



# ENGAGING RESIDENTS DURING A REFERENDUM



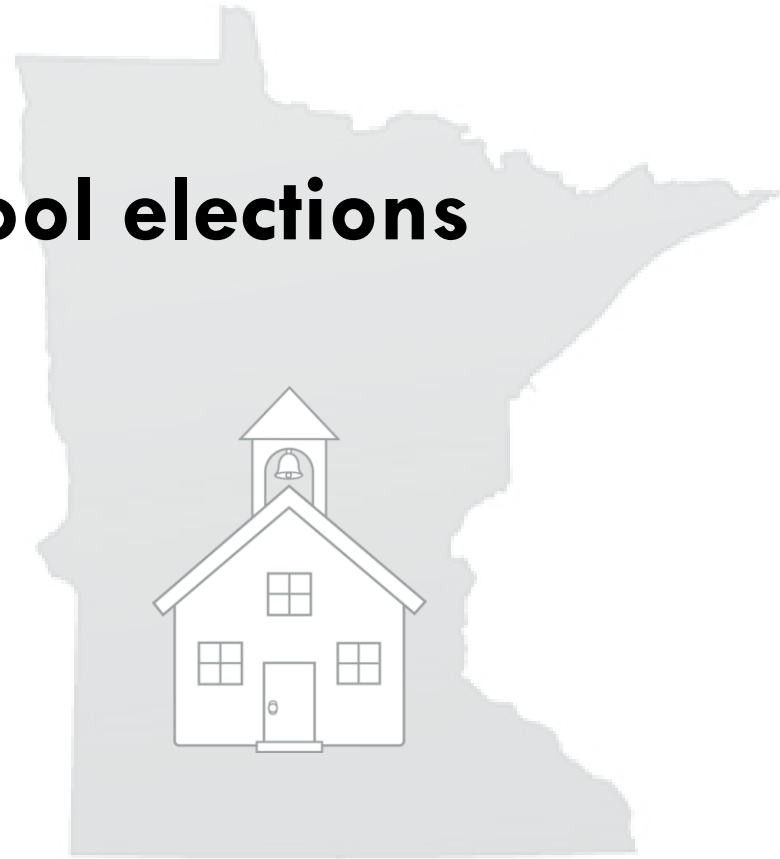
**blueprint 181**  
*Investing. Growing. Leading.*



August 15, 2017

## BOND REFERENDUM ANALYSIS

- **10 years of Minnesota school elections**
- **800+ referendum elections**
- **1000+ ballot questions**



Compiled from unaudited data on [mnmsba.org](http://mnmsba.org)

# OVERALL REFERENDUM SUCCESS RATE

<b>Operating – Overall</b>	<b>66.9%</b>
<b>Bond – Overall</b>	<b>59.1%</b>

<b>Operating Renewals</b> (18.7%)	<b>97.5%</b>
<b>One Day Bond</b> (2.7%)	<b>96.6%</b>
<b>New Bond</b> (36.0%)	<b>56.3%</b>
<b>New Operating</b> (42.6%)	<b>53.4%</b>

**New bond questions and new operating questions have about the same rate of passage.**

# RECENT TRENDS IN BOND ELECTIONS (NOT INCLUDING ONE DAYS)

<b>Bond: 2013-2017</b> <i>88 more than previous five years</i>	<b>57.6%</b>
<b>Bond: 2008-2012</b>	<b>54.1%</b>
<b>Bond: Odd Years</b>	<b>58.9%</b>
<b>Bond: Even Years</b>	<b>53.6%</b>

**The success rate for new bond levies has stayed relatively constant, even as requests have increased.**

**There is also little difference between on- and off-years.**

# SUCCESS OF BOND ELECTIONS (NOT INCLUDING ONE DAYS)

1 Bond Question	51.1%
2 Bond Questions	64.9% <i>79% of elections had at least one successful new bond</i>
3 Bond Questions	55.6% <i>67% of elections had at least one successful new bond</i>
4 Bond Questions	25.0%
Bond Paired with Operating Levy	76.0%
Bond Paired with Mixed Questions	40.0% <i>45% of elections had at least one successful new bond</i>

**Bond questions can benefit from having other bond questions on the ballot.**

**However, having three or more questions with a mix of operating and bond is often not a successful strategy for passing your bond.**

