

## Referendum Feedback Analysis

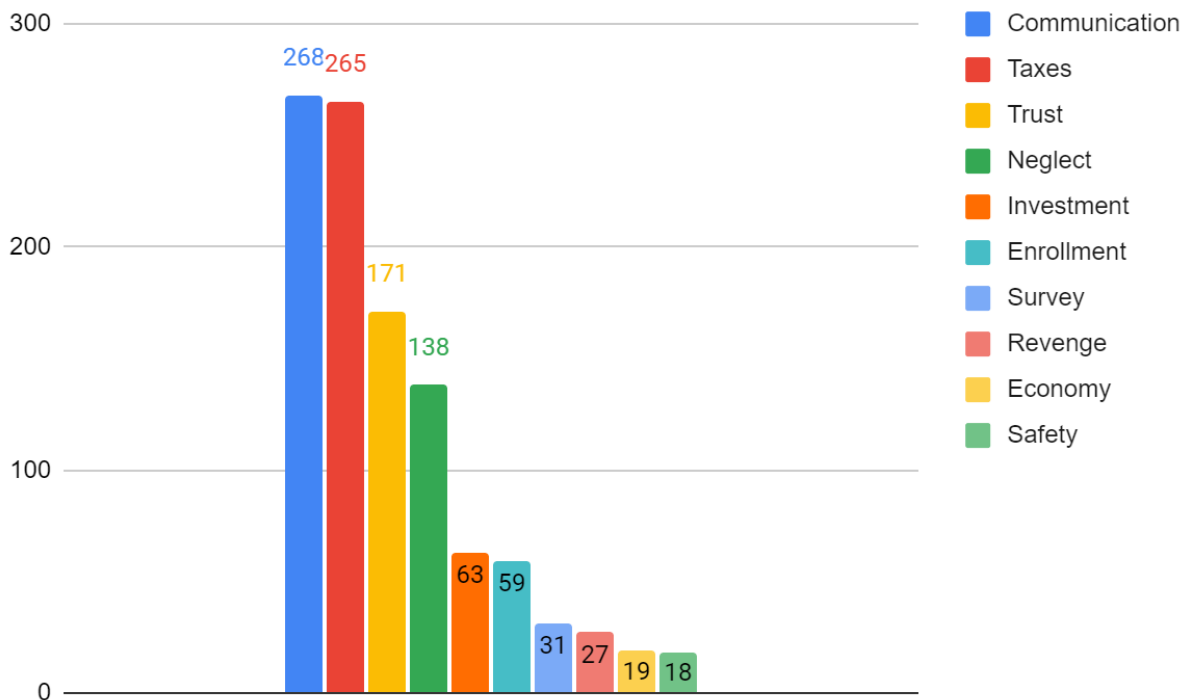
### Collection Methods

Feedback was collected through the following instruments:

- General written feedback (170)
- Focus groups (6)
- Phone interviews (10)
- Community survey written comments (769)

Note: Apart from the written comments, this analysis does not include the quantitative results from the community survey itself.

### Feedback Themes by Prevalence



## Description of Primary Themes

The following primary themes emerged from the feedback, ranked in order of prevalence:

1. **Communication** with the community, including the reasons for the referendum, specificity and availability of details, and the facility master plan itself.
2. **Property taxes**, including the tax burden, the truthfulness of the tax impacts, the mechanics of the tax levy, and current fund balances.
3. **Trust** and confidence in leadership, including historical events related to previous referenda, finances, visibility and relationships with the community, and internal climate and culture.
4. **Neglect** and lack of school maintenance, including the reasons why it is cheaper to demolish and rebuild in this case.
5. The community's **investment** in education, its school facilities, and the benefits afforded students and taxpayers.
6. Declining **enrollment** and the need to maintain the current number of schools and staff.
7. The **survey instrument** utilized, including perception of its purpose and effectiveness.
8. Unrelated to the referendum itself, some voted in **revenge** for perceived wrongs.
9. The current **economy and timing** of the election and how it may have factored into voter's decisions.
10. Ensuring that school facilities meet modern **safety** standards.

## Sub-Themes

The prevailing aspects (sub-theme) of each primary theme follows:

1. **Communication**
  - a. Rationale and understanding of the master facilities plan
  - b. Clarity, specificity, and availability of information
  - c. Misinformation and uninformed voters
  - d. Awareness of the referendum and the question itself
  - e. Timing and effectiveness of "yes" and "no" campaigns

