

Dunklin R-5 School District

Winter 2017 Community Survey Final Report



January 30, 2017

Dunklin Winter 2017 Community Telephone Survey

Final Report

January 30, 2017

Introduction

In January 2017, a five- to seven-minute telephone survey was conducted with 361 randomly selected heads of household (male or female) who indicated that they had voted on Proposition Blackcat Pride on the November 2016 ballot. The main goal of the survey was to determine why this proposition was unsuccessful and to secure the input of November voters on what the school district should do next, in terms of a potential future proposal.

Calls were placed to landlines and to cell phone numbers, and the completed interviews were allocated into three regions – “in or near” Pevely, Herculaneum or Horine – in quantities that matched the general population pattern in the district. This means that the results shown in this report that reflect the views of all 361 respondents have a Margin of Error of plus or minus 5%.

The main portion of the survey presented respondents with a list of 10 reasons for the loss that the district had heard in the community, since the election. After the list was read, participants were asked to name the most important, second-most important and third-most important reasons that the ballot issue was unsuccessful. Those respondents who had reasons that were not part of the list were given the opportunity to share those, as well.

The results were analyzed using a 3-point weighted scale, in which each “most important” answer was worth 3 points, down to each “third-most important” answer being worth 1 point.

In reviewing this data, it is important to remember the following:

- The number of points for each reason is less important than the amount of separation between the factors. For example, “Older residents were concerned about the increase in their taxes” was the clear top reason, according to these participants. At a distance, in second place, was “People don’t trust the district administration to spend the money correctly.” The reasons in third and fourth place were separated by only five points, meaning that they were virtually tied and so on.
- Because of the wide range in the number of participants in each of the demographic and geographic subgroups, these results are shown in rank order, but the points for each one are not displayed. This is to avoid confusion and misinterpretation of point totals from subgroups with widely divergent numbers of participants – and, therefore, points available.

- Results among the smaller subgroups can be more significantly impacted by just a handful of individuals answering a question differently than the balance of the group. That is why these groups sometimes have more dramatic differences in their rank order list, as compared to the larger subgroups.
- The “most important,” “second-most important” and “third-most important” reason questions were numbers 3, 5 and 7, respectively. Those respondents who answered one of these questions, “People didn’t think all the projects were necessary” were asked a follow-up question (number 4, 6 or 8) regarding which projects they thought the public deemed to be unnecessary. The results from questions 4, 6 and 8 are summarized following the charts related to the “most important” (etc.) reasons the ballot issue lost.
- The shading on the charts is intended to enhance readability only and is not meant to imply that an answer is more or less important than an unshaded one.

Results summary

Most important reasons the Proposition Blackcat Pride lost in November

Utilizing a 3-point weighted scale to most accurately interpret the views of survey participants, the reasons provided to the respondent for consideration ended up in five tiers, based on the responses.

- Far and away, the most popular reason – with 446 points – was “Older residents were concerned about the increase in their taxes.”
- In second place, but a clear step down in terms of popularity – at 320 points – was “People don’t trust the district administration to spend the money correctly.”
- In tier three were two answers that were very closely grouped. At 242 points, the reason that was in third place was “The 13-million-dollar cost was too high. Right behind that (with 237 points) was “People who don’t have students in the district didn’t think they should have to pay.”
- The fourth tier had three reasons. At 161 points was “People don’t trust the School Board to make the right decisions.” This was followed by “The district should have changed the proposal, after it lost in August, rather than just run it again in November,” with 126 points and “The district didn’t do a good job of communicating what was in the proposal, with 125 points.

- The fifth tier included the remaining three reasons (descriptions paraphrased) – not all the projects were necessary, the district should have asked for more in 2008, and people don’t believe that the student population is growing as much as the district says it is.

Within the cross-tabulations, the following items of note were seen:

- There was some shuffling of the order in the middle section of the list among those living “in or near” Herculaneum and those “in or near” Horine, as compared to those “in or near” Pevely.
- The very small group of new residents had some dramatic differences from the other two groups. But it is important to remember that this group had only 26 participants, meaning that a few different opinions would have a dramatic impact on the rank order.
- There were only modest shifts among the age and student status groups, with nothing dramatic seen in the rank order differences in the top half of the list of reasons. The same is true in terms of the gender of the respondent.
- Perhaps the most informative cross-tabulation was based on whether the respondent said he or she voted, “Yes” or “No” on the proposal. The rank order lists were nearly identical, suggesting strongly that the views on why the ballot issue lost were not impacted by how the person voted.