# \$50+ MILLION PROJECTS IN GREATER MINNESOTA

- **Seven districts won with a single bond question** (first attempt)
  - Alexandria, Chisago Lakes, Elk River, Mankato, Moorhead, St Louis County, Thief River Falls
- **One district won but a second bond question that failed** (first attempt)
  - Willmar
- **Three districts won after failing to pass a \$50+ million question earlier**
  - North Branch passed three bond questions
  - St Cloud passed the main question, failed at a second question
  - Owatonna passed a single question
- **Three districts failed but passed smaller projects in a future referendum**
  - Hermantown, Mora and Perham-Dent
- **Four districts failed and have yet to try again**
  - Aitkin, Grand Rapids, Sauk Rapids-Rice, Worthington
- **One district failed three times**
  - Detroit Lakes

**School districts in Greater Minnesota have been successful at passing major projects, particularly if they make several attempts.**

# CAUTIONS

- **No magic formula for referendum success**
- **Impact of state/national political environment**
- **Ballot question strategies are not a substitute for a quality work plan**
  - *Meet educational/safety needs*
  - *Right price point*
  - *Public outreach/engagement*
  - *Visible district leadership*



# WHY GOOD FACILITIES PLANS FAIL TO OBTAIN PUBLIC SUPPORT

- 1) Residents don't trust the Administration and School Board.
  - 2) Referendum proposal is created in a bubble (by true believers).
  - 3) Wrong price point.
  - 4) Residents don't understand how the plan improves education.
  - 5) Most of the public discussion is about taxes, not our kids.
  - 6) School board members and teachers aren't visible.
  - 7) Public questions are left unanswered.
- 
- 8) Yes Committee doesn't find and motivate enough voters.



# TWO TYPES OF COMMUNICATION DURING A BOND REFERENDUM



# A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S ROLE: PRINCIPLE I

An operating or building referendum  
is about your vision for your schools.

A successful referendum is a benchmark  
that tells you if your community understands  
and supports what it takes to be a great  
school district.



## A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S ROLE: PRINCIPLE II

A school district has an obligation to its residents to communicate when it is proposing a tax increase through an operating or bond referendum.

Failure to adequately communicate is a failure to serve the public.



