most of the residents (87.4%) are high school graduates, and 18.7% have a bachelor's degree or higher. There is a 59.4% homeownership rate with a median value of $155,300 for owner-occupied housing. Erie had a 9.2% unemployment rate in 2010. The workforce is composed of 3,780 people over the age of 16 working in the following occupations: 26.1% in management, business, science, and arts; 16.5% in service; 25.4% in sales and office; 7.9% in natural resources, construction, and maintenance; and 24.2% in production, transportation, and material moving. The top three industries in Erie are manufacturing (26.3%), education/healthcare/social services (19.5%), and retail trade (15.4%). People who live below the poverty level in the district equate to 10.4%, and 12.4% are children under the age of 18 years.

Erie School District

The Erie School District encompasses an area of 94 square miles, including the city of Erie, the townships of Irvine, Emmett, Isaac, Noah, Alia, Addison, and Ethan and the Village of

Ethan (Erie School District [ESD], 2014). The school district operates five schools: three elementary schools, serving grades pre-kindergarten to grade five; one middle school, serving grades six through eight, and one high school serving grades nine through twelve (ESD, 2014).

The mission of the Erie School District is stated as follows: "The school district of Erie, in partnership with our community, provides an environment of excellence and opportunity for all students to achieve their dreams" (Erie School District, 2010). Between 2006 and 2011, enrollment increased from 1,816 students to 1,901 students. The racial/ethnic makeup of the Erie School District changed slightly over the same period. In the 2006–2007 school year, it was 87.5% Caucasian, 9.3% Hispanic, 1.8% African American, 1% American Indian, and 0.4% Asian. In the 2010–2011 school year, it was 83.1% Caucasian, 13.8% Hispanic, 1.6% African American, 0.9% American Indian, and 0.5% Asian. Students identified as having a disability remained relatively constant: 16.3% in the 2006–2007 school year and 16.7% in the 2010–2011 school year. There was a dramatic increase in economically disadvantaged students from 2006 to 2011, from 24.6% to 39.3%. The percent of Spanish speakers increased from 5% in 2006 to 7.2% in 2011. With this demographic shift, the Erie School District struggled to implement best learning and teaching practices that go along with an increase in minority and lower socioeconomic populations. This is evidenced by the fact that, according to the 2008–2009 Erie community report, the school district had the lowest attendance rate (94%), the lowest graduation rate (~92%), the lowest post-graduation college success rate (85%), and the highest dropout rate (2.41%) in its athletic conference (Erie School District, 2009).

Overseeing all operations of the Erie School District is a nine-member board of education. Board members serve three-year terms and are voted for from four areas throughout

the district (ESD, 2014). As is evident from previous election results, Erie is conservative, voting for Republican Party representatives.

According to the Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools (2010a), the Erie School District had about 1,900 students enrolled during the 2009–2010 school year. About 600 students were enrolled in Erie High School in 2009. The district has 10 administrators, 158 teachers, and about 93 support staff to provide services and education to its students (ESD, 2014). The Erie School District offers a full spectrum of services provided by 34 special education teachers, psychologists, and social workers to the students with disabilities and exceptional education needs (ESD, 2014). The Erie School District uses a program called Challenge to address the needs of students with exceptional talents. The program is directed by a teacher certified to instruct gifted and talented students (ESD, 2014).

The Erie School District boasts its commitment to community partnerships. It purports an active recreational department with continual offerings of an array of recreational and cultural activities for all ages. The district attracts a broad range of professional entertainment and several local annual stage productions through the Erie Council for the Performing Arts (ESD, 2014).

Erie High School highlights four areas of specialty: (1) Advanced Placement coursework, in which students complete college-level courses and exams to earn college credits; (2) School to Work, which provides juniors and seniors numerous career-based opportunities, including job shadowing, tours, and work experience; (3) four computer labs for large groups and individuals before, during, and after school; and (4) Distance Learning, which enables a two-way interactive audio and visual technology for instruction of courses that have a consortium of off-site instructors.

Historical Referenda Measures of the Erie School District

Since 1990, the Erie School District has brought forth relatively few measures. Historically, the district had attempted 11 measures on 6 election dates, with 1 resolution passed, 4 debt passed, 1 nonrecurring failed, and 5 debt failed. The school district has a tradition of not taking no for an answer, having asked constituents three times to fund construction of a new middle school. In October 1996, the district refused to pass a $12.7 million referendum to build a 100,000-square-foot middle school, to complete technology upgrades, and to complete building additions (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2010). In April 1997, the district refused two referenda but passed two other referenda. It refused to pass a $300,000 referendum for a new maintenance facility as well as one for a $9.5 million for a new middle school (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2010). At the same time, the district passed a technology referendum allowing completion of $2.15 million in technology improvements and a $1.985 referendum to support a library media center, technology lab, and classroom additions. After the third attempt, the district passed 15 votes for a $9.429 million referendum to build a middle school and complete elementary school upgrades (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2010). The new Erie Middle School opened its doors to students in August 2000.

In the 2009–2010 school year, the Erie School District received $11,062,160 from the state of Wisconsin, $2,134,435 from the federal government, $8,873,999 from local property taxes, and $1,383,975 from other local revenue (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2014). These funding sources combined for a total of $23,454,569 or $11,385 per pupil (see Table 2).

Comparing the Erie School District to bordering school districts indicates the relative

wealth of the Erie School District to surrounding communities. The Erie School District is surrounded by a diverse group of school districts. While Silver Strife School District, northeast of Erie, has an annual budget of $60,665,813, the Long Lake School District, directly to the north of Erie, has an annual budget of $8,159,813 (see Table 2). It is important to note that Erie School District has the lowest average household income of $50,023 and the third lowest average home value of $177,400 (see Table 2). The Erie School District spent less per pupil than 84% of the school districts in the state and had a property tax rate that was about average for the state.

Table 2

Comparative Statistics for Erie and Surrounding School Districts

	Annual Budget	Cost Per Pupil	Average Home Price	Average Annual Family Income
Silver Strife	$60,665,813	$11,913	$225,200	$76,308
Pan Prairie	$52,628,300	$12,045	$322,900	$87,586
Dry Village	$47,105,990	$11,387	$170,300	$53,397
Jenny Basin	$34,522,564	$11,893	$175,900	$55,578
Erie	$23,454,569	$11,385	$177,400	$50,023
Industry Park	$16,208,048	$11,663	$197,100	$58,315
Dove Lake	$15,614,882	$12,222	$219,500	$67,864
Gotunnel	$12,884,111	$14,192	$213,000	$59,054
Long Lake	$8,159,813	$11,405	$206,500	$65,172

In April 2008, the district refused to pass a referendum of $45.6 million to renovate and build additions for the high school. In November 2008, the district again refused to pass a $39.7 million referendum that would allow additions and renovations to the high school, including a two-story classroom, pool and gymnasium renovations and expansion, demolishing a portion of the existing high school, improving the high school grounds and track, and constructing new tennis courts (see Table 3). Interestingly, in the 2009–2010 school year, the Erie School District was successful in passing the largest referendum in the state: a $35.19 million bond referendum that allowed construction and additions to the high school, including classroom space, the cafeteria, office, gymnasium, pool, other athletic facilities, roofs; heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems; and related demolition and site improvements (see Table 3).

Table 3

Erie Bond Referenda Characteristics

Referenda	Purpose	Amount	Date	Vote Count
First Attempt	…constructing and equipping a new high school facility; demolishing a portion of the existing high school facility;	$45,600,000	April 1, 2008	For 1,417 Against 1,665

	renovating the District administrative office, auditorium and music facilities at the existing high school; and relocating and upgrading certain existing athletic fields.			
Second Attempt	…constructing and equipping additions to the existing high school including a two story classroom addition, pool and gymnasium; renovating and improving a portion of the existing high school; demolishing a portion of the existing high school; improving the high school grounds including the track; and constructing new tennis courts.	$39,700,000	November 4, 2008	For 2,660 Against 3,442
Third Attempt	…constructing and equipping additions to the high school including classrooms, cafeteria, office, gymnasium and pool; repairing, renovating and upgrading existing high school facilities including roofs, HVAC and athletic facilities; and completing related demolition and site improvements.	$35,190,000	April 6, 2010	For 1,816 Against 1,512

Note. The data in the purpose, amount, date, vote count columns are from "Custom Referenda Reports," by Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2016a. Retrieved from
https://apps5.dpi.wi.gov/sfsref/ref_Home.aspx

This case study aims to explain the links between the participants' actions in going from

one unsuccessful school bond referendum to another unsuccessful school bond referendum to a successful one. This study describes the interventions taken by the participants, illustrates specific themes that emerge from the study, and seeks to inform other school districts and researchers about a real-life context of this community. What makes this case even more interesting is that this referendum reloading occurred during a period of economic collapse in the United States. Why did the Erie community feel that this time was the best time to pass the biggest referenda in the state? The research questions that drove this study were:

- How do the participants describe their perceptions of the interventions and surrounding factors that led a school district to the failure and eventual success in passing a bond referendum in the real-life context of their community?

- What can we learn from the participants' descriptions and explanations of a school district's bond referenda journey?

Since the passing of the referenda involved people and processes as well as politics, it was important to get participant perspectives and their interpretations on their roles, responsibilities, and involvement in the referenda process. In the next section, the people involved are described.

The People Involved in the Erie Referenda Process

Understanding the people who were involved in the Erie referenda is important. It is crucial to gain the perspective of the superintendent, school board members, school staff, and community members. Research supports the importance of these participants. Hockersmith (2001), Neill (2003), and Mobley (2007) pointed out that the superintendent is instrumental in the passing or failing of a bond referendum while Weatherby (2002), Pappalardo (2005), and

Geurink (2006) identified the school board to be critical in influencing the outcome of a school bond referenda. Greig (1991), Polka (1993), Cannon and Cannon (1997), and Lifto and Senden (2004), argued that community involvement and community members are vital to the referenda process.

Given that superintendents, the school board, district staff, and community stakeholders are paramount in discussing the referenda process, Table 3 outlines the stakeholders involved in the Erie referenda process. To ensure confidentiality, all names are pseudonyms.

Table 4

People Involved in the Referendum Process

Name	Interview Date	Position	Referendum
Alex Fonds	December 10, 2013	-High school task force member -Education Done Right group member -School board member	1, 2, 3
Andy Church	June 26, 2013	High school principal	1, 2, 3

Art Linger	September 5, 2013	-School board member -High school task force member -Education Done Right group member	2, 3
Barb Peterson	Not Interviewed	School board member	3
Brad Pass	Not Interviewed	Architect	1, 2, 3
Carrie Fisher	Not Interviewed	County court clerk	1, 2, 3
Chuck Ford	Not Interviewed	School board member	1, 2
Corey Waterford	March 11, 2013	District superintendent	1, 2, 3
Flinn Rider	October 2, 2013	-Science teacher -Education Done Right group member	1, 2, 3
Frank Gates	Not Interviewed	-School board member -High school task force member	2
Heather Weeks	Not Interviewed	Communication consultant	1, 2
James Smith	Refused	School board member	1, 2, 3

Jeff Booth	Not Interviewed	Newspaper reporter	1, 2, 3
Karen Rawski	Not Interviewed	School board member	2
Mac Wilerd	March 11, 2013	Mayor	1, 2, 3
Maria Garcia	Not Interviewed	School board member	1
Mary May	March 27, 2013	Superintendent's secretary	1, 2, 3
Mike Jones	Refused	School board member	1, 2, 3
Rahem Little	November 26, 2013	High school task force member	1, 2, 3
Robert Rodriguez	Not Interviewed	School board member	1
Sara Bets	Not Interviewed	Newspaper reporter	1, 2, 3
Stacy Dirks	October 18, 2013	-School board member -High school task force member -Education Done Right group member	3
Tom Hernandez	Not Interviewed	School board member	1
William Johnson	Refused	School board member	1, 2, 3

Participants and their roles. This study garnered a wide array of viewpoints and experiences on the Erie High School referenda process: the superintendent, the superintendent's secretary, the high school principal, a teacher, three board members, and the mayor were interviewed. All the participants were also community members, and some had children in the district. While I attempted to contact all the individuals for interview and data gathering purposes, some individuals had moved or distanced themselves from the Erie School District. All the participants were also community members, and some had children in the district. Some individuals moved away from Erie Village and were not able to be reached. As a result, I was unable to reach them for an interview. Other individuals that were approached several times directly refused to participate, stating they were not interested in discussing the referenda or they did not have time for an interview. Some individuals did not respond to multiple contact inquiries asking for an interview. I restricted the number of times to approach potential participants to a maximum of 6 attempts.

To ensure a broad and balanced perspective, this study sought out and attained the perspective of a community member who was opposed to the referenda. Because research indicates the significance of the involvement of the superintendent, school board members, and community members, this study outlines the involvement of all these stakeholders. This section provides the participants' perspectives of their involvement in the referenda process.

Corey Waterford was the superintendent, and Mary May was his secretary during all three Erie School District referendum attempts. Waterford's view of his participation in the process was one of "taking the lead." He thought this was his responsibility as superintendent, and therefore, he found himself leading at both the school and the community level. Waterford

described his involvement in the referenda:

As the superintendent of schools, I felt it was my responsibility to take the lead.
Consequently, as we were working with the various groups from the community group to
school committees, whatever the case may be, I was actively involved in each committee
meeting, for all intents and purposes put together the agendas for them, and all the
documentation and the information that they needed. (March 11, 2013)

Waterford elaborated on the variety and number of meetings that he led and attended.
These included committee meetings, facility ad hoc committee meetings, and board committee
meetings. He also went out into the community and spoke at various township hall meetings,
service club meetings, and parent group meetings. He made the issues visible at every available
opportunity. As he put it, "just about anybody that would let me come and tell our story, I did"
(March 11, 2013).

Corey Waterford was supported in his efforts by another key player in the referendum
process, Mary May, the superintendent's secretary. Mary set up meetings and speaking
engagements to promote the referenda. In addition, she provided clerical assistance for task force
groups and volunteers. Mary not only worked behind the scenes with various groups and in
instrumental ways, but she was also an active member of different groups. She stated, "I was
involved in a lot of it from a clerical aspect" (March 27, 2013).

Two other district staff members who were interviewed included the Erie High School
principal and an Erie High School science teacher. Andy Church was the principal of the high
school during all three Erie School District referenda. Church stated: "The referendum
discussion had already started when I became principal in 2004. I then became a key member in

the referendum process that started right up almost immediately" (June 26, 2013). Church stated that the superintendent and he had created the facility committee and that he had been involved throughout the process.

Flinn Rider was a science teacher at Erie High School, a parent of two, and a committed member of the Education Done Right group. Rider supported the first and second referenda with yard signs in his yard, but he was much more involved on the third referendum. Rider worked hard on the third referenda campaign, noting the following: "I had been the city chairperson for the Obama campaign, although most of my friends are Republican and conservative. I'm kind of a moderate Democrat. I ran that campaign here. I had a little background" (October 2, 2013).

Three Erie school board members were deeply involved in the referenda process. Alex Fonds, Stacy Dirks, and Art Linger started as community members not affiliated with the school board. Through their involvement in referenda groups such as the facility task force, the Vote Yes group, and the Education Done Right group, they gained visibility in the community and were elected board members.

Alex Fonds was a community member and school supporter who went on to become a school board member. Fonds was involved in all three referenda attempts, but not to the same extent as Dirks and Linger. Fonds worked hard to promote the first referendum, did less on the second referendum due to his "shell shock" from the first referendum, and "jumped all over" the third referendum. Fonds was involved by raising money, hanging banners and signs, and putting up boards. Fonds became a co-chair for the task force committee. Fonds was very much behind Erie building a new school and performed several speaking engagements. As Fonds put it, "we spoke to Rotary, Kiwanis, spoke to people on the street, just really hung my flag and said, 'I

believe really strongly in this thing. We need to build a new school'" (December 10, 2013).

Stacy Dirks was another community member who went on to become a school board member as well. She started on the school's task force, was involved in the Education Done Right group, and was elected on the Erie School Board between the second and third referenda. Dirks described herself, Fonds, and Linger as the "core group" who was responsible for putting together the newsletters, coordinating the e-mail database, sending information, as well as coordinating phone banks and meeting locations. She described her involvement as follows:

> I started out with the Vote Yes group. Actually, I was in it with all three of them, which was originally formed by Alex Fonds and Art Linger. The three of us sort of started that…. We were the people on the street trying to get the information from the school district and communicate it to the community and share with them the factual information. With each of the referenda, it was kind of the core group of the three of us…. I guess you could say I was the secretary of the group, out of the three of us. Coordinating things as far as phone banks and meeting places. We would have an open meeting, town hall meeting concept to educate people. (October 18, 2013)

Dirks explained that all the community referendum work led Linger, Fonds, and herself to become board members. Whether as the school's task force member, Education Done Right secretary, or school board member, Dirks was involved by focusing on the factual information of the referenda and sharing those facts with community members.

Art Linger was a community member who went on to become president of the Erie School Board. According to Linger, during the first referenda, he attended all the open houses

65

that the school district held. He helped the school district explain to the public what was actually going to happen and helped people decipher what they were seeing on paper and what the board was presenting. During the first referendum, Linger formed the first Yes Group and was mainly in charge of the group's fund-raising. Linger explained that during the second referendum, the Yes Group was not as prevalent because they did not have time. However, for the third referendum, he was on the school board. Linger was heavily involved with the contractors and the team charged with deciding aspects of the second referenda that maybe be eliminated to decrease cost. Linger headed up the Yes Group and conducted some speaking engagements for the group at local places such as agribusiness and town hall meetings. Linger led discussions to explain what was being proposed for the $35.2 million and what the differences were from the last two times the Erie School District held a referendum. Linger was fully invested in the referenda process and the renovations to Erie High School.