Recommendations of survey respondents regarding next steps

The final substantive question provided respondents an open-ended opportunity to share their thoughts on what the school district should do “to build a stronger connection with residents, before considering placing another proposal on the ballot.”

The responses were coded, based on common words, phrases and ideas to identify the most commonly held views. In doing so, the overwhelming theme was the need for more communication.

Specifically, 106 respondents said, “Communicating sooner/more often” (or words to that effect) and 79 said, “Show the need for each project better.”

In addition, many of those whose answers were more “one off” mentioned something about communications in their responses.

Note: In reviewing the verbatim comments that appear below the chart associated with question 9, it is important to remember that each is one comment, by one person. If these comments had been indicative of a trend, they would have appeared in enough quantity to be displayed in the chart associated with the question.

Conclusion

While the reasons that found their way to the top of the list have many nuances, the primary issues appear to be a perceived lack of communication and a limited district/patron connection.

Older residents being concerned about the tax increase, residents not trusting administration to spend the money correctly, those without students thinking they should not have to pay and residents not trusting the School Board to make the right decisions all have an element of communication and disconnection about them. In fact, the only “tangible” reason among the top five was, “The 13-million-dollar cost was too high.”

While it is quite likely that the school district actively communicated about its proposal, the perception is that that communication fell short of what was necessary. Yet, with the other issues that were high on the list, this may not be the first time that the community felt that communication was lacking.

Again, whether or not that was actually the case is a moot point. Perception is reality and, the challenge for the district going forward will be to find ways to connect with residents – current, past and never student families – with simple, benefit-driven and, most importantly, repetitive messages about the district, its activities and its needs for the future.

1. **The school district had an issue on the ballot last November, called Proposition Blackcat Pride. Do you recall whether or not you voted on this proposal last November?** *A “Yes” answer on this question was required for the potential respondent to continue with the survey.*

2. **To make certain we have people who live in all parts of the school district participating in this survey, can you tell me which of the follow best describes where you live?** *The number of respondents in each region was specified by the school district as being representative of the general population pattern. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below.*

Response	Number
In or near Pevely	227
In or near Herculaneum	83
In or near Horine	51

Since the election in November, the school district has been asking residents across the school district why they believe that voters turned down the proposal.

I’m now going to read you a short list of reasons that have been mentioned by others. As I read this list, please be thinking about which ones you think were most important in the voters’ decision to turn down the proposal. These could be things you, yourself, think, or they could be things you have heard from others. If you have other ideas that aren’t on this list, I’ll be asking about those shortly.

3, 5, 7. Here's the list...ROTATE LIST. READ SLOWLY. Based on what you think or what you may have heard from others, which one of these do you think was the most important reason the proposal was defeated? If the most important reason is not on this list, please tell me that reason. What do you think was the second-most important reason that Proposition Blackcat Pride lost? If the second-most important reason that you think the ballot issue was defeated is not on this list, please tell me that reason. And, finally, what do you think was the third-most important reason that the bond issue lost? And, as before, if the third-most important reason is not on this list, please tell me that reason. Results shown, using a 3-point weighted scale, in which 3 points were given for each "Most important" reason, down to 1 point for each "Third-most important" reason.

Reason	Most important reason	Second-most important reason	Third-most important reason	3-point weighted scale points
Older residents were concerned about the increase in their taxes.	95	64	33	446
People don't trust the district administration to spend the money correctly.	53	61	39	320
The 13-million-dollar cost was too high.	26	48	68	242
People who don't have students in the district didn't think they should have to pay.	48	43	7	237
People don't trust the School Board to make the right decisions.	21	24	50	161
The district should have changed the proposal, after it lost in August, rather than just run it again in November.	34	6	12	126
The district didn't do a good job of communicating what was in the proposal.	15	32	16	125
People didn't think all the projects were necessary.*	17	2	13	68
The people thought that the district should have asked for more on the last bond issue in 2008, so that they didn't have to come back and ask again so soon.	7	3	12	39
People don't believe that the student population is growing as much as the district says it is.	0	10	15	35
Other (see below)**	3	3	4	n/a
Only one reason was important (not read)***	n/a	23	n/a	n/a
Only two reasons were important (not read)***	n/a	n/a	27	n/a
Don't know (not read)	42	0	0	n/a

Cross-tabulation: Rank order of reasons, based on the 3-point weighted scale points, for location of the residence and length of time living in the district. Note: “n” equals the number of respondents in each group.