# STRATEGIC PATH FOR DISTRICT COMMUNICATIONS

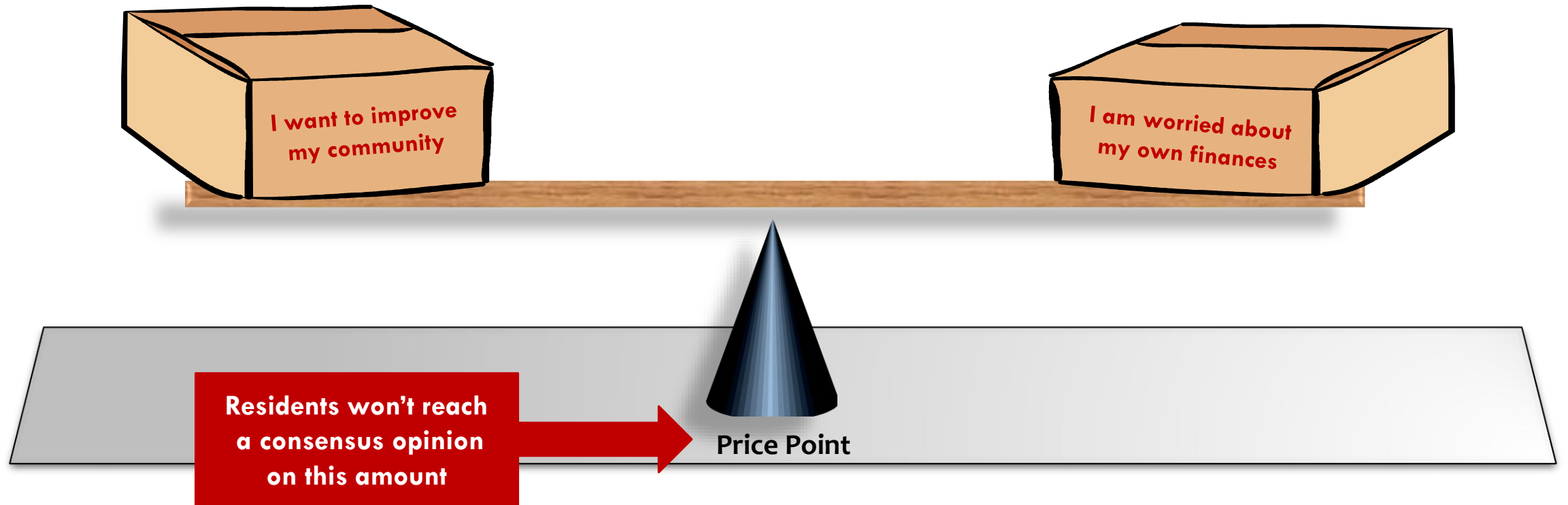


*Successful referenda are byproducts of informed and engaged residents*

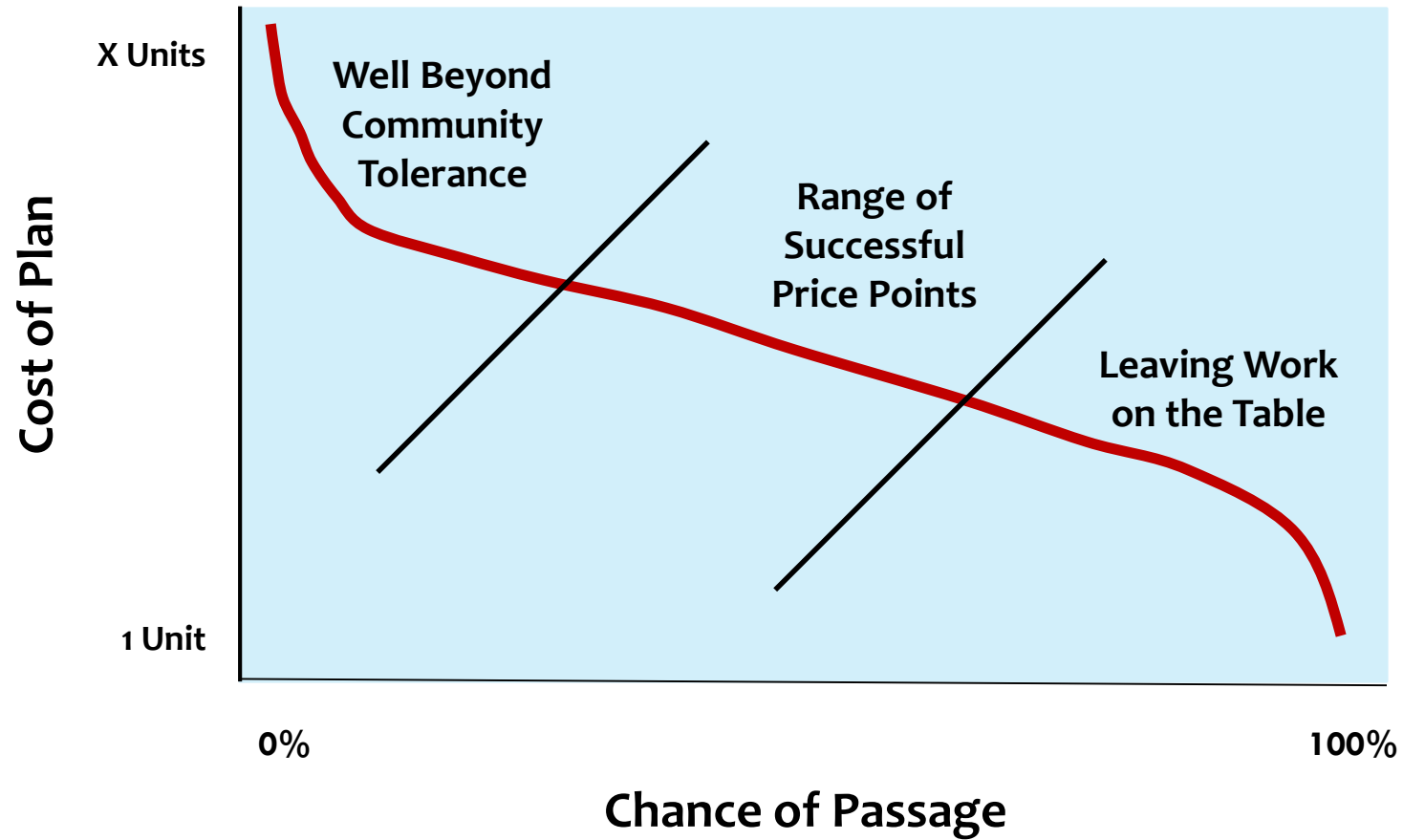
# EIGHT MOST IMPORTANT ITEMS FOR DISTRICT TO COMMUNICATE TO RESIDENTS

1. Value of Our Schools
2. Our Future Challenges
3. The Process
4. The Plan
5. The Benefits
6. Tax Impact
7. Consequences of Inaction
8. How to Find Out More Information