The mayor during all three Erie referenda was Mac Wilerd. Wilerd signed the letter of support and scheduled and carried out a public presentation from the school district to the city council, which he stated was very well attended. Wilerd stated that having the referendum on the agenda drew a large crowd because it was considered controversial. The city council did not take any action, but a lot of city council members ultimately signed the letter of support, partly because of the presentation. Wilerd did not participate in the campaign process, but due to his position, he had discussions about it and had a pulse on the community outlook.

This study made sure to get an opposing viewpoint, seeking out at least one community member who was against the referenda. Rahem Little was a community member that sat on the task force and opposed all three referenda. Little was involved in the first one the most. Even

before the referendum, he sat on the study committee that looked at the need, the cost, and the

options. When the first referendum did not pass, Little sat on the task force that analyzed what it

would take to get it to pass the second time. He participated in the process; serving on the facility

needs study committee for more than a year. Little was in the minority, being opposed to and yet

active in the process. He recalled:

> They went around the room and got to the end of this committee and it was a vote to
>
> decide to take it to the school board. They said: "Those in favor, raise your hand to take it
>
> to the school board." Almost everybody raised their hand. Somebody said, "wait a
>
> minute, not everybody raised their hand. Those who are against it, raise your hand."
>
> Three of us raised our hands. (November 26, 2013)

While the committee had a majority in support of the high school renovations, Little

provided the perspective of others in the community that the high school was "good enough."

Driving Reasons for the Erie Referenda

Good enough versus not enough. Supporters of the referenda expressed the idea that

Erie High School needed more, or what they had in terms of facilities, athletics or academic

standards was "not enough." This group tended to see everything in Erie High School as needing

repair or restructuring. They complained that the building was not safe enough because the

facility was deteriorated. They also said that the athletic facilities were dangerous; it was

impossible to secure the facility to today's standards. They included academics within their

catalogue of deficits and said it was not academic enough because the facilities were not

sufficient to deliver up-to-date instruction. Not all participants thought the same way. Some

participants expressed that Erie High School was "good enough." They noted that the walls and floors are concrete and so the facilities are good enough; the teachers were good; and the equipment used for curriculum delivery was also good enough not to require immediate replacement.

Some participants interviewed went further and analyzed the problem from a different angle. This group argued that the deteriorating and unsafe facility, the inability to secure the facility to today's standards, the poor athletic facilities, and insufficient facilities to deliver up-to-date instruction were all true. However, noted by the mayor of Erie these issues were merely public fronts concealing the issue that the Erie School District's sustained culture of mediocrity and low standards of achievement (the good-enough mentality) were leading to a loss of students to neighboring school districts through open-enrollment. Although this group made a compelling argument that might have warranted further discussion overall, the participants ignored the deeper issue of the culture of mediocrity or how to tackle that problem. Instead, they focused on the need for better facilities in order to be competitive with neighboring school districts and attract students. This competition for students in the area was accepted as the reason and need for an up-to-date facilities and instruction.

Building safety. All participants in the study agreed that the Erie High School facility was aged and deteriorated. However, some participants, such as Corey Waterford, Stacy Dirks, and Mary May, went further by noting that the building was not safe enough because of the deterioration. Others, including Flinn Rider and Raheem Little, took somewhat of an oppositional view, attempting to downplay the importance of a new school building and expressing that the facility was good enough.

Superintendent Waterford noted that Erie High School was not doing well and even unsafe as he stated the following: "Our facilities were aged. They were outdated. I think to a certain extent, they were unsafe" (March 11, 2013). Stacy Dirks strongly expressed a viewpoint that Erie High School was alarmingly deteriorated. She recalled:

> I think the costs we were putting into the facilities to maintain them. When you look at boilers and things that you are having to replace, the roofing issue. Those are really motivating factors. But then I also think it was just it became very prominently a health and safety issue too, when you're looking at the maintenance needs of the facility, how that really.... You're like, "Gosh. Wow." When you go into the underbelly of our old school and you see how corroded things are and you just, it was alarming to be honest. There were some things that were really, really alarming that we had to fix those, and we have to figure out a way to fix it now. (October 18, 2013)

Mary May agreed with Waterford and Dirks that Erie High School was aged and unsafe. Along with the facility in general, May highlighted the athletic facilities as being the most worn down and unsafe:

> It was very apparent our facility was showing age. In several of our departments, like say our science department, was very inadequate to meet the curricular needs to deliver the instruction. The pool was in very bad shape. The athletics were impacted because of scheduling the student athletes for their practice times. You had kids here until nine o'clock at night because not everybody could get their time, gym time.
>
> The track was deteriorating, needed to be redone. The tennis courts were in really bad

shape. It was really a combination of everything. Was just apparent it was time, we

needed to do something. The more you looked at everything that needed to be done, the

bigger the project got. (March 11, 2013)

While Flinn Rider and Raheem Little agreed that Erie High School was poorly built,

contrary to Waterford, Dirks, and Mary, Rider and little thought that the building was not that

bad and was good enough. Rider stated: "I wouldn't have said it during the campaign, we could

have lived with the old building for another fifteen years" (October 2, 2013).

Little agreed that the building was poorly built, but he thought a new building was

uncalled for and that the district could make do by making some minor repairs. He stated:

The original high school was not very good quality, so it was deteriorating, not to the

point where it couldn't have been repaired. It was built in the sixties, fifty years before. I

totally agreed a new school was needed, but it's way too expensive.... It was $43 million,

and one thing they were going to do is demolish, the tech ed wing.... The bricks and

mortar, the building don't teach the kids, it's the equipment, the supplies, the teachers,

the administration, and a lot of things are involved. Parents in schools, for sure. I said:

"There's nothing wrong with a concrete floor, there's nothing wrong with concrete walls,

and the equipment in there, a lot of it is in good condition, so you're not going to destroy,

take a lift out of the floor and move it, it's a waste of time." I said: "For one thing, don't

demolish the tech ed wing; put the money in the other parts of the school and update with

heating, air conditioning, lighting, and whatever it needs, but you don't need to demolish

that whole thing." (November 26, 2013)

These points of view from those who were involved in the referendum attempts clearly demonstrate two sides of the issue: one group thought the current Erie High School facilities were lacking—there was "not enough" to attract students to the district making it vitally important and time sensitive that new facilities were approved through bond referenda processes; however, a second group of participants did not consider it urgent to renovate facilities and instead were of the opinion that the high school was "good enough." This group did not acknowledge that losing students to other neighboring school districts was a problem.

Curriculum. Some participants attested that the facility was so inadequate that an up-to-date curriculum could not be taught and an up-to-date classroom was not available. Stacy Dirks, Alex Fonds, Corey Waterford, Andy Church, and Art Linger argued that the aging and poor condition of Erie High School stood in the way of being able to implement today's high-standard curriculum, deliver best-practice instruction, and maintain security standards.

Stacy Dirks was very direct in charging curricular needs as the rationale behind the pursuit of monies to renovate the high school. She stated that in the beginning of the Erie referendum process, it was obvious that to make the high school look to the future, some critical changes were needed. She thought that the facilities were not meeting curricular needs, and her experience on the task force gave her a picture of potential for growth. Dirks demonstrated these viewpoints when she said: "say if you improved science classrooms, it would allow the teacher to teach this to the students. So we were inhibited by our facilities" (October 18, 2013).

71

Similarly, Alex Fonds also mentioned the dilapidation of Erie High School and the inadequate science facilities. He stated that it was necessary to show the community and the pro-referenda group the need to proceed with building a new structure. Fonds put forth the idea of course offerings, such as science, to retain students. He noted:

You'll have your people out there that say buildings, the walls, are what keep students here, but it definitely was part of what drove kids [to other districts], because we couldn't offer certain things. Our old facility, we were unable to hold certain science experiments because our chemistry labs weren't and our biology labs weren't conducive to the new style of learning. (December 10, 2013)

Corey Waterford corroborated Fonds and Dirk's viewpoints by linking curricular offerings to the building facilities. Waterford admitted that the facility was aged and outdated, and he relayed the importance of meeting today's curricular needs. Waterford felt that safe, secure, and up-to-date facilities would enhance students' opportunities to be successful. Waterford, along with Dirks and Fonds, noted that the Erie High School science facilities were woefully inadequate, the special education facilities were inadequate, the health and physical education facilities were being taxed to the limit, the library was limited, and the technology was limited. Waterford's view was that Erie High School did not have the facilities needed to put in place the greatest curriculum out there.

Art Linger, the school board member, agreed with Superintendent Waterford and emphasized the point that keeping students safe and facilities secure was of utmost importance and was one of the reasons for the referenda. Linger stated that one of the driving reasons for all

three referenda was that Erie High School was a 50-year-old facility that had significant problems or was going to require significant upgrades that equaled more than 50% of the building's value. Linger pointed out the need to have a building that was more suited to today's educational world, updated science labs, Wi-Fi throughout the building, better safety and security, and the ability to lock down the building. As Art put it, "all the things that you require in a modern high school today."

Andy Church, the high school principal, similarly recounted one of the reasons behind the referenda was that Erie High School was old, falling apart, and the delivery of instruction was made difficult by the facilities lack of fulfilling special education needs and classroom utilization needs. Andy conveyed the driving reason for the whole referendum was that the schools were old. Andy said that even though it was a beautiful building, almost like a Frank Lloyd Wright design, "it was falling apart at the seams, the roof was leaking, it wasn't handicap accessible, it didn't serve special education needs, it didn't allow teachers to prep in their rooms, it was a nightmare for scheduling and room utilization" (June 26, 2013).

These participants agreed that the Erie High School facility was old, deteriorating, and not meeting today's curricular needs. However, Mac Wilerd, the mayor, and Flinn Rider, the high school science teacher, maintained that for many years, low achievement expectations and little importance placed on education in the Erie community was seen as good enough. This good-enough mentality led the Erie School District to lose vital revenue through the loss of students to other school districts through open enrollment.

Mac Wilerd, as mayor, agreed that the district was losing students and revenue due to a

lack of academic rigor. Wilerd stated that the district did not want the lack of academic rigor to be publicized as the reason the Erie School District was losing students, so the district gave to the press the reason of the high school building was in need of repair or getting long in the tooth. Wilerd admitted that the building was not technologically up-to-date and had maintenance issues. He maintained that that approach would not work though, because it does not have the emotional appeal that talking about academic excellence does. However, Wilerd pointed out that the school district could not bring up the academic piece, because the board had not looked at the issue for years; academic excellence had never been on the school board agenda or seen as an issue by the school board. According to Wilerd, the district had always emphasized character education, not academic excellence. Interestingly, the school board conversation never changed from character education to academic excellence. This may have been a real barrier to success during the Erie bond referenda experience.

Wilerd lays out that consequently, this had an effect over time of diminishing academic expectations. He noted that when the Erie School Board wanted to build a new school, the community questioned the need for a new school. Everyone in Erie knew that it was just a blue-collar community and that few kids went to college. Of course, the notion that Erie did not have students going to college was according to Wilerd, "a crock of bologna," but Erie did have a culture that was developed over 10 to 15 years of low academic expectations. When it came time to pursue a referendum, Wilerd said, it felt as though all of a sudden the school district was telling the community that it needed to have the best facilities for the smartest and brightest students. When discussing this cultural disconnect, Wilerd stated:

My belief is that the reason it didn't pass right away was because you had at least 10, maybe 15 years of community cultural expectations that had been driven the other direction. And when you don't put a high emphasis on academic performance, that translates to "we don't, why do we need a $40 million palace?" (December 9, 2013)

Wilerd explained that at the same time, open enrollment became an issue. He said:

Well, they [the Erie School District] were losing—the smart kids were going to Jenny Basin [a nearby district; see Table 2], parents would send them down there. So who are the people who should be out there championing the new school? It's the parents of the really smart kids.... Hell, they don't care; they are all going to Jenny. (December 9, 2013)

In Wilerd's opinion, the issue that was not publicized or advertised but got all the parent groups, teachers, and board members mobilized was losing money from open enrollment. The Wisconsin Department of Instruction (2016b) reported the Erie School District as losing 24 students to open enrollment in 2007-2008, costing the district roughly $106,000. Rider, the science teacher concurred with Wilerd's point that open enrollment was one of the driving reasons for the referenda. Rider and Church furthered the view that parents were "shopping around" for schools, previewing facilities, and noting curriculum offerings. They claimed that there was a competitive drive for school districts to maintain the best facilities to retain or attract students.

As a parent, Rider noted that given the choice to attend any school, students would not

want to go to Erie High School. The problem, as Rider maintained, was that every district around Erie had built new schools and that if the other district had not built new facilities, Erie would have been comfy with where they were. Rider went on to report that his republican friends did not realize that when they complete open enrollment, they are promoting competition. Rider stated,

> If they build a pool, you'd better build a pool. You build an ice rink, they'll build an ice rink. So the biggest reason I think we needed to build a new school is we were starting to bleed students because of open enrollment. (October 2, 2013)

Rider made it apparent that although he did not pitch this to his neighbors during the referenda process, it was a true reason behind it. Rider explained that Jenny Basin built a new school about 12 years ago, and Erie lost some students to Jenny. With open enrollment being an option, Erie has to be great or it will lose kids to Jenny. Rider remarked that people began facing the financial reality that Erie's enrollment was going to decrease, educational costs were going to increase, and state aid to the district would decline.

Church's experience as principal at the time echoes Rider's sentiments. Church said that people do not compare Erie to Long Lake as much as they compare Erie to Jenny Basin, because Jenny is closer in size to Erie.

Overall, from the perspectives of these participants, it appeared that the move to improve facilities was tied to a way to recover loss of revenue through the loss of students to neighboring districts that had better facilities and boasted better academic performances. Although some

participants thought the facilities were "good enough," others compared their facilities to neighboring school districts' facilities and in addition, tied curricular improvement and quality of academic offerings to the type of facilities offered by Erie School District. In the end, it was the latter argument that provided the motivation for the first referendum. However, as several participants pointed out, the culture of the school district had long not emphasized academic excellence and it had its effect on the way the referendum played out.

The First Referendum Attempt (2004-2008)

To understand the opposition to the three referenda and what led to their eventual success, it is important to understand a few key components of the Erie High School facilities that would come up throughout the referenda process. The school was built in 1963, and additions were made in 1967 and 1977. The high school was 204,463 square feet on a 30-acre site. At the beginning of the referenda process, the school had a large, overbooked gymnasium; a small, insufficient practice gym; a highly deteriorated six-lane indoor pool with bleachers; and a quality auditorium outfitted with seating and support spaces that was used by the community.

In 2004, Superintendent Corey Waterford and Principal Andy Church created a committee of 40 adults who were not educators but rather were private community members to come up with a list of needed facility improvements for the high school. Educators were involved in the process via an architecture firm. In addition, the superintendent brought in an architecture firm to work with the facility group, meet with educators, complete a facility survey,

and prepare to present various options.

Waterford and Church supported teachers at the school to help them participate in the process by hiring substitutes whenever possible. Church recalled, "I would hire subs for full base, and I would tell the math department, I've got subs for you for the morning, and I'd tell the science department I've got subs for you for the afternoon." According to Church, teachers appreciated the ability to provide valuable feedback and add their needs to the assessment.

Waterford and the architects worked closely to create a thorough picture of what Erie High School needed. The committee of 40 community members, led by Waterford, met monthly, with the architecture firm sitting in on later meetings. Church remembers that the architect representative was great at asking questions, listening, and reaching a conclusion that the group was not set out to originally point out as a concern. The architect's guiding questions led teachers to provide more information than their facility needs; they also articulated their facility desires. The teachers were interviewed by the architectural team with questions such as: What do you need? What are your frustrations? Church recalled that they all wanted natural sunlight. They all wanted technologies, the SMART boards and so on. Even though natural sunlight and SMART boards were not needed for teaching and learning to occur, they were incorporated into the facility assessment. The committee was steered in a direction that led to more than a needs assessment, but also a want or wish list.

Architect report: Needs or wants. In September 2006, the Erie School Board held a special session to learn about the condition of the high school facility. Brad Pass and Karen Long, project managers at Plunkett Raysich Architects, conducted staff interviews and facility inspections and created a report for the Erie School Board (Booth, 2006). The firm presented not

only the issues that were serious but also those that some community members may have considered trivial.

Some of the serious issues included: pre-cast concrete panels in poor condition, a leaking roof, ventilation issues, and the need for 220-volt outlets. The architects graded the water heating system as an F. The boilers were more than 40 years old, surpassing their life expectancy, and the heat pumps were in poor condition and had been repaired many times. Pass stated, "You're essentially putting parts into a dinosaur" (quoted in Booth, 2006, p. 7). The natatorium HVAC was detailed to have poor ductwork and poor piping insulation; the pool mechanical space had no ventilation, which, combined with the cool, damp condition, caused severe rusting and ferrous materials; the lack of ventilation where chemicals were present was dangerous; and the pool tank had deteriorated and was unsafe.

At the same time and in the same manner, the project managers presented to the board less serious issues, things that were not life-threatening, but certainly issues that create or contribute to lack of learning. These included: poor lighting; windows in need of repair; peeling paint; interior walls that stopped at ceiling height (allowing an intruder to go from room to room through the ceiling); teacher desks and phones that were not in close proximity; locker rooms being too far from the gym; inefficient lobby space, which created congestion during gatherings; sound from music room disrupting other classrooms; an auditorium that was noisy when it rained and that needed to have riggings and the curtain replaced; a library with lighting and storage needs; a distance learning lab with space and acoustical needs; business education needing a ceiling-mounted LCD and a tiered computer lab; air compressors that presented a noise problem for other instructional areas; welding and graphics needing to be broken out; an unsafe service

drive that was used as a street; and inadequate lighting in the parking lot. All these issues directly impacted the quality of instruction and learning as they related to the degree of noise, lighting, and the degree to which community could be fostered in school through having appropriate spaces for people to gather together. These issues were pointed out in the architecture firm's report.