Reason	3-point weighted scale points overall	In or near Pevely (n=227)	In or near Herculaneum (n=83)	In or near Horine (n=51)	Up to 5 years (n=26)	5 years to 15 years (n=108)	More than 15 years (n=227)
Older residents were concerned about the increase in their taxes.	446 (1)	1	1	1	1T*	1	1
People don't trust the district administration to spend the money correctly.	320 (2)	2	2	3	1T*	2	2
The 13-million-dollar cost was too high.	242 (3)	4	3	4	5	4	3
People who don't have students in the district didn't think they should have to pay.	237 (4)	3	5	2	7	3	4
People don't trust the School Board to make the right decisions.	161(5)	5	4	6	4	8	5
The district should have changed the proposal, after it lost in August, rather than just run it again in November.	126 (6)	6	6	8	6	7	6
The district didn't do a good job of communicating what was in the proposal.	125 (7)	7	7	5	3	5	7
People didn't think all the projects were necessary.	68 (8)	8	9	7	8	6	8
The people thought that the district should have asked for more on the last bond issue in 2008, so that they didn't have to come back and ask again so soon.	39 (9)	10	8	9	9	10	9
People don't believe that the student population is growing as much as the district says it is.	35 (10)	9	10	10	10	9	10

**Point values were tied.*

Cross-tabulation: Rank order of reasons, based on the 3-point weighted scale points, by age and by the presence of a current district student in the household, a past student (but no current student) or no student ever in the household. Note: “n” equals the number of respondents in each group, and seven respondents refused to answer the “age” question.

Reason	3-point weighted scale points overall	18 to 34 (n=49)	35 to 54 (n=143)	55 or older (n=162)	Current student (n=96)	Past student (n=158)	Never student (n=107)
Older residents were concerned about the increase in their taxes.	446 (1)	2	1	1	1	1	1
People don't trust the district administration to spend the money correctly.	320 (2)	1	2	3	2	2	2
The 13-million-dollar cost was too high.	242 (3)	3	4	2	3	3	4
People who don't have students in the district didn't think they should have to pay.	237 (4)	4	3	4	4	4	3
People don't trust the School Board to make the right decisions.	161 (5)	5	7	5	7	5	5
The district should have changed the proposal, after it lost in August, rather than just run it again in November.	126 (6)	6	5	7	5	7	6
The district didn't do a good job of communicating what was in the proposal.	125 (7)	8T*	6	6	8	6	7
People didn't think all the projects were necessary.	68 (8)	7	8	8	6	8	8
The people thought that the district should have asked for more on the last bond issue in 2008, so that they didn't have to come back and ask again so soon.	39 (9)	8T*	10	9	10	9	9
People don't believe that the student population is growing as much as the district says it is.	35 (10)	10	9	10	9	10	10

**Point values were tied.*

Cross-tabulation: Rank order of reasons, based on the 3-point weighted scale points, for gender and how the respondent said he or she voted in the most recent election. Note: “n” equals the number of respondents in each group, and 13 respondents refused to answer – and two said, “Don’t know” or “Don’t remember” on the question about how they voted.

Reason	3-point weighted scale points overall	Female (n=209)	Male (n=152)	Voted, “Yes” (n=166)	Voted, “No” (n=180)
Older residents were concerned about the increase in their taxes.	446 (1)	1	1	1	1
People don’t trust the district administration to spend the money correctly.	320 (2)	2	2	2	2
The 13-million-dollar cost was too high.	242 (3)	3	4	4	3
People who don’t have students in the district didn’t think they should have to pay.	237 (4)	4	3	3	4
People don’t trust the School Board to make the right decisions.	161 (5)	5	5	5	5
The district should have changed the proposal, after it lost in August, rather than just run it again in November.	126 (6)	7	6	7	6
The district didn’t do a good job of communicating what was in the proposal.	125 (7)	6	7	6	7
People didn’t think all the projects were necessary.	68 (8)	9	8	8	8
The people thought that the district should have asked for more on the last bond issue in 2008, so that they didn’t have to come back and ask again so soon.	39 (9)	8	10	9	9
People don’t believe that the student population is growing as much as the district says it is.	35 (10)	10	9	10	10