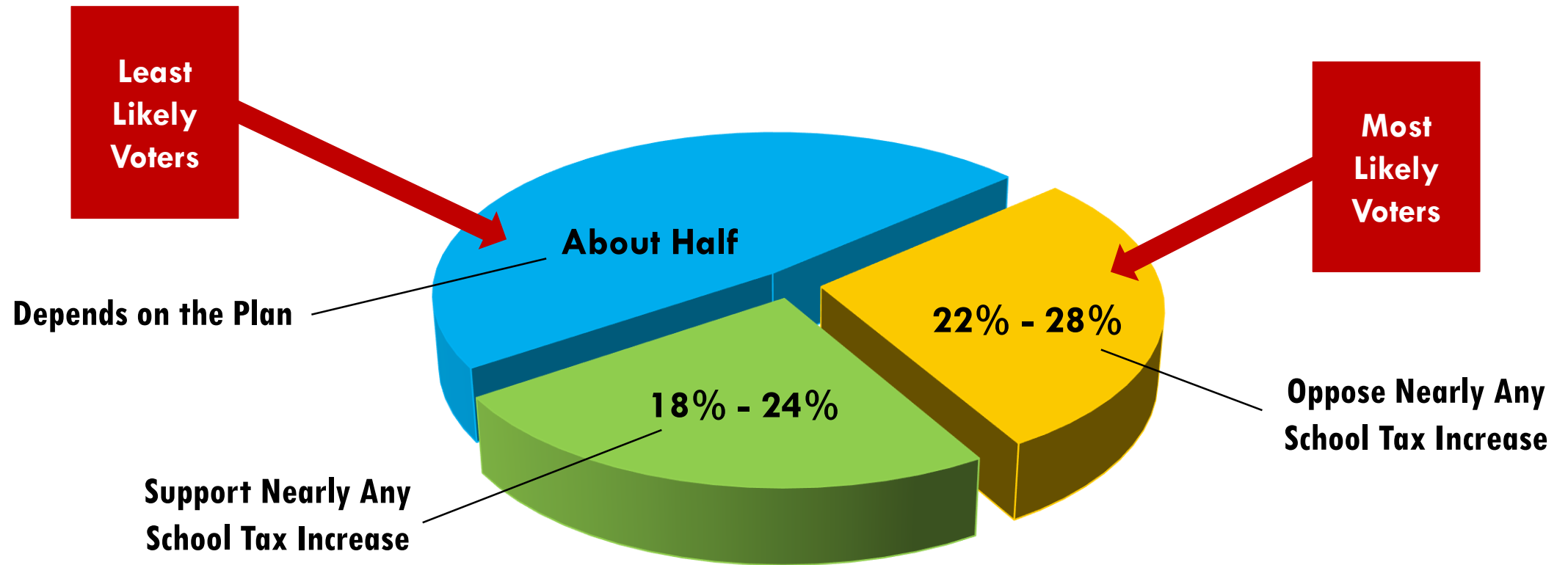
# HOW RESIDENTS THINK ABOUT A TAX INCREASE