2. **Property taxes**
  - a. Current tax burden
  - b. "Truthfulness" of tax implications
  - c. Mechanics of the tax levy
  - d. Current fund balances
3. **Trust and confidence**
  - a. Issues related to historical referenda (e.g., field turf and tax pledge)
  - b. Historical finances and spending
  - c. Confidence in leadership
  - d. Staff climate and culture
4. **Neglect and maintenance**
  - a. Perceived mismanagement
  - b. Fiscal responsibility (rebuild vs. renovate)
5. **Investment**
  - a. Needs vs. wants relative to student outcomes
  - b. Adequate facilities that support modern educational programs
  - c. Preservation of home market values
6. **Enrollment**
  - a. Current and projected enrollment
  - b. Consolidation of elementary schools
  - c. Pupil to staff ratio
7. **Survey instrument**
  - a. Purpose and potential bias
  - b. Confusion and technical design
8. **Revenge**
  - a. Underpaid or unappreciated employees
  - b. Treatment and support for marginalized communities
  - c. Staff climate and culture
9. **Economy and timing**
  - a. Inflation and fears of recession
  - b. General election and voter participation
  - c. Influence of national political issues and climate
10. **Safety**
  - a. Modern safety standards (fire, weather, security threats)

- b. Funding sources and emotional implications for voters

## Theme Discussion

**Communication.** The most prevalent of all primary themes (n = 268), the prominent perception was that the plan lacked specificity and clarity. It appears that the “need” for the referendum was not clearly conveyed. Many felt that voters were unaware of the referendum, uninformed of the consequences of its success or failure, or that convincing information was too difficult to find. Several were concerned about misinformation from both the “yes” and “no” campaigns.

**Taxes.** The second most frequent theme (n = 265), comments largely focused on the tax burden. Many felt that the case for the referendum was not compelling to justify the taxes already collected. Many comments cited the truthfulness of “no tax increase” campaign literature, that taxes would otherwise decrease, and impugned the trustworthiness of leadership. It appears that some voters do not understand the underlying mechanics of the tax levy. Yet others indicated that the referendum question, itself, indicates that finances have been mismanaged.

**Trust.** Issues related to previous referenda (e.g., field turf and the “tax pledge”) were indicated. Others mention historical finances and spending, including that administrators are excessively compensated, too numerous, and do not contribute to student learning. Some comments suggest that current staff climate and culture, and opinions for District leaders, may have adversely affected the outcome.

**Neglect.** The last of the prominent themes (n = 138), many inferred that rebuilding H.C. Storm and Louise White Schools was necessitated by mismanagement and neglect. Some comments seek a long-term facilities plan with assurances that other schools need not be rebuilt in the future. Such inferencing may have influenced perceptions of trust in leadership and confidence in fiscal management.

**Investment.** Many cite the need to maintain school facilities that properly support modern educational programs and student learning, linking outcomes to home market values and the community’s reputation. Many comments speculate that older residents without students in school did not adequately support the referendum. Yet others cite a disproportionateness between the tax burden, staff pay, and lackluster student achievement, particularly relative to neighboring communities.

**Enrollment.** Most comments cited declining enrollment as a compelling reason not to support the referendum, and many suggested that schools should be consolidated to save costs.

**Survey instrument.** Several comments voiced frustration with the survey instrument itself, particularly that it required comments and responses to questions. (It did not, although there may have been technical issues.) Many perceived bias in the nature of the questions or that their purpose – to speculate on the reasons why others may have voted – was ineffectual.

**Revenge.** Several indicated or speculated that some voted “no” to avenge other issues not related to the referendum. Such reasons include perceived historical wrongs (e.g., field turf or the 2007 “tax pledge”) or current issues (e.g., equity, staff climate, special education, gifted, indoctrination, sex education, social justice, and staff pay).

**Economy and timing.** Several comments were concerned with the state of the national economy or fear of an impending recession. Some indicated that the November election was not optimal for passing the referendum. Several reflected a discourteous and partisan animus, reflective of the current national political climate. Others stated, often emphatically, that the measure was rejected and should not be asked again.

**Safety.** As the least prevalent theme (n = 18), perception was that school safety is an absolute requirement. Some believe this was a compelling reason to support the referendum, many perceived it was an emotional ploy. Many believe that all safety issues should be addressed in full by the operating budget.

## Findings

The feedback indicates that:

- Communication with the community was deficient. Many voters were unaware of the rationale and did not know, or could not find, information to make an informed decision.
- It appears that many voters were not convinced of, or did not understand, the rationale for rebuilding H.C. Storm and Louise White Schools.
- Many voters appear to mistrust leadership, and issues indirect to the referendum (e.g., equity, staff climate, pay rates), may have influenced votes to an extent sufficient to have altered the outcome of the election.
- It is not clear that faculty and staff understood or supported the plan.

## **Considerations**

- The opportunity for an unchanged bond and interest tax levy will expire after the April 2023 election.
- Should the plan be adjusted, particularly with regard to the rebuilding of H.C. Storm and Louise White Schools?
- How can the master facilities plan and its rationale be clarified to the community?
- Is the campaign committee willing to continue and expand its work and outreach, specifically direct contact with voters?