The architecture firm's report noted the following needs for the school's educational spaces: about 45,000 additional square feet for physical education; 3,000 more square feet for core classrooms and science rooms; 2,000 square feet for the district administration office; 2,000 square feet for the music section; more space for the cafeteria and library; 1,500 square feet for special education; and teacher support areas, which were virtually nonexistent (Booth, 2006). Because the architecture firm presented both big items and small items, some on the school board and in the community were left wondering which items were needed and which were wanted. The architecture firm did not distinguish between building needs that were life-threatening and those that were crucial for the everyday act of teaching and learning. The community and school board members interpreted some items as teachers' wants rather than needs, such as desks and phones being closer together. Although this item appeared logical, in the larger scheme of facility needs, the community saw it as trivial and it fed into the community perception that a new or highly renovated building was truly not needed.

The architects presented the Erie School Board with four options for remedy (Booth, 2006). First, address the existing facility needs with no space or educational changes, primarily improving school infrastructure such as lighting and plumbing. Second, address the facility needs and space in a less comprehensive way with some additions and renovations. Third, address the

80

facility needs and use a comprehensive approach to educational spaces with major renovations and additions. Fourth, build new, which was not recommended by the architects. The Erie School Board eventually chose the third option, major renovations and additions.

Getting into action. As the Erie School Board discussed the facility report and the various options, it added a link to its website, www.erie.k12.wi.us, devoted to keeping the community informed (Waterford, 2006). The website turned out to be a good idea, because a year after hearing the architects' presentation, the board would narrow the four options down to two. The website allowed people to monitor the discussions and the evolution of the options. According to participants, the website was used most by people who were internally working on the proposals rather than by the community at large.

A small pro-referenda group wanted a new Erie High School; however, many in the community saw the building as good or even great. Corey Waterford discussed this viewpoint of the tension between building new and remodeling:

> Now, with the very first referendum, we in essence were looking at an all-new building off-site, someplace else, and there was an element of the public that said, "You've got a great auditorium, one of the best in the area, if not the best. That was built thirty years ago and some of the other facilities could be remodeled and you'd save us money." So we went back to the drawing board and we looked at it. Would we, in fact, be better off and could we save money keeping part of the building? (March 11, 2013)

Waterford and Church expressed that they were hired to get a referendum going and passed. However, it seemed that the process was stagnant and not moving forward quickly. It was not until a referendum consultant was hired that the process began speeding up. When

Heather Weeks, a communications consultant, started working with Waterford, several events began that moved the process along—and increased tension.

In November 2006, the Erie School Board started the search for a construction manager (Bets, 2006). The board passed the contract with the referendum consultant in January 2007 (Bets, 2007a), and hired a construction manager and formed a high school task force in February 2007 (Bets, 2007b). It surveyed residents in April 2007 (Erie School District, 2007) and considered and rejected consolidation with neighboring school districts in August 2007 (Bets, 2007c). Each of these events held some significance in the referendum process. For those in favor of the referendum, the up side was that Weeks had helped hundreds of other school districts and knew the process, needs, and strategies to move the process forward. The down side was that some community members viewed hiring a consultant as a frivolous expenditure that took away from the needs of the school.

Construction manager versus communication consultant. Although it had been relatively easy to hire the referendum consultant, hiring a construction manager was somewhat more difficult because of various types of construction managers with various definitional roles and responsibilities. The school board started looking for a construction manager officially in November 2006 and settled on one in February 2007—a four-month discussion. It took the Erie School Board only one month to find the referendum communication consultant who would be advising them for the first two elections because she had already been working with the district superintendent informally (Bets, 2007).

The Erie superintendent met with representatives from the architecture firm and the bond counsel firm, and both indicated their willingness to reimburse the district for a referendum

communication consultant (Bets, 2007). The superintendent emphasized, "I strongly believe that we need to proceed with the hiring of Ms. Weeks even if we have to pay the costs ourselves" (Bets, 2007, p. 1). After the Erie School Board reviewed Weeks's proposed strategic communication services with timeline plans to survey residents and complete some community mailings, the board voted unanimously to hire Weeks and her company, First Trust Portfolios L.P. and School Perceptions LLC.

The hiring of a communication consultant was seen in different ways. District staff and the school board saw the hiring in a positive light, as evidenced by how closely Waterford was working with Weeks and her unanimous approval twice by the Erie School Board. But some found much to criticize in the hiring of Weeks. The controversy around the hiring of Weeks as a consultant played a role in the way the referendum was received. The opinion of the dissenters was that all-new construction and renovation projects need some type of construction manager; they do not need a communication consultant. While Weeks did help the superintendent and the Erie School District move forward in various efforts, such as the community perception survey, which are identified in this study, some participants expressed the perception that the district or the superintendent could perform those tasks without paying for a consultant. They thought that all she did was make posters and handouts, create data-driven materials, and contribute to newspaper articles—all stuff that no one cared about and no one read. Rider said, "Then it came out in the newspaper that she was making fifteen grand as being a consultant or something, and those referendums were dead in the water" (October 2, 2013). Art Linger echoed but downplayed the poor hiring decision. He stated that the consultant's help with marketing was a waste of money, but the contractor probably paid her fees. Although Weeks did help the superintendent

and the district, the public perception of her hire and the work that she did played a role in the lack of success of the first referendum.

The high school task force. Around this time, the Erie School Board created a high school task force (HSTF). The *Dry Village Times* reported the task force's purpose and timeline as put forth by the referenda communication consultant, Heather Weeks (Sharp, 2007). Weeks presented a rough schedule for the task force to work through the facility and educational issues, so they could evaluate the district's options. She recommended that the task force consist of district residents, staff, and members of the board working in consultation with the district administrators, architect, construction manager, financial advisor, and other professionals as needed; and she stated that ideally 25 to 30 interested people would be selected on a first-come, first-served basis (Sharp, 2007).

The task force was charged with completing a facility needs and assessment report and making a recommendation to the board. Recruiting for the HSTF began. The superintendent sent a memo to all district staff eliciting membership from those who were residents of the school district. The district published a newsletter and sent it to the community. The front page headline was, "We Need You! Board Establishes High School Facilities Task Force" (Waterford, 2007). The *Daily Erie County Union* published a piece in the opinion section to elicit volunteers for the task force titled "Participate in the Process" (2007).

The High School Task Force, composed of 33 school district residents with a wide variety of professional backgrounds and personal interests, kicked off in early March with a vision statement, a review of the facility report, and a tour (Waterford, 2007). The HSTF consulted with the Facility Project Team, which consisted of school administrators, board

members, the architect, construction manager, and financial advisors (Waterford, 2007).

On March 12, 2007, the Erie School Board approved three vision and purpose statements for the high school facilities project:

1. Ensure a safe, secure, efficient, and cost-effective building that supports the delivery of first-rate education for our students.

2. Enable our district to deliver a high quality education that will allow our students to be competitive in the global economy by removing facility deficiencies.

3. Create and maintain an environment that encourages life-long learning for all members of our district and invites community access in keeping with the district's mission to provide an environment of excellence and opportunity for all students to achieve their dreams.

Board member Art Linger stated that in the first referendum, the most involved people were the members of the HSTF. Superintendent Waterford recollected that he was working with the school committees and "for all intents and purposes put together the agendas for them, and all the documentation and the information that they needed" (March 11, 2013). The superintendent's secretary, Mary May, recalls doing all the clerical work, organizing the group, getting volunteers, and helping organize the meetings.

The task force pushed forward an understanding of the needs and options for the referendum. The task force was composed of parents and people who were vocal and very supportive. It sought teachers' views on what needed updating and incorporated them into the plan that was ultimately presented to the school board. However, some of the task force members

who were consistently vocal against the referendum became aware that they were in the minority and stopped coming to the meetings. There were differing opinions of the importance of the role played by the HSTF with regard to the referendum. The science teachers, Flinn Rider and Rahem Little, saw other groups as being more essential and thought that the task force did little to affect the referendum outcome. In addition, Rider thought the task force was nothing compared to the Yes Group, which in the end made all the difference. Little suggested that there might have been too many pro-referenda members on the task force that resulted in the group not having a true pulse on the issues. This may have led the task force to recommend the option of major renovations and additions.

Survey pushes task force to analyze consolidation. In late March, with the help of consultant Heather Weeks, the Erie School District distributed a survey to Erie residents. "This inclusive, online survey, also available in the newspaper and in paper form, provides community members with a direct opportunity to participate in the district's planning process and to provide the board of education with valuable feedback" (N.A., p. N.G., 2007). School Perception LLC was hired to facilitate the project. The company specialized in conducting community engagement surveys for school districts and assessing and sharing the results (N. A., 2007). A letter was sent to Erie residents on Friday, April 13, 2007, and Saturday, April 14, 2007, giving local citizens an access code and instructions on how to complete the online survey or how to request a paper version, which was available in both Spanish and English (Bets, 2007).

Sara Bets, a reporter from the *Daily Erie County Union*, provided the results presented by School Perception community survey in an article titled, "Erie Board Reviews High School Facilities" (Bets, 2007). Although only 400 out of the 1,200 to 2,000 who usually showed up for

elections took the survey, the survey still provided valuable data about where local residents get

their news. The survey was inconclusive about why residents would vote against the referendum.

However, the survey was able to gauge residents' perspectives on building green and

demonstrated that 51% of residents supported investigating consolidation with another school

district.

The June 11, 2007 HSTF report outlined its findings: "The highest ranked, desired

qualities for our high school were: secure entrances, an energy efficient structure, enhance

classroom technology, improved science laboratories, and high quality construction" (High

School Task Force, p. 12, 2007). Furthermore, "the highest ranked values selected by survey

respondents were: safe and secure learning environment, attract/retain high-quality staff,

maintain fiscal accountability, offer an upgraded, college preparatory curricula" (p. 12).

The report also outlined the findings that a large number of respondents (11.5% to

20.35%) indicated they needed more information about current and future high school building

projects. School Perception noted that this was an unusually high number, so the task force

recognized that it needed to do more to educate and inform people about the needs of the high

school facilities. Even though this large number prompted increased communication with the

community, it also quietly underlines the lack of awareness—some may have said, lack of care—

about the building project at this time.

Upon learning this news, Corey Waterford, acting for the task force, became more vocal.

He admitted:

> I was the individual that went out and about through the community speaking with the
>
> various township hall kinds of meetings, service club meetings, individual parent groups.

Our buildings all have in one way or another a booster group, whether it's a PTO or

whether it was whatever it might be called, but parent groups from the school's

perspective. I spoke to a couple of the churches, chamber of commerce; just about

anybody that would let me come and tell our story, I did. (March 11, 2013)

However, Waterford represented the Erie School District as well and may have been

drawing crowds of more school supporters than of project naysayers. The community survey also

revealed a high number of respondents who inquired about consolidating with neighboring

communities. The consolidation question was so prevailing in the survey that the school district

hosted a joint community input session with neighboring school districts that were also

attempting bond referenda. The school consolidation meeting drew 60 local residents and

provided the opportunity for citizens of three school districts—Erie, Industry Park, and Long

Lake—to share their input and questions. Most of the comments were opposed to consolidation

(Bets, 2007). In the end, the residents of Industry Park and Long Lake were against

consolidation.

As the Erie School Board rejected consolidation and saw itself increasingly on the hook

for passing a referendum to renovate the high school, it approved renewing the contract with the

referendum consultant and honed in on school referendum options (Bets, 2007).

Community choice versus "loaded" choices. The HSTF recommended two options to

the Erie School District. On October 16, 2007, the task force recommended to either build an

almost, all-new building at a cost of $41 million or complete major renovations at a cost of $35

million (Bets, 2007). As mentioned above, these choices may have been born out of a committee

that consisted of many members who were pro–big project, diminishing the naysayers on the

committee. This may have led to the outcome of the task force recommending two options that were inconsistent with the community opinion on the price and certain components of the project.

To gauge the community's perception, the school district administration and board went to the public to obtain input on the two options. They arranged public town hall-style meetings for November 5 and November 14, incorporating a facility tour and presentation (Bets, 2007).

Over the next month and a half, the district created a town hall presentation (Bets, 2007), the superintendent sent an all-staff communication encouraging staff to attend the town hall meeting (May, 2007), and letters to the editor were submitted to the local paper asking residents to get informed and attend the town hall meeting (Haas, 2007). The two meetings drew more than 160 people (Bets, 2007). The meetings started with a tour. Then residents heard a presentation by district officials detailing the two options. Superintendent Corey Waterford reviewed some major issues of the facilities such as the heating, plumbing, lighting, inadequate security and athletic facilities, and technology needs. He also explained that when the high school was constructed in 1963, special education students were not considered, and now there was a real need for special education program areas (Bets, 2007).

Board member Art Linger commended the school district for doing everything it could in presenting the situation to the community. But the high school principal, Andy Church, noted that the meetings had low turnout: "Sometimes we were lucky to see six to ten people." The low turnout may indicate that the community did not view the project as important, or that they may have been disenfranchised by the possible choices being expensive and not wanting either option. Whatever the reason for the low turnout at the meetings, it makes sense that the people

who supported building new or doing a major renovation would attend since those were the only two choices.

The district used the town hall meetings made up mostly of supporters of a new high school as a reason for pursuing construction of a new high school. As Sara Bets (2007) reported, due to overwhelming support for essentially a new Erie High School in the previous two town hall meetings, the Erie School Board through consensus decided to pursue a new high school and discontinued looking into other building options.

The economic context. As discussed in chapter two, all of these referenda attempts occurred within an economic context of national and state recession. Again, the National Bureau of Economic Research officially stated on December 1, 2008, that a national recession had begun in December 2007. This tough economy was prevalent throughout all three referenda. During this time, an increasing amount of money was needed to meet technological standards and update the ever-changing classroom, and the Erie referenda continued to be an important educational issue. While the economic context of United States was that of entering into a recession in December 2007, the next four months until the referendum election saw quite a bit of pro-referendum actions and some anti-referendum rhetoric. The Erie School Board started in December to highlight the advantage and cost savings of geothermal instillations (Bets, 2007), approved the referenda wording to authorize general obligation bonds not to exceed $45.6 million (Booth, 2007), and approved a new contract with a referendum consultant (Bets, 2008).

As the district was highlighting the referendum, in contrast, participants noted the economic hardships working against the proposal of a new high school for $45 million. Mayor Mac Wilerd expressed the difficulty:

When they tried to do it the first time, just like a lot of school districts, okay, what we need is a $40, $50, $60 million building. Well, part of the, of course, this is all taking place during the downslide in the economy. (March 11, 2013)

Principal Andy Church agreed, noting that people's money was tight and that many were unemployed and/or on a fixed income. Church explained that Erie was pretty blue-collar and not an affluent community. The superintendent's secretary, Mary May, defended people who were against the project, stating that at the time, the economy was terrible and people were out of work. May noted that people were unsure whether they would get a job and they could not support the referendum in that type of economic context.

Education done right versus district involvement. A new group of about 45 people called Education Done Right, chaired by Art Linger (future board member), Stacy Dirks (future board member), and Alex Fonds formed and developed a plan to promote a Yes Vote on the new Erie High School (Wisner, 2008). Corey Waterford, superintendent, described the Education Done Right group as "parents of our students, from the very young parents whose kids maybe are in kindergarten, first, second grade now, and they're going to be seven, eight years before they even get into the building, but I think that the parents were definitely [the makeup of the group]" (March 11, 2013).

The Erie School District conducted high school tours with informational nights (Wisner, 2008), published newsletters that highlighted the impact to property tax payers (Waterford, 2008a), published referenda Fast Facts that highlighted the facility needs with a question-and-answer section (Waterford, 2008b), created an Erie High School facility DVD (2008), and worked with the local newspaper, the *Daily Erie County Union*, to publish some informational

articles emphasizing the make-sure-to-vote sentiments (Booth, 2008).

Both Education Done Right and the district were involved in disseminating information to the public. Participants agree that the Education Done Right group (informally referred to as the Yes Vote group), was less organized and less effective in the first two referenda attempts. Participants also agree that the district's promotional activities were ineffective but necessary as a matter of routine pre-referenda actions. The district seemed to advance information about the option of a new high school rather than discuss the opposition's concerns with that option.

Analyzing the opposition. It would be sensible when analyzing the opposition to anything to ask two fundamental questions. First, who makes up the opposition? Second, why are they opposed? In this case study, some participants thought about and discussed these questions; however, other participants seemed to take a degree of opposition for granted and not worth analyzing.

Some board members, the superintendent, and the high school principal expressed through interviews that there was always a group of naysayers; it didn't matter what you did, they were going to vote no. The high school principal, Andy Church, stated, "There was a core of people that were against, and there was a core of people that were for. It really didn't matter how we packaged it" June 26, 2013).

Participants explained that there were primarily two groups who were against the referenda: seniors who no longer had a vested interest in schools since their children had long graduated; and those against a tax increase. Teacher and parent Flinn Rider described the opposition as, "I'd say parochial school parents obviously, people who send their kids to Lakeside Lutheran. I found senior citizens to be somewhat unsupportive, anti-tax people, people

92

who think that their tax bill is way too high for a modern society, and they have very few times that they can directly vote except this" (October 10, 2013).