# THINKING ABOUT PRICE POINTS



# TAX TOLERANCE IN A TYPICAL MN SCHOOL DISTRICT

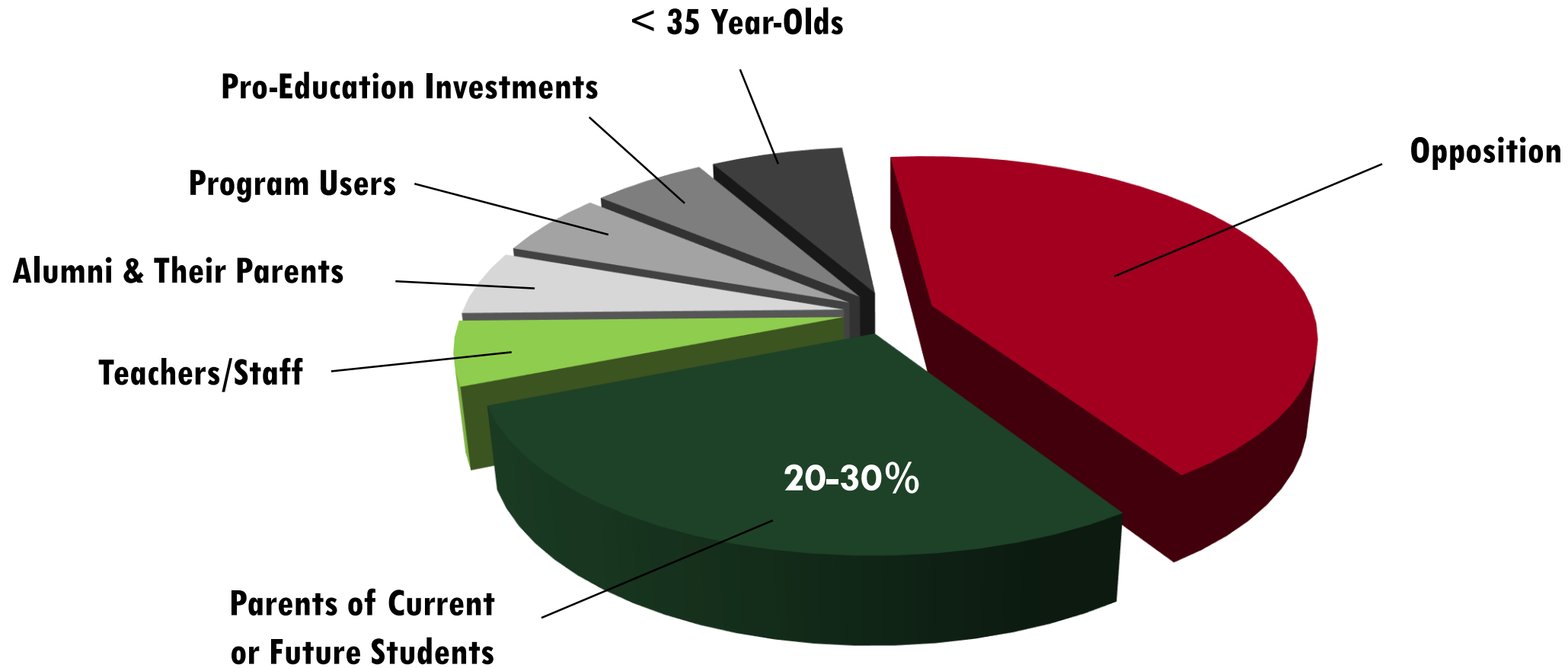




## OPINIONS SHARED BY MOST SUPPORTERS

- **Already a high quality of education in local schools**
- **We get good value from our investment in our schools**
- **Facilities are in need of improvement**
- **School board/administration makes decisions in the best interest of kids**
- **I am willing to pay more in taxes to improve education**

# HOW THE COALITION OF SUPPORT EMERGES



# MOST CRITICAL INFLUENCERS OF SWING GROUPS



- **School Board Members**
- **Teachers**
- **“People Like Me”**
- **Local Newspapers**
- **Community Leaders**
- **Financial Experts (Bankers, CPAs, Other Business Leaders)**

