



Oregon School Boards Association

Learn from the Winners: Mt. Angel School District

Mt. Angel School District

ADM: 675

November 2012 Construction bond: \$10,405,000

55.1% approval

A brief, successful election history

Mt. Angel School District has a 100 percent success rate for its construction bond measures. With the passage of a \$10.4 million construction bond measure in November, the district has now passed each of the two bonds in the district's history.

According to Superintendent Troy Stoops, the only other attempt was in 1995 to rebuild the elementary school after earthquake damage forced its condemnation.

With so few past attempts, the district had a steep learning curve for this election. Stoops said their approach was to reach out to their community, provide honest information about facility needs and keep the costs as low as possible.

Only ask for what you really need

The November bond will fund repairs and upgrades to both the middle school and high school. In the past, these repairs would have been part of the district's operating budget, but reduced funding during the economic downturn meant a smaller budget for non-instructional needs, including maintenance. With no money for the projects, many deteriorated further and became higher priority projects.

"The board did a really good job prioritizing budgets to try to address as many immediate needs as possible," said Stoops. "As time went on, they fell a little more behind. There were some serious roofing problems and areas that needed immediate attention."

A bond proposal was the logical solution. Maintenance staff kept a list of needs, which became the basis for the bond proposal. The goal was to address the biggest needs and not increase taxes. "We wanted to maintain the same rate with the new bond that people were already paying with the bond from 1995, which was set to retire."

That was a challenge for a small community – only 13 square miles – with a low tax base. After prioritizing the most essential projects, the final number resulted in a modest tax increase of \$.90 per \$1,000. A bond with no rate increase to taxpayers over the current tax level would have only netted \$7.3 million.

Partner with your community

Asking voters to approve a bond measure for schools requires trust between the district and community. Stoops had only been superintendent in the district for three years, but he had served the district for about 12 years as the elementary and then the high school principal. Although he had no bond campaign experience, he had good rapport in the community.

The first step was a two-phase, community-based Long-Range Facility Planning Committee process to evaluate facility needs and then define the final project list. The committee drafted a belief statement that guided them through difficult decision making. "If a project didn't fit within our belief statement, we didn't include it," Stoops said.

The result was unanimous committee support for the bond proposal. "They accepted the need was there, and the plan was well thought through," said Stoops, who believes that was also the sentiment in the larger community. "Most community members recognized that the projects were reasonable and necessary. Taking care of schools is a good use of money and impacts the quality of life in the community," he said.

Earn the support of voters

One advantage the district had was a history of responsible fiscal management. They have taken advantage of every energy efficiency reimbursement opportunity available through SB 1149 and are currently eligible for the maximum reimbursement of approximately \$365,000.

Last summer, they borrowed \$654,000 to address the most serious facility problems, which may have helped community members understand the gravity of the situation in the buildings.

Educating voters was key to earning approval. Supportive parents and community members helped the district share information at community meetings throughout the campaign.

"You have to give people a lot of time on voter education. Some are easy to inform; others need to learn more," said Stoops. On Election Day, any win is a good win. The measure passed by 87 votes. Although there are no plans for bond number three, the district will use this bond as a starting point for ongoing communication about district facilities.