Board member Stacy Dirks agreed that there were a lot of seniors against the referendum: "a lot of our farmers, people in the outlying rural communities, a lot of our seniors, people who don't have children in the school system anymore. Didn't understand what's the benefit in this for me" (October 18, 2013). Erie School Board president Art Linger pointed out that the rural community had a lot to gain from the referendum and discussed the lack of communication on the part of the Board:

> I think in the first referendum, there was a lot more in there for the agricultural community than they realized. We didn't do a good job of expressing that. Like right now, we're building a high school greenhouse outside of the referendum that would have been incorporated in the first referendum, but it wasn't in the third one. Even though the agricultural community was against it at the time, they were actually getting more in the first go around that they went against. (September 5, 2013).

Superintendent Corey Waterford and Mayor Mac Wilerd thought that the opposition came from a wider section of the community that was against taxes being increased and disagreed about the elderly being the opposition. According to Corey Waterford:

> Now, we're a small community, so in a small community like [Erie], you knew who the naysayers were, and you knew who their supporters were. Without it being an organized group, you still knew who they were. It was not the senior citizens, not if you look at it in a total perspective. I think it was basically folks who were just genuinely concerned with taxes and what it was going to do to their

93

taxes, and I think that went everywhere from young to middle age to the retired

folks to the senior citizens. I think there were a few people in each of those

categories, but basically I think it was just simply the majority of the people that

were opposed to it were people that just didn't want their taxes to go up. (March

11, 2013)

Mayor Mac Wilerd agreed with Waterford:

I think ultimately the typical naysayers, I mean the typical people who vote for

the pocketbook. Well, I went to that school and it was for me just fine, thank you.

My kids went there 20 years ago, and they got a good education, and what do you

need, that kind of stuff, people who don't want to part with the nickel. (December

9, 2013)

The superintendent's secretary, Mary May, discussed the opposition from a different

perspective. In her view, the economic hardships faced by people made them reluctant to support

the referendum. Given the context of the economic downturn, Mary May's analysis got to the

personal causes of opposition:

The majority of the elderly in the community [were against all the referenda],

probably, although I know there were some that were in favor of it. I think a lot of

them were the folks that were struggling financially. They just couldn't get behind

it because of the personal impact. (March 27, 2013)

May spoke of people struggling financially, not being against the referenda because they are

against it, but because of personal financial issues. The context of the economy would support

her point of view. Furthermore, the district may have been more effective if it had acknowledged

and expressed in its referenda information and communication an understanding that people were financially hurting.

The anti-referenda people got their letters published in the *Daily Erie County Union* with titles such as, "Not Affordable" (Novak, 2008), "Vote 'No'" (Falk, 2008), "No New School" (Stewart, 2008), and "Against School" (Sayre, 2008). The night before the vote on the referendum, the Wisconsin Chapter of Americans for Prosperity (a group that describes themselves as fighting each day for lower taxes, less government regulation and economic prosperity) telephoned Erie residents outlining the negative aspects of the bond referendum and urged residents to vote no on the measure (Booth, 2008). Even though the participants were mixed about whether and how much the negative robot-calling affected peoples' votes, on April 1, 2008, the naysayers won, and Erie voters officially shut down the new high school plans. Corey Waterford, Erie School District superintendent, shared with the board that 3,082 votes were cast out of 7,559 registered voters in the school district (40% turnout), with 1,417 (46%) votes in favor of the referendum and 1,665 (54%) opposed, a difference of 248 votes (Booth, 2008).

The Second Referendum Attempt (2008)

That April, the Erie School Board discussed and analyzed the failed referendum and heard referendum input from various stakeholders. Jeff Booth (2008) wrote an article for the *Daily Erie County Union* titled "Erie Board Mulls Failed Referendum." The article states that Superintendent Corey Waterford was thankful that people in the district took the time to come out and vote, and he expressed gratitude for the Education Done Right group putting in 150%

(Booth, 2008). The article reported that the observations made by Heather Weeks, the communication consultant, were valid; voter turnout indicated that residents were not apathetic to district issues. Despite the defeat of the referendum, most residents acknowledged the need for improvements and upgrades to the high school.

Although a loss is a loss, it was not massive or overwhelming, and everyone was aware of the taxpayers' significant investment associated with the referenda. Interestingly, the referenda proposals of neighboring districts had much less tax impact and still failed. The Wisconsin Chapter of Americans for Prosperity's night-before-the-vote telephone campaign to oppose the referenda measure should not be underestimated, and the *Daily Erie County Union* newspaper endorsement was positive and provided community creditability and trust (Booth, 2008).

Superintendent Waterford stated, "[Referendum] One, I think they felt that it was too much money, and it was too much money because we were trying to build everything new as opposed to keeping some of the old" (March 11, 2013). Mayor Mac Wilerd agreed, "It was one [the first referendum] that it had to be persuaded. They were sticker-shocked the first time and thought that the school board and the architects that they hired had designed a palace, which they had" (December 9, 2013). Board member Stacy Dirks confirmed the importance of the amount, stating,

> I think that was a really critical thing. I remember there being, and it must have been in one of the first two, I think the dollar amount was pretty critical in the beginning with one of our failures. But I think it gave us the benchmark to say, 'Okay, well, now we know what we can't pass.' (October 18, 2013)

Two stakeholders, the referenda consultant Heather Weeks and Superintendent Waterford, recommended that the process of passing a referendum proceed. The Erie School Board agreed and drafted a community survey right away in early May 2008 to outline what changes need to be made to give the referendum a better chance of passing (Bets, 2008). The Erie School Board also hosted post-referendum listening sessions in areas where more people voted no (Bets, 2008).

The post-referendum survey published by the Erie School District asked:

1. Please check the municipality wherein you live and vote.

2. Did you vote on the Erie High School Referendum on April 1, 2008?

3. Please tell us how you voted.

4. What was/were the primary reason(s) you voted the way you did?

5. What would cause you to change your vote from yes to no, or no to yes?

6. What do you believe the school district should do now to address the serious facility issues at Erie High School?

7. Additional Comments.

The Erie School District received 369 responses to the post-referendum survey (Bets, 2008). Of the respondents, 179 had voted yes and 176 had voted no (Bets, 2008). After a couple of weeks of sifting through and organizing the post-referendum survey data and holding multiple listening sessions, the Erie School Board was ready to review the results. The feedback to the Erie School Board was that the overall referenda issue centered on cost (Bets, 2008).

In June 2008, the Erie School Board established an ad hoc committee to come up with

new options for renovating or replacing the high school (Bets, 2008). The renovation option was $39.4 million, $2 million from inflation, and offered far less bang for the buck than constructing a new high school for $45 million. Board president William Johnson stated, "It's really unfortunate that the cost of commodities continues to go up so much so that, on an apples-to-apples basis, this building has gone up $2 million in price versus what this would have cost a year ago" (quoted in Booth, p. 3, 2008).

The ad hoc committee and the Erie School Board wrestled with the two options of a more costly almost-new high school and a less expensive renovation option. According to an article in the Daily Erie County Union newspaper (Bets, 2008), board member James Smith was concerned the cost-cutting might diminish the appearance of the school and make it look "junky," adding that the last thing he wanted was to cheapen the building to save a couple bucks. The architect reassured the board by noting that there would be new furniture and that, except for the auditorium, the entire north end of the high school exterior would be a new façade. Board member Karen Rawski was worried that people would call the board cheap in planning, as some had done with an earlier project at the Erie Middle School. Board president William Johnson stated that the cost-cutting measure is a reflection of community input, and it was clear that cost was a major factor in the last referenda. "The board president noted that he has heard from people on both sides, some who say they want a new building, and others who would like to see the current project cut even further" (Bets, 2008, p. 8). Board member Mike Jones expressed concern that doing a lesser project would start to cut into academics and noted that the longer the district waits, the higher the inflation costs. William Johnson retorted that the project with cuts still achieves the objectives that were set out: securing the building, improving science and

technology instruction, and addressing infrastructure and athletic needs. The Erie School Board

passed the renovation option in concept unanimously.

The Erie community expressed concerns about district maintenance. Stacy Dirks stated:

I think in the end, when we really focused on listening to people's specific concerns

about why they previously hadn't voted yes. For me, one of the issues that always comes

up is the maintenance issue. People had a misperception that we were not caring for

facilities. And once you really were able to have the factual information, the numbers, in

front of you and say, "But we've spent this much here and we've done this," and then

people would often times say, "Oh, well I didn't know that." (October 18, 2013)

Alex Fonds, task force and community member, also maintained that maintenance was a

community perception issue:

Once again, the only thing that really stuck out was we don't take care of things.

Unfortunately, once again, it goes back to the fact that they don't have the knowledge

that our budget, sometimes our budget, doesn't give us the fortitude to maintain the

things the way we really wanted to. Now, there were definitely times where our

employees weren't taking care maintaining it and keeping it as clean as they could have,

but that has changed. (December 10, 2013)

There was no maintenance plan for the high school and the community perception that

the high school was not kept up prompted the Erie School Board to address the maintenance

issue (Bets, 2009). The school board rushed to create a maintenance plan, including a possible

new system of documenting and communicating the maintenance needed and performed. Along

with the need for more maintenance staff, the board created a smaller $300,000 referendum

question to address maintenance only.

Although Erie High School publicized, advertised, and hosted two open houses with tours, presentations, and art renderings, they were not well attended (Bets, 2008). A vocal opposition expressed itself through letters to the editors calling for the community to vote no (Burow, 2008). With the lack of unity in the yes camp and the perception of the district attempting to pass two referenda, the opposition voted down both measures on November 4, 2008. Interestingly, neighboring school districts Dry Village and Industry Park passed their referenda (Bets, 2008). Dry Village passed a measure for $22.385 million to update and expand all the district's elementary schools, and Industry Park passed a third attempt to authorize $15.6 million to remodel and update its middle school (Bets, 2008).

Corey Waterford presented to the board that with more than 6,000 votes cast on the referendum, there were many more yes votes than there had been on the April referendum; unfortunately, there were many more no votes, too (Bets, 2008). On question one, about renovating the high school facilities, 56% voted no and 44% voted yes. On question two, about maintenance funding, 55% voted no and 45% voted yes (Bets, 2008). Board member Mike Jones was shocked that the November referendum failed by a wider margin (2% wider) than the April measure (Bets, 2008). Board member Mary Lou noted that the school questions received 1,200 more yes votes in November than they had in April, and that "you can't really interpret that as negative" (Bets, 2008, p. 3). Lou went on to say that the board still needed to find a way of garnering input to provide district planners with what the community would support (Bets, 2008).

Participants indicated four reasons for the failure of the second referenda attempt. The

first and second reasons were commonly pointed out throughout the referenda process. The first was that there were some community members that would always vote no and the second was a bad economy. The first rationale the participants commonly expressed was some community members were against taxes being raised at all and would vote no under any referenda circumstance. Whether community members against the referenda could have been people without children or Erie parents that were satisfied or unsatisfied with the district's current facilities and offerings was unknown and not investigated.

The second rationale for the referenda not passing was the poor state of the economy. Participants often noted that these times were very difficult due to people losing their jobs and homes; the value of homes had gone down and led to a decrease in tax collection. The community, as discussed earlier, was feeling the pains of the recession and may not have been able to afford any increase in their taxes. The voters may have been worrying more about how they were going to get by rather than thinking about the issues around renovating the Erie High School.

Participants provided two new reasons for the failure of the second referenda attempt. They said the referenda was too quick and too cheap. Some participants noted that the second referenda occurred more quickly than the first. The first referenda had taken the time to bring community members in to researching the options and costs and presenting the information to the community. The second referenda had a smaller group of community members, who were already involved in the first referenda, choose from two limited options and the costs were already known from the first referenda. While preparing for the second referenda was easier than the first, due to already having a lot of the information and processes in place, participants stated

it seemed as though the Erie School District tried to get the second referenda through too quickly.

Some participants recollected that some voters originally voted for the referenda were upset that a cheaper and insufficient facility upgrade was decided on for the second referenda. Participants stated that these disenfranchised voters decided to vote against the second referenda. Teacher, Flinn Rider discussed the second referenda, "You're going to have people not vote for it because it's too cheap, and it's not a good answer, so I think the second one was too cheap a little bit, and too quick, and bad economy" (October 2, 2013). Furthermore, participants noted that it was not a large amount of voters that would vote against the referenda because it was too cheap, but with the narrow margins between success and failure it could have made a difference. Actually, the 2% wider failing margin may have had something to do with people who were once for the Erie High School referenda, going against it now because it was seen as not doing enough for the students and staff of Erie High School.

The Third Referendum Attempt (2009–2010)

Unlike the second Erie School District referendum, which followed the first by only a few months, the school board took longer to decide to attempt a third referendum. It was almost a year after the second failed referendum before the school board began to mull over if and when it should attempt a third referendum (Bets, 2009). During that year, the school board had to move forward and make minor repairs to the pool, prompting the viewpoint that there are some major repairs that need to be done, and the funding for these repairs needs to be provided (Bets, 2009). The district worked on buying a system to organize, document, and complete maintenance

102

around the district and in the high school (Bets, 2009). Corey Waterford recalled:

I remember hearing the cry of, "How are you going to take care of this? What kind of a

plan do you have to make sure that it's maintained so that it'll last us these 50 years that

you say it's going to last?" You had an element of the population that even today, are

critical of how we maintain facilities and that we could do a better job, and maybe we

could, but we could do a whole lot worse. I think that those opposed to the third

referendum strictly were just those that were fearful that we wouldn't maintain it. (March

11, 2013)

Board member Mike Jones offered to host a town hall meeting where the HSTF, the ad

hoc high school facility committee, and any other interested people were invited to discuss what

to do. Jones even offered to personally buy pizza and soda for all meeting attendees (Bets, 2008).

The Erie School Board, in December 2008, formed an ad hoc panel to make recommendations.

The panel advised the board that April 2009 was too soon for a referendum measure. The ad hoc

panel and the school board discussed referendum plans and the school maintenance plan for

almost seven months—from February 2009 through September 2009.

Saving versus spending. Then, according to the superintendent, something big

happened. In October 2009, the Erie School Board and others learned of the savings

opportunities and a federal stimulus offer. Superintendent Waterford stated:

I think probably the most significant thing was the availability of the federal bonds, the

federal support. That cut the costs down for us considerably, and I think without it, we

would have been in…. It would have been tough. QSCB is what they were called. QSCB,

qualified school bonds, is what really made the significant difference for us, without any

doubt. It cut the taxes down considerably, and as such, voters were willing to approve and to pass. (March 11, 2013)

Andy Church, the high school principal, agreed with Waterford. "In hindsight I think the thing that saved us was first the stimulus money made a big difference. If we didn't have that, we may not still have a high school or it would be a really downsized high school" (June 26, 2013).

Stacy Dirks, school board member, HSTF member, and Education Done Right member, echoed the superintendent and the principal:

> Then it was the third one that we saved so much money. It was the third one where we saved so many millions of dollars with the borrowing and the interest rates being so historically low. That was, I think, a big deal. That was a big clincher for the final one. (October 18, 2013)

It was critical, Dirks continued:

> I mean, we had street signs, we were hitting them over the head with the "We're going to save $12 or $15 million because of that interest rate. And if we're going to get this right and you have even an inkling of ever wanting to update this facility, now is the time to do it because of this opportunity that's in front of us. It's never going to happen again." (October 18, 2013)

Alex Fonds, HSTF member and Education Done Right chair, agreed:

> I think people have become much more conservative and it's interesting too on the tax base, everybody was so concerned how much it was going to raise their taxes and the way our leaders have conducted the business of funding the facility. We got such tremendous rates that it's really causing very little impact to our local taxpayer. I think

that's the big part of it too. (December 10, 2013)

An article titled "Savings From Renovated Erie High Outlined" (Dorfer, 2009) appeared in the local paper. Baird and Company provided information to the Erie School Board. Through referenda, a lower tax impact would be realized due to financing through federal stimulus money, which was available until the end of 2010. Project Manager Russ Fine presented a $26 million renovation, $13 million less than the second referendum attempt and $19 million less than the original referendum attempt. Recommending a "scaled down" and "phased" option, the first phase included a new two-story classroom wing, a new office/common/cafeteria area, an updated pool with locker room, geothermal heating, and a new roof. The second phase included lower-priority projects such as track improvements, tennis courts, gym updates, and renovations to the existing high school.

Qualified School Construction Bonds and Build America Bonds both have subsidies from 25% to 35%. The debt instruments allowed school districts to borrow at a zero percent rate in order to rehabilitate, repair, or equip their schools. The Erie School Board members were excited at the possibilities. In October 2009, the board mulled over going to a third referendum. The board held a special meeting to hear a third referendum proposal from the ad hoc committee. Board member and chair of the ad hoc committee Mike Jones stated that construction needed to be under way by 2010 to qualify for stimulus funds, a February start would lead to less student disruptions, and the recession brought the price tag down (Bets, 2009).

The architect, construction manager and financial planner all outlined that this was the best time, with minimum tax impact, an extremely favorable bond market, an economic stimulus program, and low construction costs (Dorfer, 2009). The third referendum plan was very similar

to the first referendum plan but would cost less. Financing was outlined; the sooner the district could pass a referendum, the more financing could be obtained through the stimulus borrowing plan (Dorfer, 2009).