# TWO VERY DIFFERENT PLANS TO EXECUTE

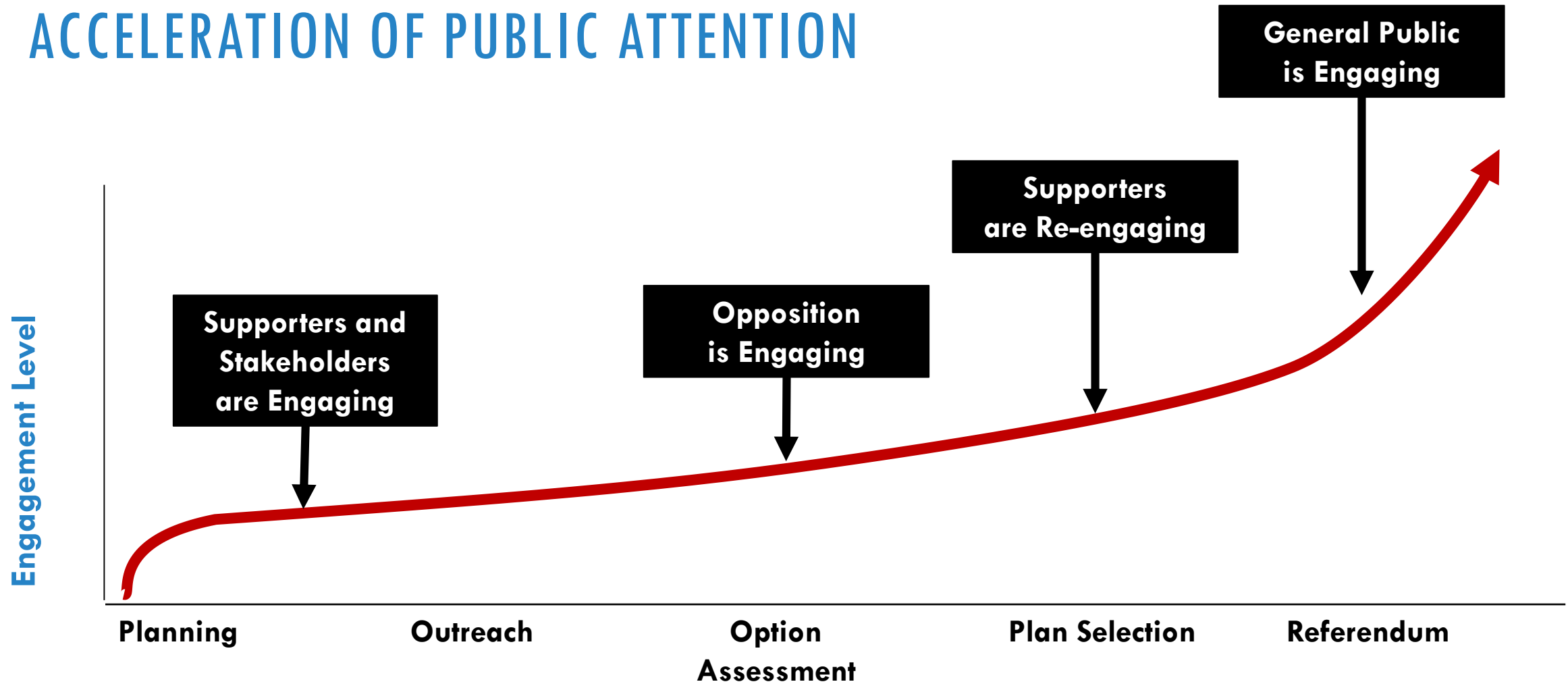
## District's Information Campaign

- Value of Our Schools
- Our Future Challenges
- The Process
- The Plan
- The Benefits
- Tax Impact
- Consequences of Inaction
- How to Find Out More

## Citizens' Advocacy Committee

- Canvass the Community
- Create Energy for Supporters
- Persuade Undecideds
- Correct the "NO" Narrative
- Turn-out "YES" Voters

# ACCELERATION OF PUBLIC ATTENTION



# MESSAGING\*

- 1. Growing, Vibrant, Successful District**
- 2. Independent Assessments Demonstrate We Need to Invest**
  - *At/Exceeding Building Capacity*
  - *Older Spaces Not Designed for Today's Education*
    - Special Education
    - PreK and Early Education
    - Technical Education
  - *Security And Safety*
    - Accessibility for All Students
- 3. Enrollment Growth Will Make Our Space Needs Even Worse**

\* until survey completed

# MESSAGING\*

## 4. No “One-Size Fits All Buildings” Solution

- *All Buildings Have Long-Term Maintenance Needs*
- *Ages, Condition and Local Needs Are Different*

## 5. We Have Asked For Public Input – Learned a Lot

- *Pride in Schools*
- *Protect Neighborhood Elementaries*
- *Education, Health, Safety Come First*
- *Seek Best Value Plan for Taxpayers*