****Seventeen respondents answered, “People didn’t think all the projects were necessary” on the “Most important reason” question. These 17 answered the follow-up question, “Which projects do you think were not necessary?” as follows:***

- *Relocating the bus garage/barn – eight respondents*
- *Renovating the Herculaneum High School gymnasium – five respondents*
- *Don’t know – three respondents*
- *Expanding Pevely Elementary School – one respondent*

Two respondents answered, “People didn’t think all the projects were necessary” on the “Second-most important reason question. Both selected “Relocating the bus garage/barn” as a project that was not necessary.

Thirteen respondents answered, “People didn’t think all the projects were necessary” on the “Third-most important reason” question. These 13 answered the follow-up question, “Which projects do you think were not necessary?” as follows:

- *Relocating the bus garage/bus barn – 10 respondents*
- *Don’t know – two respondents*
- *Renovating the Herculaneum High School gymnasium – one respondent*
- *Building a new entrance at Senn-Thomas Middle School – one respondent*
- *Connecting the Taylor Early Childhood Center and the Butterfly wing – one respondent*

*****The “other” responses, in verbatim form, were as follows:***

- *A mistrust of doing the right thing. Too many districts are having issues with money and poor management, so I think a lot of people are hesitant.*
- *I think it was just bad timing, instead of the cost. With what is happening in the Fox School District; it was a fall out from that – mismanagement of money. There is a lawsuit about it.*
- *The bus shed should not be relocated.*
- *They take the pension out for 70 years up front for the teachers. They could use all that money for other things. Who will be alive at 140?*
- *I think they asked for too much. They should have just asked for money to do the renovations.*
- *Too many days off for the money they are getting.*

- *Raising money for portable classrooms was a waste.*
- *Our School District curriculum is crap.*
- *Change starts at the top not the bottom. They should start at the top and make cutbacks.*
- *Get rid of the superintendent and things will get better.*

*****Of those who said either “Only one reason was important” or “Only two reasons were important,” the most frequently mentioned reasons were as follows:**

- *Older residents were concerned about the increase in their taxes – 24*
- *People didn’t trust the district administration to spend the money correctly – 13*
- *People who didn’t have students in the district didn’t think they should have to pay – 10*
- *People didn’t think all the projects were necessary – six*
- *The 13-million-dollar cost was too high – five*
- *People didn’t trust the School Board to make the right decisions – five*

9. As it looks to the future, what do you think is the most important step the district should take to build a stronger connection with residents, before considering placing another proposal on the ballot? Responses were coded, based on common words, phrases and ideas. Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below.

Response	Number
Communicating sooner/more often	106
Show the need for each project better	79
Don’t know	58
Other (see below)	51
Find an alternative to raising taxes	43
Simplify the proposal	24

Verbatim “other” comments

Better test results from the students would make residents think the schools are doing a good job.

I really don’t know, but I’m on a fixed income and if my taxes are raised any more, I’ll have to move.

They need to use what money they have before hitting us for more.

Get better communication out to the public. Most people didn't even know what it was about. Just that our taxes were going to be raised.

They need to lower their expectations on what needs to be done.

They need to make it where only people with kids in school pay for the projects they want done.

Maybe do something with the theater that could help create some extra money.

Communicate with the public. I didn't see anything until about one month before the election and there wasn't enough information on what they need the money for. I think it should have been more itemized.

Too little too late, so start earlier.

They need to get their accreditation up. Improve the students' grades and ranking. Let us see more of what goes on with the district's spending. Kick out some of the old farts off the Board and get some new blood.

More justification from administration on why more money is needed in different areas.

Show a need for the money, such as the student-to-teacher ratio. Show that the educational value of the dollars pays off.

Not putting a new proposal on the ballot, because it is costing us taxpayers lots of money.

Change the superintendent. He's been there 24 years. Maybe, someone new will help us get better value for the money. Prove they're spending tax money wisely and better parental involvement.

Send more newsletters out and inform the public on the issues.

Just a better explanation as to what the money is for and some justification to support it. Not sure the district is trusted right now.

Just be honest about everything. The community has a right to know what's what.

Get rid of the superintendent. Get a lot more participation from the community.