With all these favorable conditions, the board agreed to attempt a third referendum, but it disagreed on when. Board member Art Linger thought the timing was perfect; he did not want to wait until April and see an increase in the cost. Board member Barb Peterson did not see any changes in the referendum plan and doubted people would vote to increase taxes in such a difficult time. With unemployment and taxes up and local employer Briggs and Stratton closing, Peterson thought later would be better. Board member Mike Jones felt it would be negligent *not* to give the taxpayers an opportunity to pay less for a high school building. Board member Stacy Dirks realized that it was a difficult time, but the district planners should not base their decisions on temporary economics; she argued that this was an investment in the district's future. Board member Mary Lou agreed that the cost had dropped significantly, the market was right, and people knew that they had to do something with the high school building.

The district organized a presentation that outlined the favorable tax impact and the stimulus funds that would create a golden opportunity to fund renovations of the high school. The tax impact was $1.77 per $1,000 property value, or a $354 increase on a $200,000 home. However, the federal stimulus funds would drop the figure to a $260 tax increase on a $200,000 home (Bets, 2010). The Erie School Board decided to slate the referendum for April 2010, and this time they could present the referendum from a savings perspective, avoiding the cost perspective. The district was able to present to Erie how much the district and Erie tax payer would be saving from passing a referendum right away, instead of discussing how much the

referendum would cost each Erie tax payer.

Effective pro-referenda group. In addition to all the money the district would save by passing a bond-referenda during this time, participants reported that another significant event leading to a successful third referendum attempt was the pro-referenda group. The pro-referenda group was made of people from the Education Done Right group and some new-to-the-referenda-process community members. In March 2010, a pro-referenda meeting was held, and the pro-referenda constituents got organized (Bets, 2010). Three strategies were highlighted by participants as important characteristics of the pro-referenda group, leading to the pro-referenda group being organized and effective. First, the form of communication utilized with the community. Second was to utilize a database to build targeted communication. Third, timing communication to ensure that certain communication was done right away and other forms of communication did not go out until right before the referenda.

The first strategy that the pro-referenda group used was to personalize communication and make a concerted effort to discuss the referenda face-to-face with community members. It began with everyone who attended the pro-referenda meetings and signed a commitment to discuss the referendum with 10 other people in the community who were not related to them (Bets, 2010). Board member Art Linger pointed to high school science teacher Flinn Rider as the difference maker and outlined the strategies Rider had used:

> The biggest difference was a lot more community involvement with the yes group that we had that got behind it and reached out and convinced people. We had one staff member at the high school [Rider] that had been involved in political campaigns before. He used that same type of strategy that you would use on a political campaign to organize the yes

group into a fashion where we had a bigger outreach to people. (October 2, 2013)

Also, each person was assigned 10 individual unique people that they were supposed to reach out to and get them on board. If we had a group of 50 and everybody reached out to 10, then we had 500 people. His [Rider's] strategy and guidance worked well in reaching a larger number of people.

Rider's strategies were based on his experiences with political campaign organizing, and the targeted approach made a difference to reaching people and communicating one-on-one with them. Rider effectively describes the pro-referendum group's highly organized and focused strategies as:

We go to this meeting. There's only nine of us there, but we're dedicated. It was my first meeting outside of the general school board meeting. Our basic principles were this. We weren't going to win this referendum with street science or bumper stickers or newspaper articles or letters to the editor even. We were going to do those things, but this was going to be won in the fellowship halls of the church on Sunday, at fish fry. It's going to be won by neighbors talking to neighbors at their fence line when they're shoveling snow. Therefore, if we're going to reach 3,000 people, we need to have 100 people here and each of them adopting 10 people each. (October 2, 2013)

Rider and the committed pro-referenda group had indicated that it would take a more intimate form of communication surrounding the referendum to be successful. During the first and second referenda, one-way and one-time forms of communication such as bumper stickers, newspaper articles, letters to the editor, and yard signs had been utilized, demonstrating an ineffectiveness in persuading community members to vote for the referenda. Conversely, a form

of communication that has back-and-forth dialog and occurs over multiple interactions such as face-to-face discussions at churches, bars, hardware stores, or other places ensured that the third referendum contained effective communication that persuaded community members to vote for the referendum. This method is extremely time and labor intensive, but as noted from the participants, this final referendum had dedicated individuals putting in the time and energy to implement this effective form of communication.

Speaking to people face-to-face was perceived as a great form of communication used by the pro-referenda group early and often. The pro-referenda group went further than talking to people face-to-face. They strategized about who to talk to and how to talk to them in person. The second strategy used by the pro-referenda group was building a database to target community members that vote and are persuadable to vote for the referendum. This allowed the pro-referenda group to effectively target their face-to-face interactions. They were able to determine who had voted in the last few elections and approach them face-to face. Rider stated:

We were going to do it person to person. We had this important person, which was [Carrie]. Her last name's [Day], and she works at the county courthouse. She had access, legal records, to the voter registration. We had the voters, all the voters who had voted in the last three elections. We had their names, addresses, and phone numbers printed off on mailing address labels…and they were all in wards so it was pretty cool. You could go to Ward B, Ward C, and we had all the voters in Erie on labels on the walls. (October 2, 2013)

In the final meeting, the 147 attendees were able to use mailing labels to organize which pro-referenda group member was going to communicate with which community member. Rider

describes what the process was at this meeting:

> Then you got a sheet of paper. I have it on my computer somewhere, and it had squares, empty squares, ten empty squares the exact size of the mailing address labels. Then we all walked around the room for about 20 minutes, and you pulled off people, and we talked about that you have to know them. (October 2, 2013)

The group emphasized being mindful when choosing which community member to talk to. They discussed that the experience should be a positive one. Positive interactions were produced by choosing people that were already going to vote yes or were persuadable and by avoiding people that were dead-set against the referenda. It also meant that as the pro-referenda member selects a community person, they should consciously chose a person who thinks positive of them, not pick someone they were fighting with or have had bad experiences with. Rider explained the process of picking from the labels that were created from the voter registry:

> You have to think they like you. You don't want to pull off somebody who you knocking on their door is going to really drive the nail in the coffin. You're not going to knock on anybody's door that you're really sure they're going to vote no. Let them be. We adopted in the end…because some people went and took two sheets. We adopted 1,900 voters that we all promised we'd talk to individually. (October 2, 2013)

The third important strategy used by the pro-referenda group was the timing of their communication. Some forms of communication such as talking to people face-to-face and putting up yard signs were sought after immediately, the sooner the better. The pro-referenda group noted that some communication, such as newspaper articles reporting about the referendum almost always outlined the tax impact of the referenda, which was perceived

110

negatively by Erie citizens. While the *Erie Times* was only reporting out the facts and attempting to be informative, these facts almost always included the tax impact of the referendum. Community members saw tax impact negatively because it points out that they would be paying more out of their pockets for taxes. The more times a person saw that they would be paying more if the referendum passes, the more they would be inclined to vote against the referendum. Rider describes this communication effect:

> We needed to keep our mouths shut. One of the mistakes they made in the first two
> [referenda attempts] is they had their campaign lasted six, seven months, so it was like
> six months of diagrams on the front page of the local newspaper, six, seven months of
> district taxpayer news. You know, a taxpayer newsletter becomes, when it has your
> referendum plans in the front page, becomes a tax-paid advertisement, and that pisses off
> the opposition and quite frankly it turns undecided people against it, so our second
> principle besides being grassroots and neighbor talking to neighbor was we were going to
> shut up until, I think our March date was March first, which was only three and a half
> weeks before the vote. We weren't going to write anything. We weren't putting signs up.
> We were going to lay low, because the last thing we wanted to do was get another vote
> no committee started. (October 2, 2013)

Even though the first and second referenda attempts had the Education Done Right group, which was similar to the pro-referenda group, participants noted the increased organization and effectiveness of the pro-referenda group over the Education Done Right group. The three communication strategies that were seen as extremely effective were: communicating out to the

111

community face-to-face, using a voter registry for targeted communication, and timing the

communication. This was evidenced by the leaders of the pro-referenda group becoming the

district's leaders either during the last referenda or immediately following the third attempt.

Board member Stacy Dirks outlined the pro-referenda group as instrumental in leading three of

the leaders to become board members:

> I started out with the Vote Yes group. Actually, I was in it with all three of them, which
>
> was originally formed by [Alex Fonds] and [Art Linger]. The three of us sort of started
>
> that. I forget the name of what we called it now, but we were the people on the street
>
> trying to get the information from the school district and communicate it to the
>
> community and share with them the factual information. Also, as part of the high school
>
> facilities task force. So, it was all the information and all the factual information I got
>
> from there…Between those two things, I just developed an interest in it.
>
> With each of the referenda, it was kind of the core group of the three of us. We
>
> would get together, we would meet, I would put together newsletters. We had an e-mail
>
> database, so I would coordinate that and send that information out. I guess you could say
>
> I was the secretary of the group out of the three of us. Coordinating things as far as phone
>
> banks and meeting places. We would have an open meeting, town hall meeting concept to
>
> educate people. I think that's what I did with each of them. Then, I guess, subsequently
>
> getting on the board because of that. At one point, I forget all the dates of all of them, but
>
> I believe I would have been on the school board at that time also. (October 18, 2013)

This blurring of the pro-referenda group and the leadership of the district indicates their

effectiveness and the unified front the district and community was placing on this referendum

attempt. Passing the referendum was important enough for the Erie community members to place value on candidates who were working toward its success. This important leadership merger and the effective communication that the pro-referenda group maintained led to increased pro-referenda communication.

It was noted that leading up to the first two referenda attempts, there were more negative letters to the editor than positive ones, but during the time leading up to the final referendum, there was an increase of pro-referenda letters, which edged out the anti-referenda letters. In March, the pro-referenda group published a full-page list of 400 people endorsing the referendum, including first and last names (Daily Erie County Union, 2010). The district ran facility tours and kept emphasizing the federal stimulus funds available trying to make the tax impact discussion about how much Erie would be saving, instead of spending. In the end, the overall communications surrounding the referendum was more positive and effective because the discussion was framed around saving money and because of the strategic communication practices the pro-referenda group incorporated.

Positive publicity kept rolling in. For example, the local county news broadcasted a story in the evening news about the Erie School District attempting its third referenda measure and its savings opportunity. Highlighting the financial savings opportunity, the pro-referenda group wrote letters to the editor in the *Daily Erie County Union* with titles such as "Good Opportunity," "Vote Yes," "Need a Remodel," "A Real Bargain," and the pro-referenda effective personal targeted strategic communications, the third referendum passed in April of 2010. An article in the local newspaper titled "Third Time's the Charm for Erie High Redo" pointed out that after failing the first plan for essentially a new building for $46 million and the second plan

of renovation for $39 million, Erie was able to pass a $35.19 million referendum.

The financial context was given credit for passing the Erie bond referendum, as evident by the *Erie Times* reporting: "Significant drops in construction costs, combined with 40-year lows in regular interest rates and unprecedented opportunity for federal stimulus financing convinced district planners it was time to give the public another opportunity to address continuing facilities needs at the high school." (Bets, 2010, p. 8)

The pro-referenda group also got credit for passing the Erie bond referendum, as evidenced by the *Erie Times* reporting, "With the hard work of the yes group and the savings from the stimulus, the 'yes' votes outnumbered the 'nays' for a final tally of 1,816 to 1,512. That's a margin of 54.57 percent to 45.43 percent. Superintendent Corey Waterford emphasized that this was a team effort, stating ,a lot of people worked very hard over several years to make this happen.'" (Bets, 2010, nap.).

Summary

This chapter explained the links between the participants' actions and the conditional factors as the Erie School District went from being unsuccessful to successful at passing school bond referenda. It described the participants' perceptions of the interventions and surrounding factors that led the Erie School District to succeed in passing a bond referendum in the real-life context of their community. Lastly, the chapter illustrated certain thematic topics that emerged from the participants' descriptions and explanations of the Erie School District's bond referenda journey.

This chapter outlined background information on the Village of Erie, background

information about the Erie School District, historical information about Erie referenda measures, and the participants involved in the referenda process, and their perspectives. This chapter described the driving reasons of the Erie referenda, such as building safety and curricular instruction that were seen by some Erie community members as not enough and by others as good enough.

The chapter then goes on to discuss the events and actions surrounding the first referendum attempt in 2008, going as far back as 2004. The first referendum attempt comprised the facility needs through the architect's report. Some community members saw some of the provisions in the architect's report as wants, not needs. As the Erie School District got the referendum process started, the discrepancy viewpoints of needs versus wants continued manifesting through the hiring of the construction manager and a communication consultant. In this first attempt, the High School Task Force was created and may have encouraged membership to consist of more pro-referenda members. Thus, their recommendations seemed loaded with expensive and state-or-the-art wants, not specifically needs to some participants. This was done in the context of an economic recession.

In the first referendum attempt, community involvement seemed to fail with low turnouts at town hall meetings and at building tours, an ineffective Education Done Right group, and a lack of analyzing the opposition. Additionally, a community survey forced the district to consider consolidation, which also contributed to the failed referendum.

Furthermore, this chapter investigated the second referendum attempt, which occurred shortly after the first attempt, within the same year, 2008. The second referendum process contained an ad hoc committee that searched out facility options with less costs, which may have

turned some agreeable voters against the referendum. At the same time, deferred maintenance of the high school and middle school became an issue and prompted some participants to ask reasons for renovating the Erie High School when the already present facilities were not being taken care of properly. Participants pointed out that the second referendum attempt was too cheap and too quick. Again, the district leaders and the agreeable group of voters were content with the idea that some people would vote against any referendum and did not analyze or seek out input from the opposition. The economy was still an issue, and people were hurt with high unemployment, devalued home prices, and less tax revenue.

Lastly, this chapter concluded by outlining factors that led to a successful third referendum attempt that took place from 2009 to 2010. During the third referendum attempt, the discussion of spending to renovate the Erie High School changed to the possible savings Erie tax payers could take advantage of by passing a referendum. The participants emphasized the effectiveness of the pro-referenda group in personal, targeted, and timely communication. The group was effective enough to lead to the culmination of the pro-referenda group leaders becoming the school district board members and to the success of third referendum.

Chapter 5

Discussion

In the previous chapter, I outlined the participants' descriptions and perceptions of the interventions and surrounding factors that led the Erie School District to the failure and eventual success in passing a school bond referendum in the real-life context of the Erie community. I began this study in order to answer the following research questions: How do the participants describe their perceptions of the interventions and surrounding factors that led the Erie School District to the failure and eventual success in passing a school bond referendum in the real-life context of their community? What can we learn from the Erie participants' descriptions and explanations of a school district's bond referenda journey?

In this chapter, the study goes on to answer: What can we learn from the Erie participants' descriptions and explanations of a school district's bond referenda journey? This chapter discusses why each of the first two referenda attempts failed, why the third referendum attempt succeeded and the differences between them. This discussion is embedded within the context of what I learned from the Erie participants' descriptions and explanations and how the literature on bond referenda relates to the findings of this study. I then discuss the limitations and implications for future research and for practice.

Reasons for Failures and Success

Communication. Effective communication or the lack thereof was one of the main reasons for the failure of the first two referenda and the success of the third. In the first

117

referendum, data from internal archived files, local newspaper articles, interviewing of participants and participant provided documents, all pointed to the collective perception of the community that the referendum pursued 'want' rather than 'need'. In other words, the community perception was that the facility did not 'need' to be overhauled, rather it was an expensive 'want' that was going to cost a lot of money. This perception could have been corrected by the communication consultant who was hired for this purpose. However, the consultant was seen as an outsider by the community and therefore did not generate the trust that was needed in order for the community to turn around and support the referendum.

Another example of a lack of communication in the first referendum process that led to its failure was the non- inclusive Task Force. The Task Force appointed in the first referendum process did not appreciate the opposition. They did not listen to the concerns of those who had a differing perspective or opinion leading to a greater rift between those who were in favor of the referendum and those who were against it. The Education Done Right Community Group also did not attempt to communicate with the parents and the community members in order to help them understand the context and the referendum. At the time when there was an economic recession, these communication barriers effectively prevented the success of the first referendum.

Communication in the second referendum. The second referendum failed due to a continued disregard towards the opposition combined with an economic recession. The lack of effective communication with the communication consultant still seen as outsider, largely contributed to the failure. In addition, some modifications to the original proposal so that there was a cheaper referendum option on the table, made some original proponents upset, and did not

gain any new supporters. Trust issues surfaced again with poor maintenance of existing facilities (see Table 5).

Table 5

Data Collection and Findings

Referenda	Outcome	Data Sources	Findings
First Attempt	Failed	1. Internal archived files 2. Local newspaper articles 3. Interviewing of participants 4. Participant provided documents.	-A perception the referenda comprised of want more then need -Communication consultant seen as outsider -Non-inclusive task force, disregard for opposition -Economic Recession -Ineffective Education Done Right group & poor district campaign
Second Attempt	Failed	1. Internal archived files 2. Local newspaper articles 3. Interviewing of participants 4. Participant provided documents.	-Continued disregard for opposition, no voter always going to vote no attitude -Economic Recession -Comm. Consultant seen as outsider -Cheaper option chosen but some really want new

			-Poor maintenance on existing facilities
Third Attempt	Successful	1. Internal archived files 2. Local newspaper articles 3. Interviewing of participants 4. Participant provided documents.	-Federal stimulus allowed district to go for new facility -District framed referendum as a savings rather than cost. -Pro-referenda group communicated effectively using voter registry data-base and one-on-one face-to-face communications

Communication and the third referendum. Effective communication in the third attempt created success. The substantial reasons that the third referendum succeeded was that the district framed the referendum as a savings rather than cost. The pro-referenda group communicated effectively using voter registry databases and one-on-one face-to-face communications (see Table 5). Effective communication was not the sole reason for the success of the third referendum. Other themes played a role in the success. Community momentum was one key point that made a difference

Community momentum. Community momentum refers to the process of community members becoming more and more familiar with aspects of the referenda and the district needs as the referenda attempts occur. Each of the Erie referendum attempts made more and more Erie

community members aware of the needs of Erie High School and the costs involved in renovating. In addition, they also learned more about district committee groups, facility maintenance, and district procedures. While the first two referenda failed in garnering funds to renovate the Erie High School, the communication attempts of the third referendum succeeded in helping the Erie community learn about the needs of the Erie High School. This led to an increased momentum in the community regarding the needs of the school and the importance of the referendum.