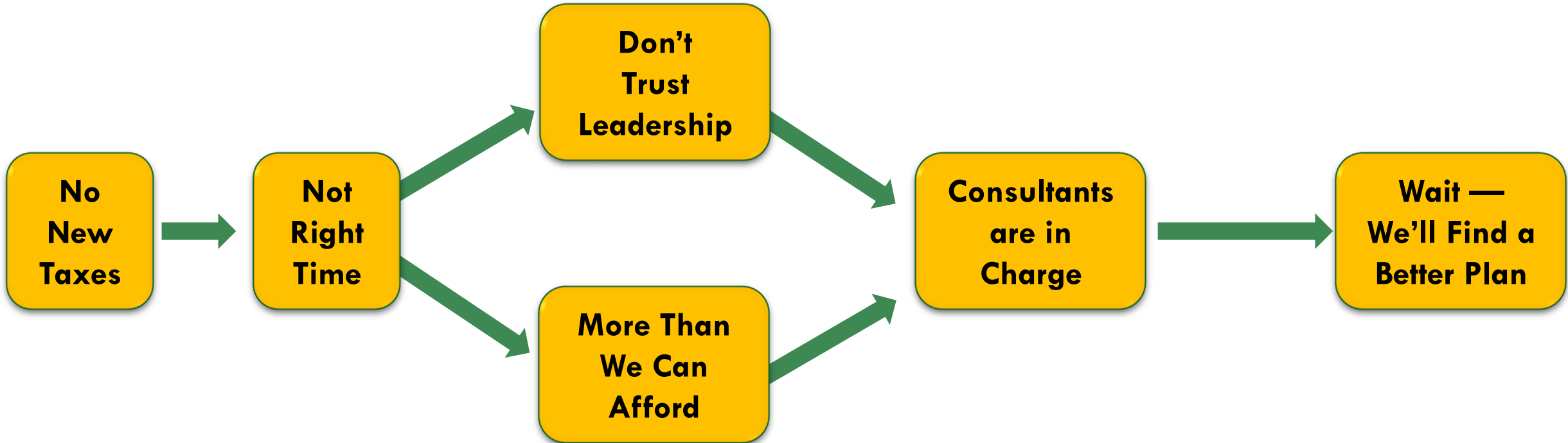
## 6. By November, Formal Plan

- *Continue to Ask for Public Input*
- *2018 Referendum?*

## 7. More Info Or Input? [Blueprint181.Org](http://Blueprint181.Org)

\* until survey completed

# EVOLUTION OF OPPOSITION MESSAGING



*Formula: Anti-Tax + Government Distrust + Hope for Better Plan > 50%*



# TACTICS IN DISTRICT COMMUNICATIONS

## FOUNDATIONAL

1. Website
2. Social Media
3. Feedback Mechanism
4. FAQ
5. Brochure/Fact Sheet
6. Media Stories
7. Personal Connections
8. Legal Notices

## ENHANCED

- District Newsletters
- Videos
- Paid Ads
- Letters to Editor
- Third Party Validation
- Open Houses/Tours
- Stakeholder Emails
- And Much More...

# ENGAGEMENT PLAN



## FACILITIES PLAN Communications Grid

District Work	Responsibility	Date	Citizens Committee	Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finalize Communications Plan</li> </ul>	Administrative Committee Laine, Steve and School Board	May 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin identifying potential leaders</li> </ul>	School Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Phase 1 of Facilities Plan Microsite is operational</li> </ul>	Done			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newspaper column from district on facilities planning progress</li> </ul>	Communications Work Team			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outreach through community groups (ongoing)</li> </ul>	Laine, Steve and School Board			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share results of public listening sessions               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newspaper column</li> <li>Web site (as a PowerPoint?)</li> <li>Video</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Communications Work Team	June 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial organization meeting</li> </ul>	Citizens Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brainerd Chamber listening sessions</li> </ul>	Laine, Steve and School Board		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruitment of supporters</li> </ul>	Citizens Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Start communicating financial options               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newspaper column</li> <li>Web site (as a PowerPoint?)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Communications Work Team			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meetings with area legislators</li> </ul>	Laine, Steve and School Board			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outreach to potential partners</li> </ul>	Laine, Steve and School Board			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing activities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social media posts</li> <li>Answer inquiries from residents</li> <li>Update FAQ and microsite</li> <li>Stakeholder emails</li> <li>Local media interviews</li> <li>Biweekly staff newsletter</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Communications Work Team			

Page | 1

Activities listed under Citizens Committee are NOT District communications activities, and will not be developed or funded using district resources. They are included here solely for reference.

DRAFT — June 13, 2017

# CALENDAR: ELECTION ACTIVITIES

Deadlines	February Election	April Election
Deadline to Submit to MDE	November 15	January 10
Adopt Election Resolution and Report to MDE and County Auditor	December 1	January 26
Early Voting Starts	December 29	February 23
Publish R&C	January 24 or Before	March 21 or Before
Public School Meeting on R&C	After January 24	After March 21
Mail Notice to Households with Registered Voters	January 30	March 27
Election Day	February 13	April 10

# OUR GOALS FOR DISTRICT MATERIALS



**T**ransparency



**A**ccuracy



**C**onsistency



**A**ccessibility

# QUESTIONS?