I don't have any idea. I'm 79 years old and put three kids through school and we are already taxed too much. Ask the younger generation.

Get the word out on what they need and why they need it. I don't trust the superintendent.

I don't believe any of the School Board members. Talk to the people who pay your salary. They are so arrogant and self-righteous. They pushed it again. Very ignorant of the facts. Nothing will help.

They need to not have another bond issue. We can't afford it and it won't pass.

It seemed like they thought it would pass, so why try to communicate much to us? Arrogance is what I call it.

They need to be more outgoing; more informative with backup facts.

I really don't know what more they could do. They put it out there and people didn't vote on it. You can't hit them over the head.

More communications with residents. Go smaller in what they are asking for. Less money. Something is better than nothing.

Get different people on the Board. Those people are crooked and they need all new Board members.

Better communication to get out clear information on what is going on in the district.

Send letters to residents and inform them on what's going on in the district.

Use what you have wisely, before asking for more.

Get out to the public more. Find the needs of the students.

Make sure they're budgeting the money the way it should be and not giving the white-collar workers pay increases.

Inform the people what they are wanting to do. People want to know what the money is spent for.

The current Board and superintendent seem cold and uncaring about what we think. They don't listen and have their own agenda

Be more specific on what the money is used for.

It's always good to have good relationships with the people you are dealing with.

Do what they did before 2009. There was more communication about what they wanted to do.

They actually need to get out and say something about it; the renovations and stuff.

I don't know, but I just don't want my taxes raised. I already pay too much. Also not sure they would spend the money correctly anyway.

Communicate better with the residents. Be specific with what they need and why they need it.

Relook at the budget and reallocate funds for all projects.

More communication with the residents by newsletters, meetings, public appearances. Anything that will show they are serious about improving the negative atmosphere.

I don't think the superintendent can be trusted.

Get more of the influential people in town on the Board, before bringing it up again. Forcing it down our throats will not work again. A School Board member said, "Your kids went to school free." I paid \$2,700 a year for the last 20 years. It wasn't free. Nothing is free. I pay my taxes.

They are not personable. Have you met these guys?

They need to be more conservative. Stop spending so much. Sometimes, when they need money for anything, they need to be more frugal when using tax money so foolishly.

Come up with a better rate for future bond issues. Listen to the residents for a change.

Better communication and better budgeting. I was unfamiliar with the cost, as were many people.

City Hall – It would be wise to ask questions about the goings-on in our community.

I really don't know. I voted for the bond issue, and I think it should have passed.

I voted for it, so I really don't know why it wasn't approved. I don't know of any steps that they should take next.

My last few questions will help us divide our interviews into groups.

10. How long have you, yourself, lived within the boundaries of the Dunklin R-5 School District? Is it...? *Choices were read to respondents.*

Response	Percentage
Less than 2 years	<1%
2 to 5 years	7%
More than 5 years to 10 years	14%
More than 10 years to 15 years	16%
More than 15 years	52%
I've lived here all my life	11%

11. In what age group are you? Is it...? *Choices, except where indicated, were read to respondents.*

Response	Percentage
18 to 24	1%
25 to 34	13%
35 to 44	19%
45 to 54	21%
55 to 64	25%
65 or older	20%
Refused (not read)	2%

12. Do you have any children or grandchildren who attend school in the Dunklin R-5 school district right now? *Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below.*

Response	Number
Yes, children	92
Yes, children and grandchildren	4
Yes, grandchildren	61
No	204

- 13. Do you have any children or grandchildren who previously were students in the district, but who have graduated?** *Asked only of the 265 respondents who did not answer question 12 either “Yes, children” or “Yes, children and grandchildren.” Numbers, rather than percentages, displayed below.*

Response	Number
Yes, children	144
Yes, children and grandchildren	14
Yes, grandchildren	6
No	101

- 14. Thank you for your help with this survey. So that the district can better understand the differences of opinion between those who voted, “Yes” and those who voted, “No,” would you mind telling me – did you vote, “Yes” or did you vote, “No” on Proposition Blackcat Pride in the November 2016 election?** *Percentages (and numbers, in parenthesis) displayed below.*

Response	Percentage (Number)
Voted, “Yes”	46% (166)
Voted, “No”	50% (180)
Don’t know/Don’t remember	1% (2)
Refused	4% (13)

- 15. RECORD GENDER**

Response	Percentage
Female	58%
Male	42%