Community Goodwill. Another important aspect of communication and building community momentum is increasing and sustaining the goodwill of the community. In the first two referenda, the district leaders only communicated with those members of the community that agreed with them or those who had similar view points. The Erie school district leaders seemed to disregard the opposition and elicit support from stakeholders that they saw as relevant, not all stakeholders. Making opposition on the district committee feel unwelcomed, not engaging with opposition due to the belief that they will always vote no, and inviting only voting resident school staff to referenda presentations are examples of the Erie school district not creating or maintaining goodwill with community and school stakeholders. They did not take into account the fact that all staff has a vested interest in their facilities and that all community members, even oppositional ones, are important.

Sustained disregard for community members or staff led to trust issues. However, after the third attempt, the community was supportive of the referendum and trusted the stakeholders and leaders who were community members rather than district leaders. This was in large part due to the one-on-one initiative and due to the district framing of the referendum as a cost savings

rather than as expenditure. In this way, they helped the community see the referendum as an investment in the future rather than as an expense in the present.

Trust. While participants did not mention trust issues, trust was an implicit theme in the data. An undercurrent of trust issues arose throughout the research process. One indicator of distrust was that some participants that were opposed to Erie referenda did not want to be interviewed and the community member that was opposed and interviewed refused to answer some questions.

Another indicator of the lack of trust on the part of the community towards the school district was the assumption on the part of community members that a lack of maintenance documentation meant that maintenance had not been done properly. While the district corrected that through attempting to educate the community about the distinction between repairs and maintenance and purchasing a maintenance documentation system, it still demonstrated an undercurrent of distrust in the Erie School District. In the last referenda the community lack of trust was no longer an issue perhaps because it was the community, not the district leaders, which pushed the referendum forward.

One of the lessons that Erie School District had to learn over the course of the referenda is that a community passes a referendum, not a district. This point may seem simple, yet the Erie district seemed to take this for granted. Occurrences in the first two referenda such as having the town hall style presentations given at only the more popular areas in Erie, disregarding the opposition, and not welcoming non-resident staff to the referenda events are prime examples of missing the crucial understanding that the community passes a school bond measure, not a district. In the third attempt, the district tried very different processes to communicate with the

community and seek their cooperation. It was the community of Erie that demonstrated what should be done. The community of Erie came forward to lead a grass-roots face-to-face effort to pass the final referenda measure. The pro-referenda group, comprised of community members, had the ability to effectively communicate with other community members throughout Erie.

Lastly, a vital lesson learned was that effective communication goes beyond the message being communicated and hinges also on the person who is giving it. While it is imperative to have an effective message that resonates with community members, the same message may be received differently depending on who is expressing it. In the Erie referenda process, the first two referenda communications were led by district leaders, especially the superintendent. The Erie community felt ignored by the district leaders. However, on the third referendum, although the community members provided similar reasons with regard to why the Erie High School had to be renovated in much the same way as the first referendum attempted , they were listened to because their neighbor or fellow grocery shopper was expressing it. The perception of the district leaders and the involvement of a community-based pro-referenda group were central in ensuring that the referendum message was well received.

Overall, effective communication remained the main overarching reason why the third referendum passed when the first two failed. It is the lesson of effective communication and the various means to achieve the same that this study uncovered as the primary reason for bond referendum success.

Findings in the Context of the Literature

As mentioned in the littérature review, "the research of Philip Piele and John Hall, completed 35 years ago, still provide the foundation for many contemporary dissertations and

scholarly works on this topic [educational referenda process]" (Lifto & Senden, 2010). Piele and Hall's "magastudy" brings educational referenda research forward to present day (Lifto & Senden, 2010). As outlined in the literature, characteristics and factors that affect the success or failure of the bond referenda can be organized into three determinants (Piele and Hall, 1973):

- o Environmental determinants, which are composed of school district characteristics, election characteristics, information flow, and communication (Hockersmith, 2001; Neill, 2003; Weathersby, 2002; Mobley, 2007; Faltys, 2006; Hinson, 2001; Friedland, 2002; Clemens, 2003; Ryan, 2005; Henry, 1987; Beckham, 2001; Theobold and Meier, 2002; Lifto & Senden 2010; Weatherby, 2002; Geurink, 2006; Pappalardo, 2005; Florence, 2014; Lode, 1999; Holt, 1993; Gallagher & Moore, 2010; Bagin et al., 2010, Stover, 2012; Weathersby, 2002; Kinsall, 2000).

- o Socioeconomic determinants, which are composed of economic factors and social factors (Kinsall, 2000; Schrom, 2004; Faltys, 2006; Fox & Priest, 2005; Weathersby, 2002; Theobold & Meier, 2002; Pappalardo, 2005; Hockersmith, 2001; Lifto & Senden, 2004).

- o Psychological determinants, which are composed of partisan and nonpartisan attitudes and attitudes toward taxes, community, government and school officials, and conflict (Mobley, 2007; Friedland, 2002; Pappalardo, 2005; Schrom, 2004; Fox & Priest, 2005; Weathersby, 2002; Theobold & Meier, 2002; Neill, 2003; Lifto & Senden, 2010).

This study found that factors from each determinant played a role in the failure of the first and second school bond referenda attempts and in the success of the third one in Erie School District. The environmental determinants that were found significant from the Erie participants' descriptions and explanations of a school district's bond referenda journey were: election characteristics, information factors, and communication factors. The socioeconomic determinants that were found significant from the Erie participants' descriptions and explanations of a school district's bond referenda journey were: status of the economy, tax impact, fiscal referenda incentives, personal communication, framing referenda from a needs perceptive, and positive public relations factors. Lastly, the psychological determinants that were found significant from the Erie participants' descriptions and explanations of a school district's bond referenda journey were: attitudes towards taxes, community involvement, and school officials.

Environmental Determinants

The environmental determinants that were found significant from the Erie participants' descriptions and explanations of a school district's bond referenda journey were: election characteristics, information factors, and communication factors.

Election characteristics. Several scholars refer to election characteristics as a key determinant of the success or failure of bond referenda. Some election characteristics include time of the year, election type, mill rate, local and state governmental legislation laws, voter history, and voter demographics. Some factors were not mentioned by participants and not found in the written evidence in this study, such as issue type and mill rate (Poncelet, 1999), time of the

125

year (Hinson, 2001), number of referenda on school ballot (Ryan, 2005), and ballots with more than one proposition (Faltys, 2006). While this study did have differing times of the year and the second attempt had more than one proposition, the participants did not find these election characteristics significant in the Erie referenda process. However, participants noted significance in other election characteristics found in the referenda literature such as Clemens' (2003) research on government legislation and allowable practices and Lifto and Senden's (2010) research on voter history.

An election characteristic found significant by Clemens (2003) and by the Erie study participants was government legislation. Government legislations were evident in the Erie School District bond referenda attempts. As discussed in chapter four, the Qualified School Construction Bonds and the Build America Bonds subsidies available to school districts were useful to pass a bond referendum. As mentioned in chapter four, participants noted this governmental legislation and practice as significant in passing the final referenda. The Erie School District was able to tote throughout the community prior to the third referenda attempt that 25 to 35 percent of the referenda would be subsidized, providing more bang-for-your-buck. Furthermore, the federal stimulus allowed the Erie School District and the pro-referenda community group to frame the final referenda attempt with emphasis on the amount the community would save, not the amount it would cost.

Another election characteristic discussed in the literature (Cannon & Cannon, 1997; Lifto & Senden, 2010) is voter history, which was observed in the Erie referenda process. The first two Erie referenda attempts did not utilize voter history or records in planning or campaigning. The Erie School District officials disregarded voter history and records, not strategically

preparing for those opposed to the referenda. District leaders on numerous occasions stated that there was a contingent of people that would vote against the school bond referenda no matter what happened. Furthermore, participants perceived that during task force meetings and other district led meetings, people who opposed the referenda were discounted and proponents were given more time and speaking opportunities. The Erie School District may have done better on the first two referenda attempts if they had attended to the voter history and the opposition more.

However, in the last Erie referenda attempt the pro-referenda group effectively used voter history and records to prepare and organize interaction with the community. A school district that utilizes voter history during strategizing and planning of referenda campaign will be more successful (Cannon & Cannon, 1997; Lifto & Senden, 2010) The Education Done Right group used the voter history, gearing up for the last referenda, to create a list of people to contact. Each volunteer committed to approaching and discussing the benefits of the Erie High School bond referenda with 10 people on the list. As discussed in chapter four, utilizing voter history to organize a communication campaign, as participants testified, was instrumental to the final referenda success. If environmental factors were influential in the success and failure of bond referenda attempts, information factors were equally important to the success of the campaign.

Information factors. Information factors such as committee contribution, promoting needs, and the use of a bond or communication consultant were integrated into the Erie School District bond referenda experience. Some of these factors were utilized with more effectiveness than others. Committee contributions can be significant in aiding to the passing of school bond referenda (Nunnery & Kimbrough, 1971; Brazier, 2009; Geurink, 2006; Pappalardo, 2005; Clemens, 2003; Hinson, 2001). Nunernery and Kimbrough (1971) suggested a team approach

127

with educators, lay people, school leaders, and specialist working as a team to achieve a referenda success. Whether its label, advisory committee (Geurink, 2006), oversight committee (Pappalardo, 2005), bond committee (Clemens, 2003), or campaign committee (Hinson, 2001), bringing together community stakeholders and school district staff to work together as a small group is important and should be started as early as possible (Brazier, 2009).

An aspect of this study that corroborates the literature is that the Erie task force, and the referenda that the committee initiated and was maintained by the Erie School District was seen by most participants as important in engaging community members and spreading the word about the ins-and-outs of the Erie School bond referenda. On the other hand, this study also found disagreement with the literature, as pointed out in chapter four. The committee and the task force were noted to be made up of overwhelmingly pro-referenda community members, and referenda dissenters reported not feeling as valued in these district-led committee or task force group. This study found that it is important to utilize a task force or a committee to ensure community engagement and ownership in developing a needs assessment and remedy options. However, if the district-led committee or task force does not value all members, it may cause those community members to disengage and have adverse effect on the referenda process and successfulness.

Another informational factor is promoting needs. This study found that promoting of school facility needs led to bringing forth a school bond referendum and is vital to successful passage. Purposeful and clear vision of what is being achieved by passing a bond referendum is important (Brazier, 2009). Research in the area of promoting facility needs discusses not only the promotion of need, but also the importance of ensuring that as needs come up throughout the

128

lifetime of the building, the community is made aware of the repairs and renovations needed (Faltys, 2002; Geurink, 2006; Theobold & Meier, 2002). In this study, the first and second bond referenda failed. At least in part, one can attribute the reason for the failure was the lack of informing the community continuously of the need for repairs to facilities. Erie School District could have been more effective in promoting the needs of repairs and renovations. Participants noted that the Erie School District did not historically keep the community aware of problems that the high school facilities were having, rather a needs assessment was performed before the first referenda. Participants pointed out that the need assessment personnel did a great job of garnering high school staff's input on the needs of the building and the classrooms. As stated in chapter four, this was positive for the classroom staff, but to some participants who were not working for the district, it seemed that the referenda components were more out of wants than needs. While the community was somewhat knowledgeable of the building needs through tours, publications, articles, and town hall meetings used throughout the first two referenda attempts, the tours and town hall meetings were not well attended, resulting in a lack of community involvement in the needs process.

Another informational factor is the utilization of a referenda or communication consultant. Research results are mixed in the use of communication or referenda consultant. Pappalardo (2005) and Hockersmit (2001) purport utilizing a consultant is an effective tactic for passing bond referenda. Conversely, Schrom (2004) and Hinson (2001) found consultants to have no positive effect on passing a bond referendum and may even cause a bond campaign to be less effective. The findings of this study point to a third result in the use of consultants. In this study, the consultant seemed to not only have had little effect but may have hindered the

referenda process as well. While some internal district participants described the consultant as somewhat helpful to guiding the district in a plan of action to engage the community through a survey and various town hall meetings, other internal district participants and outside of the district participants questioned the purpose of a communication consultant and the funding involved. Even though the superintendent many a time openly testified that the consultant was helpful, important, and would be paid by the architect company, the community members considered the consultant as an added cost that was not needed. It must be noted that the Erie School District lost the first two referenda that the consultant was involved in and was successful in passing the last referenda for which the consultant was not rehired.

Communication factors. A factor in the category of environmental determinants is communication. "Communication is instrumental in the passage of a construction bond election" (Florence, 2014, p. i). Strategies surrounding communication are important and significant to passing a bond referendum (Bagin et al., 2010; Geurink, 2006; Cannon & Cannon, 1997). Effective forms of internal or external communication (Bagin et al., 2010; Lode, 1999; Pappalardo, 2005; Weathersby, 2002; Kinsall, 2000; Polka, 1993), continuous communication (Stover, 2012; Henry, 1987; Holt, 1993), or the use of targeted communication (Lifto & Senden, 2004; Neill, 2003) have each been discussed as important aspects of successfully passing a bond referenda. This study found that using poor external or internal communication can negatively affect school bond referenda and may have aided in the failure of the first two Erie referenda attempts. This study reinforces past research on referenda communication: utilizing continuous and targeted communication lends to a higher successfulness in pass school bond referenda.

External communication forms such as mass media, community surveys, and community-based committees are important (Lode, 1999). Erie School District used the newspaper through the referenda process and gained a local spot on the television news for the third referenda. In addition to mass media used by the Erie School District, a community survey and community-based committees were also used. Both external forms of communication were found to be somewhat ineffective. The use of the newspaper was described by some participants as constantly reminding the community of the costs entailed to tax payers, and thus, unintentionally prompting people to vote against the measure. This idea brought forth by participants is supported by the fact that the first two failed referenda attempts had more news article reporting than the third referenda attempt. Furthermore, the survey was not well completed and neither techniques successfully gained the perspective and dialogue of the opposition to the school bond referenda.

Bagin et al. (2010) discusses the importance of internal communication and the destructiveness of poorly internal communication. This study is a prime example of poor internal communication in amount, planning, and sensitivity. Internal communications were used by the Erie superintendent, utilizing memos and emails; however, they were infrequent and did little to foster the internal excitement and outgoingness needed to help pass a school bond referenda. As discussed in chapter four, the superintendent's communications were sent to all of the staff, while within the memos was an invitation to get involved for those employees who were residents of the school district. This openly differentiated communication between resident and non-resident caused non-residents to be disenfranchised or see little need for themselves to champion the Erie High School bond referenda. This is evidenced by the data from internal

participants who highlighted the ineffectiveness of the superintendent's communications. Internal communication would have been more effective and less disenfranchising if they were sent only to residents calling for participation, or if they were sent to all employees and called for everyone to come out and get involved in the referenda process.

An important aspect of communication is continuous communication. Continuous and effective communication creates a favorable climate for future referenda (Lifto & Senden, 2010; Henry, 1987; Holt, 1993). This points to the ability of a school district to continue to dialogue with the community on the needs of a school as the needs arise. This study discussed earlier that this type of community relationship was not evident in the Erie School District and the district used a needs assessment instead of continuous reporting to communicate needs. This study also suggests that the first two bond referenda attempts may have inadvertently provided the needed continuous communication even though that was not the intent of the referenda and as a result, made a significant impact on the final successful school bond referenda.

Another important aspect of communication is targeted communication (Lifto & Senden, 2010; Neill, 2003; Holt, 1993). Some of the targeting strategies discussed throughout the literature uses voter history, voter files, demographic reach, and timing (Lifto & Senden, 2010). Generally, a school district should identify which audience is captured by the various, specific communication methods. Once identified, an effective and specific message should be created for the target audience. Specifically, targeted communication is seeking out through voter history and registration, which voters are going to vote and targeting them with direct referenda messages. As discussed in chapter four, the pro-referenda group perform targeted communication, while the Erie School District did not target anyone with their communication or

consider what type of communication would reach a target audience. It is worth noting, as evident from the data in chapter four, that the pro-referenda community group used voter history to identify appropriate contacts and strategize method of contact. This was seen by many participants as critical to the success of the last referenda measure.

Socioeconomic Determinants

The socioeconomic determinants that were found significant from the Erie participants' descriptions and explanations of a school district's bond referenda journey were economic factors such as status of the economy, tax impact, fiscal referenda incentives, and social factors including personal communication, framing referenda from a needs perceptive, and positive public relations factors.

Economic factors. Within the socioeconomic determinants categorization, economic factors are discussed throughout the literature and are relevant to this study. While some researchers found significance in some economic factors such as economic status, poverty level, and size of the asking amount of school bond referenda (Poncelet, 1999; Nehls, 1991), another researcher found economic aspects as having little to no significance but rather election aspects such as campaigning strategies that are significant (Kinsall, 2000). As outlined in chapter four, the participants in the Erie School District referenda processes believe that economic factors were significant in the failure of the first and second bond referenda attempt and the passage of the final bond referenda.

Three economic characteristics were often mentioned by participants in the Erie referenda experience: status of the economy, tax impact, and fiscal referenda incentives. The

status of the economy was noted earlier in this study as the recession started in 2008. The majority of the participants and the writings within the referenda process consistently mentioned the poor economic context. Participants expressed that these were tough times and during the referenda process, people were financially hurt. They pointed to the difficulty of asking for more money from a community of people who were increasingly unemployed.

Related to the economically troubled times was the added burden that people would have to incur in the form of increased taxes. Participants pointed out that people would have to pay more through taxes. When discussing community members against taxes, some participants brought up that a portion of the community was against raising taxes at all, and others in the community expressed that the first two referenda increased taxes too much. People against raising taxes pointed out that on peoples' fixed income, taxes would rise higher than they could afford. Throughout the referenda process, both opponents and proponents of the Erie High School referenda would discuss the costs of the referenda in terms of its tax impact, and how much taxes would increase per household assessment of every hundred thousand and two hundred thousand. During the first two referenda, this type of discussion hindered the passing of the referenda. Fortunately, during the third referenda the school district and the pro-referenda group were able to frame the cost in a tax saving perspective through the federal stimulus incentive opportunity. The promoting of this savings opportunity turned out to be significant. As discussed earlier, this federal incentive offer allowed the community of Erie to pass a large referendum, almost the same size as the first referendum, with a lower tax impact. Participants indicated that this actual tax saving opportunity was an important factor in passing the final referenda.

Social factors. Social factors such as patriotism and civic duty are discussed in the literature as factors that may supersede economic factors (Schrom, 2004). One social theme in the literature is the effectiveness of utilizing demographic mapping of census data, voter registry, parent data, and voter history in bond referenda processes (Lifto & Senden, 2004). This study found that the lack of collection or use of these types of data points by the Erie School District may have hindered their ability to pass their bond referenda. In addition, participants of the pro-referenda community group pointed out the effectiveness of utilizing some data points in their efforts to campaign for the last referenda. The participants went on to testify that the use of voter registry, while concurrently interacting with the community, was a significant part of passing the final Erie High School referendum. As mentioned in chapter four, the registry was used by the pro-referenda group to target communication and to organize a personal form of communication.

Another social aspect is the placing of a school bond referendum in the framework of the needs of the students, staff, and community. Communities have increased positive sentiment for referenda if they are made aware of the needs of a building as they are occurring through the years. The social aspect of involving the community in the needs of a facility can be viewed through a humanistic framework, that of human feelings of seeing others in distress and wanting to help. Researchers promote that communities are more likely to pass a referenda if the perception of a real need is present (Holt, 1993; Weathersby, 2002; Greig, 1991; Theobold & Meier, 2002). Some participants in this study pointed out that it may have been through the process of attempting to pass the Erie High School bond referenda and the various activities, such as needs assessment, task force meetings, town hall meetings, building tours, and various other interactions, that the Erie community learned and started to feel bad for the students and

staff, leading to a successful final referendum attempt. Furthermore, the pool had to be partially repaired between the second and third referenda, which may have also led community members to feel sorry for Erie students and staff. Thus, the Erie community may have acquired more empathy and a perspective of more immediate needs during the final referenda process.

Lastly, a social factor that plays an important role is a general positive public relationship between the school district and the community. A positive relationship is vital to successful bond referenda (Nehls, 1991). According to participants in this study, the Erie School District's relationship with the community was manifested through the schools changing perspective of being rigorous and up-to-date. While historically, Erie school district had a mentality toward academics as "good enough," through the changing neighboring educational landscape, education competition was forcing Erie School District to reach for more. This was sometimes seen as a disconnect between the "it was good enough for us" perspective and the "we need the best" perspective. Half of the community saw the Erie School District's promotion for better facilities as a positive, while the other half saw it as not needed. This may have been the reason the vote tallies were close in each of the referenda attempts.

The positive relationship between the school district and the community is highlighted in the third referenda attempt with the previously discussed pro-referenda group leadership and school district leadership dynamic. The successful strategic communication by the pro-referenda group and the leadership of the pro-referenda group becoming the Erie Board of Education members is evidence of the positive relationship between the community and the school district during the last school bond referenda attempt.

Psychological Determinants

The psychological determinants that were found significant from the Erie participants'

descriptions and explanations of a school district's bond referenda journey were attitudes toward

taxes, community involvement, and school officials. Psychological determinants pertain to how

people think and feel, incorporating the political aspects of the referenda process (Piele & Hall,

1973). As noted in chapter three, psychological determinants such as satisfaction with the school

district (Lifto, 1995), oppositional community groups (Mobley, 2007; Neil, 2003; Friedland,

2002; Lifto, 1995), pro-referenda community groups (Pappalardo, 2005; Holt, 1993; Henry,

1987, Mancini, 1987), attitudes toward civic duty (Schrom, 2004), perception of public officials

(Fox & Priest, 2005; Mancini, 1987; Lifto, 1995; Weathersby, 2002; Nunnery & Kimbrough,

1971; Theobold & Meier, 2002), and community involvement (Cannon & Cannon, 1997; Greig,

1991; Lifto & Senden, 2010; Lifto & Senden, 2004; Polka, 1993; Henry, 1987; Nunnery &

Kimbrough, 1971; Lode, 1995; Mancini, 1987; Weathersby, 2002; Lifto, 1995; Nehls, 1991;

Holt, 1993) are significant in the passing or failing of a school bond referendum. This study

furthers the literature: finding the Erie community members' attitude toward taxes, the

community's educational involvement, the community's relationship with school officials, and

the community's concerns were reported as important in the success or failure of each of the Erie

School bond referenda attempts.

Attitudes toward taxes. A factor in the category of psychological determinants is

attitude towards taxes. As previously mentioned, voter demographic characteristics such as

patriotism and civic duty were found to be important factors in determining the outcome of

school bond referenda (Schrom, 2004). This study showed that the Erie community had a

significant portion of community members against the referenda, no matter what. Their attitude towards renovating the high school was oppositional. An overlapping group, but not necessarily the same people, were against any tax increase. This anti-tax group was composed of people against any tax increase for any reason, people against increasing taxes to renovate Erie High School, and people against increasing taxes due to the economic recession.

The attitudes against the referenda were viewed by many participants as unchangeable and thus, was not attempted to be changed by district officials or community pro-referenda groups. The school officials seemed to favor pro-referenda members in their self-created referenda task force and committees. Also, the pro-referenda group identified a group of people that were going to be against the referenda no matter what and maintained the strategy of not trying to persuade those individuals. This unchangeable attitude toward taxes by Erie community members was considered when preparing for the pro-referenda campaign. This is most evidenced in the pro-referenda group who strategically chose not to communicate through articles in the paper leading up to the last referenda due to their perception that newspaper articles, while containing great factual information, invariably contained the tax impact on a home owner, which they believed unintentionally persuaded community members to stand against the referenda.

Community involvement. Community involvement pertains to the effectiveness of getting the community individuals and groups to participate in the needs or rationale of a referenda and the campaign leading up to Election Day. Community involvement can be positive or negative for the referenda. Community involvement is the most researched aspect of school bond referenda. The community involvement literature discusses the importance of establishing a

grassroots effort of meaningful community involvement providing crucial ownership and commitment needed by communities to be successful in a school referendum campaign (Cannon & Cannon, 1997; Greig, 1991; Lifto & Senden, 2004; Polka, 1993). Involving the community in assessing, planning, and promoting school bond issues is imperative in passing a school bond (Lifto & Senden, 2004; Lode, 1995; Mancini, 1987; Weathersby, 2002). This study confirms the literature that Erie failed two referenda that were not considered to have a significant amount of community involvement. Thereafter, the pro-referenda group created the grassroots meaningful community involvement needed by personally communicating with community members, leading to a successful referendum. This community engagement was noted as one of the most important contributing factors to the successful Erie referenda. This study furthers the literature by possessing an unusual aspect of an overlap between the pro-referenda community group (found in the community involvement literature) and the school board leadership (found in the district officials literature), which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Community involvement research warns that organized opposition has a significant negative impact on the outcome of bond elections (Mobley, 2007). Successful elections were more likely in districts without organized opposition and with parent support (Friedland, 2002). This study did have some opposition to the referenda. The participants identified the opposition as a group who always opposed naysayers, seniors with no children, community members who opposed any tax increase, parochial school parents, farmers, rural community members, and community members with financial hardships.

However, participants also noted that these identified people opposed to the referenda were not organized and did not put together any oppositional campaigning. The only organized

opposition identified by some participants was the Wisconsin Chapter of Americans for Prosperity, which utilized telephone calling residents on the night prior to the first referenda to urge them against the Erie referenda. There were mixed perceptions on the effectiveness of the phone calls, with most participants claiming that it was not effective in being a deterrent to voting for the referenda. At the same time, participants did note the anti-referenda phone calls did not do anything positive for the referenda.

Research indicates the likelihood of a successful outcome increases by having a public relations program that has ongoing communication (Lifto, 1995). In this study, the consultant utilized to create and implement a public relations program was seen by the superintendent as vital, while some of the community viewed the consultant as a waste of money. While the consultant provided great strategic actions for the school district to utilize, without a committed community, the campaign is ineffective. As noted in chapter four, the consultant was used for the first two referenda attempts, which had less public involvement. Contrastingly, the last and successful referendum attempt had no communication consultant and more community involvement. This study finds that while a communication or campaign consultant can be positive, it is only effective if there is also a significant amount of community involvement. The first two Erie referenda attempts were ineffective at attaining ongoing communication with the public. Evidence from this study points out a disconnectedness of the community toward the referenda. This is evident from the low turnout rate at the town hall meetings and the many misconceptions noted in the community survey.

On the other hand, the public relations program designed by the pro-referenda group in the last successful referendum attempt had great ongoing communications. The pro-referenda

group being influential is in line with the research. The degree of citizen and interest group support has been highly rated as a factor influencing the outcome of bond referenda (Pappalardo, 2005). This study supports the idea of the Erie pro-referenda group being noted by participants to be extremely important to the success of the final referenda. The literature goes on to note that districts should devote extra attention to involving community leaders (Weathersby, 2002). In this study, the first and second referenda did not report involving community leaders. However, the third referenda can be viewed as involving community leaders, as evident by the pro-referenda group leaders becoming the school board members, thus becoming the district leaders. These three individuals were more than people working on a school district referenda campaign; they were involved in many community groups.

Attitudes toward government and school officials. While these pro-referenda group leaders were important, the literature discusses the importance of the current school officials to the success of a school bond referendum. While voters' overall satisfaction with the school district does not predict the outcome of bond issues (Lifto, 1995), securing a government body endorsement such as school board members or district superintendents is critical to passing school referenda (Fox & Priest, 2005; Mancini, 1987). Unanimous school board support and strong superintendent involvement are argued to be key components of a strategic referendum campaign (Lifto, 1995; Weathersby, 2002). This study supports the idea that school board officials are important. In the first two referenda, the school board was mixed in its view of which referenda option should be pursued and in what ways to do it. Most of the time, the Erie school board voted together, but much of the board dialogue through the referenda process was in conflict or at least questioning one another. On the other hand, less conflict between Erie

school board members was reported, leading up to the third referenda attempt. Some of the pro-referenda group leaders becoming Erie school board members between the second and third referenda led to a more congealed board, which had a positive effect on the last Erie school referenda attempt.

While school board members are important to the referenda process, school leaders and teachers are often overlooked as public officials, but they are necessary to a successful school bond measure and should be involved in the process (Nunnery & Kimbrough, 1971; Theobold & Meier, 2002). On one hand, the superintendent somewhat communicated through memos and emails to the staff, eliciting staff that live in Erie to be on the task force or to come to the town hall meetings. On the other hand, some participants noted that teachers were under-utilized and viewed by the superintendent as ineffective. Communications to Erie staff were limited to a few emails between referenda. These emails were addressed and sent to all staff members, calling for the employees that were Erie School District residence to come to various events and get involved. As discussed in chapter four, this disenfranchised the staff that were not Erie School District residents, sending the message that only staff that were able to vote were welcomed to be vested in the Erie referenda process, leading to less staff (considered public officials) to be involved in the referenda process. This reinforces the literature that school officials are important to a bond referenda election, adding that they can negatively affect the referenda process. While much literature points out that effective district officials can positively affect the school bond referenda process, this study points out that an ineffective school official can negatively affect the referenda process.

Community concerns. A community involvement factor discussed in the literature is the importance of careful examination of opinions and concerns of stakeholders by the district superintendent, which leads to successful campaigns (Neill, 2003). This idea in conjunction with the community involvement research on the importance of understanding and preparing for opposition (Friedland, 2002, Mobley, 2007), points out a fundamental referenda characteristic that the Erie School District neglected to pursue. The Erie School District did not attempt to persuade or even understand the opposition to the school bond referenda. A significant amount of Erie community were opposed to the school bond referenda and were treated as always going to be opposed no matter what. This mindset led the Erie School District to never fully invest time, resources, or interest in the opposition. It was an important failure for Erie not to understand the opposition and involve them in at least the facility needs portion of the referenda process. If Erie School District would have been able to provide a listening ear to community members who were against the referenda, then they may have been able to articulate a more effective argument for the need of an Erie school bond referendum. This, in turn, would have armed the Erie referenda campaign. Instead, Erie School District failed to seek out the opposition and settled for a significant portion of the Erie community voters always voting against the referenda.

Limitations

The specific findings of this study are limited to the Village of Erie and the Erie School District. The population of Erie, its size, educational composition, comparative wealth, rural status, and workforce make-up are some factors that may affect the voter turnout and the

referenda process. An example of these factors impacting the referenda process is the size. Communication factors discussed throughout this study and in the literature indicate that the form and amount of communication are important to the outcome of a referendum. The amount of media attention to a single referenda or the amount of personal communication that occurs is heavily affected by the size of the city and the school district. The newspaper reporting on a high school facility bond referenda in an urban larger-sized school district will be less than in a rural small school district. The personal face-to-face communication can reach a higher percentage of the community in a small rural school district than in a larger urban setting.

The interviews conducted for this study occurred in 2013 after the third referenda occurred. The participants may have had a different perspective if they had been interviewed between referenda attempts. Attempting to recall what occurred may have been hindered by the amount of time that elapsed from each of the referenda. It is a common occurrence that the further away from an event one gets, the less details a person can recall. Thus, a limitation for this study was that being interviewed three years after the last referenda attempt and five years after the first referenda attempt may have clouded their memories. Furthermore, the participants' recollection of the last referenda attempt may have been clearer than the first due to less time having passed by. Thus, participants and this study may have unintentionally emphasized the last referenda.

Another limitation is that some participants demonstrated reluctance in a direct and an indirect manner. Some participants directly asked if others would find out about what they were saying. One participant even refused to answer a question about the opposition to the referenda, because he stated it would get him into trouble. Some participants squirmed in their chair or

made grimacing faces as they spoke about what seemed to be a difficult topic of the referenda. The topics triggering the most reluctance were the superintendent, the school board members, and the referenda opposition. Some participants at the time of the interview were current subordinates of other participants in the study. For example, one participant was at the time of the interview an active teacher, while at the same time, the active superintendent was also interviewed. It was noted by the teacher participant that speaking freely of the superintendent was difficult.

Another limitation of this study is the economic context at the time of the referenda process. The economic context for the majority of the time of these three referenda attempts was one of a recession. The recession may have been a climate that is less conducive to passing school bond referenda. For example, participants may be more sensitive to needs versus wants in a time of economic downturn, becoming more critical of want is really needed. Participants who are having trouble paying the bills are more affected by a tax increase. Furthermore, participants may have placed more importance on a financial stimulus opportunity due to the recession.

Lastly, a human interviewer and human participants come with the limitation of personal biases. Human experiences and knowledge create uniqueness in a person. Others perception of my physical appearance, gender, spoken language conventions, and other specific traits may have had an effect on the openness of a participant. Certain participants may have felt more comfortable with a female interviewer than a male. This unconscious and conscious bias may have led to a more open or reluctant participant. While precautions were taken through this study to limit this bias, it is impossible to fully eliminate it.

Implication for Practice

      This study has several implications for practice. A couple of implications are important in guiding policy makers, while others are important for school leaders to take into account as they move through their referenda journey. This study encourages: policy makers to commit to financially motivating school districts to renovate and repair; school leaders to seek out financial stimulus opportunities; school leaders to financial frame their referenda measure as a savings; school districts to encourage a pro-referenda community group; school districts to analyze and incorporate the opposition; school districts to understand needs versus wants; and school districts to understand their own communal perception of hiring a consultant.

      Implications for policymakers. Policymakers significantly affect school bond referenda since they continually decide their state's school funding allocations and regulations. An implication for policy makers and government officials at the state and federal levels is the understanding and implementing of federal or state funding stimuli or grants. This study found that a major impetus for passing a referendum is the cost savings of a federal or state stimulus. Federal and state legislators should consider aiding school districts and communities by supplementing the costs of renovating and repairing their infrastructure. This may lead to a significant amount of school referenda passed and a significant amount of our school infrastructure updated and brought into the 21st century.

      Implications for school leaders. The first implication for school districts is to seek out and utilize federal, state, and local stimulus or grant funding available to supplant the cost to tax payers. School districts need to secure any alternative funding available and then advertise the financial benefits of passing a referenda at that particular time. Whether the funding is fully

secured or a possible byproduct of passing a referendum, it is imperative for the school district to frame the referenda measure through the lens of the amount of possible savings rather than the cost to tax payers.

A second implication for practice is the need for a well-organized and effective pro-referenda community group. It is important for a school district to provide any pro-referenda community group with as much information and presentation materials as possible that the district utilizes to inform the community. This can be done through providing factual information and presentation to the group. This may also take the form of encouraging community members that are not yet elected to the school district board of education, but maybe attempting to run for it, to place time and energy into a referenda campaign. It seems to increase the chances of successful bond referenda and may increase the chances of being elected on the school board. Either way, a pro-referenda community group with effective and strategic communication will lead to more successful bond referenda.

A third implication for practice from this study is for school districts to attempt to analyze the opposition. School districts should not be content with an opposition that will always be opposed. School districts should make a conscious effort to be welcoming toward the opposition and implementing mechanisms that ensures the opposition's engagement in the needs and options of school bond referenda. In this study, if the Erie School District would have been more receptive to oppositional community members in the task force process, they may have come up with an option or a framing of an option that would have won over some of the opposition.

A fourth implication for practice is for a school district to parse out the difference

147

between what items are needed to be renovated or repaired, and what items are actually not needed but would be greatly appreciated. This type of evaluation comes from having a good handle on the communities' perception of the school and its expectations of the students. For example, if it is a blue color community that is not interested in high achieving academics, they are less likely to want to pass a referendum that implements some high achieving academic program such as an International Baccalaureate program. Conversely, if the community is very wealthy, they are less likely to want to invest funding into an at-risk youth program. A school district needs to be in sync with the community to gauge which referenda items will be perceived as a need.

A fifth implication for practice is to be cognizant of the community members' perception of a referenda or communication consultant, while weighing out the benefits a referenda consultant brings to the process. A referenda or communication consultant may help a school district become more effective in communication, building a plan of action, surveying the community, understanding their options, and putting together an advertising campaign. However, consultants may also be viewed as outsiders. Community members may view referenda or communication consultants negatively, questioning the rationale for paying a consultant to do things that school district leaders can accomplish. School districts need to be sensitive to the community's perception of hiring a consultant.

Lastly, an implication for school districts is to build up a reservoir of good will in the district. School districts should listen to concerns about maintenance, about academic expectations, to the opinions of non-resident staff, and to the opinions of the opposition. The Erie School District was lacking in understanding their community and staff perceptions of the High

148

School's maintenance and academic standards. A positive relationship is developed with the community and school staff by ensuring their perspective is garnered and attended to.

Implication for Future Research

This study has several implications for future research. Some questions that emerged from the results of the study and the process that are relevant for future research are:

1) How can unorganized opposition to referenda be persuaded to vote for referenda?

2) How can district leaders and school board members inform and provide information to pro-referenda community groups?

3) Does running for school board member while campaigning for a school referenda benefit or hinder the referenda?

4) How does goodwill towards the district leadership generated to support school bond referenda success?

5) How do economic contexts such as a recession affect school referenda?

An area of research that should be explored is the opposition toward school bond referenda. Most research in this area discusses organized opposition. Future research should attempt to investigate the ability of school officials, community leaders, and community pro-referenda groups in affecting individuals opposed to a school referenda measure. This type of research may lead to practical field applications that a school district can utilize in order to aide in persuading opposition and become more successful in passing school bond referenda.

Knowles (2015) studies the perception that voters and school board candidates do not

participate in school board elections, which runs counter to the democratic promise of school boards as local offices. This combined with the findings from this study calls for future research on the relationship between candidates for the upcoming school board elections overlapping with community campaign leadership. It would be important for a researcher to attempt to measure the effects of being a leader in a pro- or anti-referenda community group while or immediately prior to running for school board, on their ability to succeed in becoming a school district board member. Also, researchers should explore the effect on the successfulness or failure of school bond referenda when potential school board members are involved or lead in a pro- or anti-referenda community organization. This may have practical application for people who are running for school board and for pro- or anti-referenda community organizations.

The goodwill towards district leadership prior to, during, and after a school bond referendum may have an effect on the successfulness a school bond referendum. How district leadership treat non-resident staff and unorganized opposition may not seem important because the staff would not be able to vote in the referendum and the opposition is going to vote against the referendum anyways. However, these small actions may have big implications for the success of a referendum.

Lastly, an area that should be explored in future research is the economic context's effect on the success or failure of school referenda. Whether it is a time of prosperity or one of recession, researchers should attempt to bring forth the effect the economy has on the community's voting practices. While a school district often does not have much of a choice in when a school referendum is needed to be sought after, they will be more aware of practical strategies to utilize during a downturn in the economy compared to a time of prosperity. More

150

case studies are needed to focus on the opposition to school bond referenda, the school board candidates' relationship to school bond referenda, and the effect of the economic context during the time of the school bond referenda.

References

Bagin, D., Gallagher, D. R., & Moore, E. H. (2008). *The school and community relations* (9th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Bagin, D., Gallagher, D. R., & Moore, E. H. (2010). *The school and community relations* (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Beckham, J. D. (2001). *An examination of the influence of technology inclusion in determining the outcome of school bond issue elections in Oklahoma*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

Bernard, S. (2010, May 28). Lehman Brothers estate sues J. P. Morgan Chase. *Washington Post Company*. Retrieved January 15, 2011 from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/27/AR2010052705088.html

Brazier, E. A. (2009). *Successful frameworks for financing capital projects: An analysis of Texas community college processes for bond referendums, 1998-2008*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Texas, Austin.

Buttle, F. (1996). *Relationship marketing: Theory and practice*. London: Paul Chapman. As noted in Schrom, J. W. (2004). *School community interaction and communication during a general obligation bond election*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Riverside.

Cannon, G. & Cannon, P. (1997). Tax strategies: Ten tips for winning a school tax referendum. *American School Board Journal, 184*(5), 35-36.

Capper , C. A. & Frattura, E. M. (2008). *Meeting the needs of students of all abilities: How leaders go beyond inclusion.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Clemens, A. D. (2003). *Issues and related strategies used in successful school facilities bond elections in seven selected Orange County school districts between June 2000 to March 2002.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of La Verne, La Verne, CA.

Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Denzin N. K., & Lincoln Y. S. (2010). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. *In Handbook of qualitative research.* 1-19. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Faltys, D. J. (2006). *Factors influencing the successful passage of a school bond referendum as identified by selected voters in the Navasota Independent School District in Texas.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University, College Station.

Flick, U. (2002). *An introduction to qualitative research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Florence, L. L. (2014). *School district bond campaigns: Strategies that ensure successful outcomes.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Portland State University, Portland.

Fox, L. P., & Priest, T. B. (2005). Minority support for school bonds in Charlotte-Mecklenburg: A cautionary note. *Education and Urban Society*, 37(2), 193-203.

Friedland, H. A. (2002). *The ecology of school bond elections: Factors associated with election results in New Jersey.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, New York.

Geurink, G. (2006). *An analysis of factors leading to the passage of school district*

finance referenda within the state of Wisconsin. Unpublished doctoral dissertation,

Edgewood College, Madison, WI.

Godown, M. P. (2010). *Factors influencing the successful passage of a school bond referendum as identified by New Jersey school superintendents.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Widener University, Chester, PA.

Gong, H. (2012). *Public school bond elections: An assessment.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

Greig, R. D. (1991). Board referendum: A success in rural Virginia. *Rural Educator*, 12(3), 9-11.

Henry, J. M. (1987). Help for passing bond referenda. *School Business Affairs, 53*(12), 25-27.

Hinson, J. L. (2001*). A study of the relationship between the outcome of school district bond issue elections and selected variables.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Saint Louis University, Saint Louis, MO.

Hockersmith, D. C. (2001). *Strategies used by school district superintendents, chief business officials, and school board members to achieve acquisition of a general obligation bond.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of La Verne, La Verne, CA.

Holt, C. R. (1993). *Factors affecting the outcome of school bond elections in South Dakota.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Dakota, Vermillion.

Kinsall, M. L. (2000). *A study of the effects of election campaign strategies on successful*

passage of tax levies. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Saint Louis University, Saint Louis, MO.

Knight, C. (2013). *Statewide study of school public relations personnel: Roles, responsibilities, relationships, and budget vote outcomes.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Fordham University, New York City, NY.

Knowles, J. E. (2015). *School boards and the democratic promise.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

Kotler, P. (1991). *Marketing management: Analysis, planning, implementation, and control* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. As noted in Schrom, J. W. (2004). *School community interaction and communication during a general obligation bond election.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Riverside, CA.

Kraus, B. W. (2009). *A descriptive analysis of selected community stakeholder opinions regarding potentially critical factors in school bond referenda success of failure in Kansas during the years 2004-2007.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS.

Lambert, W. A. (2012). *Superintendent perceptions of the success and failure of school construction referendums from 2008-2010 in the state on Indiana.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN.

Larsen, M. & Loppnow, D. (n.d.). *Wisconsin. report submitted to the national center for education statistics.* Retrieved October 3, 2011 from http://nces.ed.gov/edfin/pdf/StFinance/Wisconsi.pdf

Lewis-Beck, M. S., Bryman, A., & Liao, T. F. (2004a). *The sage encyclopedia of social*

science research methods (Vol. 1). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lewis-Beck, M. S., Bryman, A., & Liao, T. F. (2004b). *The Sage encyclopedia of social science research methods* (Vol. 3). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lifto, E. D. (1995). *Factors affecting the outcome of successful and unsuccessful bond referenda in four school districts.* Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1995. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED474204.

Lifto, E. D., & Senden B. J. (2004). *School finance elections: A comprehensive planning model for success*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education.

Lifto, E. D., & Senden B. J. (2010). *School finance elections: A comprehensive planning model for success* (2nd ed). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education.

Lincoln, Y. S. (2010). "What a long, strange trip it's been...": Twenty-five years of qualitative and new paradigm research. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 16(1), 3-9.

Lode, M. D. (1999). *Factors affecting the outcomes of school bond elections in Iowa*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Dakota, Vermillion.

Long, C. (2011, November 16). A national crisis: NEA spotlights urgent need for school modernization. NEA Today. Retrieved February 27, 2016, from http://neatoday.org/2011/11/16/a-national-crisis-nea-spotlights-urgent-need-for-school-modernization/

Mancini, D. J. (1987). *A study of variables related to successful and unsuccessful school tax referenda in Ohio*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Akron, Akron, OH.

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. (2010). Case study. Retrieved July 7, 2010, from

http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/case+study

Mobley, L. B. (2007). *An anatomy of an unsuccessful school bond election in a rural school district*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State.

National Kids Count (2015a). Kids Count Data Center, Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved April 7, 2015, from http://www.datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5199-per-pupil-educational-expenditures-adjusted-for-regional-cost-di#detailed/1/any/false/868,867,133,38,35/any/11678

National Kids Count (2015b). Kids Count Data Center, Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved April 7, 2015, from http://www.datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5199-per-pupil-educational-expenditures-adjusted-for-regional-cost-differences?loc=51&loct=2#detailed/2/51/false/868,867,133,38,35/any/11678

Nehls, R. L. (1991). *Election planning and campaign strategies affecting success or failure of public school bond measures in California*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of San Francisco, San Francisco.

Neill S. W. (2003*). The identification of effective strategies for bond campaigns in Kansas school district: An analysis of the beliefs of superintendents who conducted bond issue campaigns.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Wichita State University, Wichita, KS.

Nelson, S. H. (1998). *A case study of the referendum process.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.

Nunnery, M. Y. & Kimbrough, R. B. (1971). *Politics, power, polls and school elections*. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.

O'connor, R. E. (2011). *North Texas school superintendents perspectives on strategies to hold a successful tax ratification election.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.

Packer, C. D. (2013). *School referenda and Ohio department of education typologies: An investigation of the outcomes of first attempt school operating levies from 2002-2010.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH.

Pappalardo, J. W. (2005). *Strategies used by superintendents, chief business officials, and school board members in successful proposition 39 general obligation bond elections.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of La Verne, La Verne, CA.

Piele, K. P., & Hall, J. S. (1973). *Budgets, bonds, and ballots: Voting behavior in school financial elections.* Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath.

Polka, W. S. (1993). Networking and community cooperation: A successful approach to changing perspectives and winning votes. *People and Education, 1(4)*, 355-362.

Poncelet, P. M. (1999). *An examination of the empirical correlates of the success and failure of Ohio school district financial referenda 1992-1996*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH.

Russo, C. J. (2010). *Planning a school construction referendum: a case study of a small rural school district in southern New Jersey.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Wilmington University, New Castle, DE.

Ryan T. W. (2005). *An examination of community type and school tax levy referenda in Missouri.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Saint Louis University, Saint Louis, MO.

Erie School District. (n.d.). An informational publication provided by the Erie School District Retrieved February 20, 2010, from http://www.ErieSchoolDistrict.edu

Saldana, J. (2012). Coding manual for qualitative researchers. London: Sage.

Schrom, J. W. (2004). *School community interaction and communication during a general obligation bond election.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Riverside.

Shafritz J. M., (2004) *The dictionary of public policy and administration.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Stake, R. E. (1995). The art of case study research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stauffacher, A. N. (2012). *Strategies and factors influencing public school district referendums.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Lindenwood University, Saint Charles, MO.

Stover, D. (2012, October). Building a bond. *American School Board Journal.* 199(10), 12-15.

Theobold, N. A. & Meier, K. J. (2002). *The politics of school finance: Passing school bonds.* Paper presented at the national meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago. Retrieved July 25, 2008, from http://teep.tamu.edu/pubs/bonds.pdf

Thompson, D. C. & Wood, R. C. (2005). *Money and schools* (3rd ed.). Larchmont, NY:

Eye on Education Incorporated.

WEAC Professional Development and Training Division. (n.d.). WEAC research paper: Wisconsin's public school buildings. Retrieved September 27, 2009, from http://www.weac.org/Issues_Advocacy/Resource_Pages_On_Issues_One/research_mater ials/buildings.aspx

Weathersby, C. L. (2002). *Investigation of strategies used in passing bond issues in Mississippi school districts*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State. Abstract retrieved July 25, 2009, from ProQuest Digital Dissertations database. (Publication No. AAT 3043183).

Werner, M. J. (2012). *An analysis of the New Jersey public school district school bond referendum process: A historical case study of the egg harbor township school district bond referendum of 2004-05*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2008). Glossary – section j of basic facts. Retrieved December 14, 2010 from http://dpi.wi.gov/sfs/sectj.html

Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools (2010a). *How much money is received and spent in this district?* Retrieved July 22, 2010, from http://data.dpi.state.wi.us/data/MoneyPage.aspx?GraphFile=BlankPageUrl&S4orALL=1 &SRegion=1&SCounty=47&SAthleticConf=45&SCESA=05&FULLKEY=02270203```` &SN=None+Chosen&DN=Jefferson&OrgLevel=di&Qquad=offerings.aspx&STYP=3

Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools (2010b). *What is enrollment by student group?* Retrieved July 22, 2010, from

http://data.dpi.state.wi.us/data/GroupEnroll.aspx?GraphFile=BlankPageUrl&S4orALL=1

&SRegion=1&SCounty=47&SAthleticConf=45&SCESA=05&FULLKEY=02270203````

&SN=None+Chosen&DN=Jefferson&OrgLevel=di&Qquad=demographics.aspx

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2015). *Custom referenda reports.* Retrieved April

7, 2015, from http://www2.dpi.state.wi.us/sfsref/ref_Home.aspx

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2016a). *Custom referenda reports.* Retrieved April

17, 2016, from https://apps5.dpi.wi.gov/sfsref/ref_Home.aspx

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2016b). *2007-08 open enrollment and tuition

waiver aid adjustments and open enrollment transfers by district.* Retrieved April 17,

2016, from http://dpi.wi.gov/open-enrollment/data/aid-adjustments

Wisconsin Legislature (1993). *Wisconsin act 16*. Retrieved January 30, 2012, from

http://legis.wisconsin.gov/acts89-93/93Act16.pdf

Wisconsin Legislature (2016). *Wisconsin State Statue 67: Municipal borrowing and municipal

bonds*. Retrieved March 30, 2016, from

http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/67.pdf

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks,

CA: Sage.

Appendix:

Interview Questions

1. Describe your involvement in each of the referenda?

2. What activities did you participate in with each of the referenda?

3. Can you describe a critical incident that may have had an impact on the referenda?

4. Who was involved and what happened?

5. Tell me more about the driving reason for each of the referenda?

6. What was the community's perspective on each of the referenda?

7. Who was against the bond referenda?

8. Who was for the bond referenda?

9. Why were some opposed to the first referendum in April 2008?

10. Why were some opposed to the second referendum in November 2008?

11. Why were some opposed to the third referendum in April 2010?

12. What was the district's plan for promoting the first referendum in April 2008? Follow up questions: Could the district have improved it's planning? What did the district do well in planning?

13. What was the district's plan for promoting the second referendum in November 2008? Could the district have improved it's planning? What did the district do well in planning?

14. What was the district's plan for promoting the third referendum in April 2010? Could the district have improved it's planning? What did the district do well in planning?

15. What was your relationship to the strategies used in each referendum?

 a. Did you agree or disagree with any of the concepts used in each of the referenda?

  (Yes/no) Can you explain your reasons for agreement or disagreement?

 b. Did you agree or disagree with any of the people involved in the referenda?

16. What would have enhanced the referendum process in the April 2008 referendum, the November 2008 referendum, and the April 2010 referendum?

17. Name community members who actively supported the referenda and two community members who actively opposed the referenda.

18. Name parents who actively supported the referenda and two parents who actively opposed the referenda.

19. Name teachers who actively supported the referenda and two teachers who actively opposed the referenda.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Eitan Yacov Benzaquen

Place of birth: Rehovot, Israel

Education

        B.S., University of Wisconsin-Madison, May 2000
        Majors: Sociology and Philosophy

        M.S., National University, May 2003
        Major: Special Education

Dissertation Title: School Bond Referenda Reloaded: A Case Study of a Successful School District in Passing a Subsequent Bond Referendum after Failing to Pass Previous Bond Referenda