

**SUPERINTENDENT PERCEPTIONS OF CRITICAL FACETS RELATED TO
SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL SCHOOL BOND ELECTIONS IN
TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

A Record of Study

by

ERICH MORRIS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Chair of Committee, | Beverly J. Irby |
| Co-Chair of Committee, | Robert Muller |
| Committee Members, | Rafael Lara-Alecio Gwendolyn Webb-Johnson |
| Head of Department, | Fred Nafukho |

August 2016

Major Subject: Educational Administration

Copyright 2016 Erich Morris

ABSTRACT

Over the past several decades, Texas public school districts have witnessed tremendous growth in student enrollment. This trend in significant growth is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Many districts also have expansive needs to update outdated and insufficient buildings of instruction. Bond referenda are generally the sole source for facility financing, thus passage of bond elections is critical.

The purpose of this study was to reveal superintendent perceptions of critical facets related to successful and unsuccessful school bond elections in Texas public schools. The study is important in terms of providing district officials with a foundation of reference to facets which will assist in increasing the likelihood of bond success while limiting the chances of failure. A qualitative case study focusing on interviews and archival data serve as the research design and data collection approach. Data analysis is accomplished via a sequential combination of categorical aggregation, pattern identification, and naturalistic generalization.

The findings of the study reveal that five primary facets exist which, with focus hereto, will assist district officials with passage of bond elections: (a) building and maintaining trust in district officials; (b) getting to know the public; (c) informing the public; (d) hiring a bond strategist; and (e) separating propositions. Superintendents perceive that focusing on and giving credence to these facets will enhance the likelihood of bond election success. While adherence to and consideration of these items will not clinch definite election victory, it will increase the likelihood of doing so.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first and foremost want to thank the most influential people in my life, my loving mother and father. You were and still are a loving, caring, understanding, and patient set of parents who instilled a tremendous work ethic in me, posturing me with the discipline to complete this Record of Study and the TAMU Doctoral Program. I give great gratitude to each of you for your support and commitment to me, your youngest son. I want to thank my brother and best friend, who has always provided me with a competitive setting. I want to thank Dr. Todd Stephens, who afforded me the ability to focus considerable time on my doctoral studies. You are a tremendous leader and I will always appreciate your guidance and support. I want to thank my committee members, particularly my Chair, Dr. Irby, and Co-Chair, Dr. Muller, for helping me through this arduous journey. I want to dedicate this study to my two recently born sons, Luke and Dane. Although we've barely gotten to know each other thus far, you two already make me the proudest and happiest dad in the world. Study long and work hard and you will accomplish great things. Further dedication is directed at my loving and devoted wife; without her support none of this would be possible. You will never completely understand just how important you are to me and what you have contributed to building my confidence. We truly completed this study together and I could not have done it without you. I want to also thank my wife's mother and father for their support and encouragement throughout this process. Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, for blessing me with the family, friends, and life I have. I will continue to live in your name. God bless, and Gig'em!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| ABSTRACT | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..... | iii |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | iv |
| LIST OF FIGURES..... | vii |
| CHAPTER | |
| I. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Background of the Study..... | 1 |
| Statement of the Problem | 5 |
| Purpose and Significance of the Study | 6 |
| Definition of Terms | 7 |
| Ad Valorem Tax..... | 7 |
| Bond Proposition..... | 7 |
| Bond Referendum | 7 |
| Interest and Sinking Tax Rate | 8 |
| Over 65 Homestead Exemption | 8 |
| Taxpayers | 8 |
| Uniform Election Dates..... | 8 |
| Research Questions | 8 |
| Limitations | 9 |
| Delimitations | 9 |
| Assumptions | 10 |
| Organization of the Study | 10 |
| II. CRITIQUE OF LITERATURE..... | 11 |
| Introduction | 11 |
| Existing Research..... | 12 |
| School Facilities, Student Growth, and Financing Facilities | 13 |
| School Facilities | 13 |
| Facility Conditions | 14 |
| Student Growth | 16 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Financing Facilities | 17 |
| Critical Review of Studies..... | 19 |
| Stockton’s 1996 Record of Study..... | 20 |
| Clemens’ 2003 Dissertation | 21 |
| Faltys’ 2006 Record of Study..... | 23 |
| Kraus’ 2009 Dissertation..... | 24 |
| Lambert’s 2012 Dissertation | 25 |
| Giles, Gatlin, and Cataldo’s 1976 Individual Study..... | 26 |
| Sonsteli and Portney’s 1980 Individual Study | 27 |
| Beckham and Maiden’s 2003 Individual Study | 27 |
| Bowers, Metzger, and Millitello’s 2010 Individual Study | 29 |
| Bowers and Lee’s 2013 Individual Study | 30 |
| Themes: Factors Contributing to Successful Bond Elections | 32 |
| Bond Characteristics | 33 |
| Community Involvement..... | 33 |
| Election Characteristics..... | 34 |
| District Characteristics | 34 |
| Community Characteristics | 35 |
| Trust in Administration | 36 |
| Themes: Factors Contributing to Unsuccessful Bond Elections... | 37 |
| Summary and Drivers for Future Research..... | 38 |
| | |
| III. METHOD | 40 |
| | |
| Introduction | 40 |
| Research Design | 40 |
| Research Questions | 41 |
| Internal and External Validity | 42 |
| Data Triangulation..... | 42 |
| Participant Feedback | 42 |
| Rich, Thick Description | 42 |
| Selection of Participants | 43 |
| Instrumentation..... | 44 |
| Data Collection..... | 45 |
| Data Analysis | 48 |
| Summary | 49 |
| | |
| IV. FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS | 51 |
| | |
| Introduction | 51 |
| Interview Results..... | 52 |
| Superintendent #1 | 53 |
| Superintendent #2..... | 61 |
| Superintendent #3..... | 67 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Data Analysis | 75 |
| Interview Protocol Question #1..... | 76 |
| Interview Protocol Question #2..... | 77 |
| Interview Protocol Question #3..... | 79 |
| Interview Protocol Question #4..... | 80 |
| Interview Protocol Question #5..... | 80 |
| Interview Protocol Question #6..... | 81 |
| Interview Protocol Question #7..... | 82 |
| Interview Protocol Question #8..... | 83 |
| Interview Protocol Question #9..... | 83 |
| Interview Protocol Question #10..... | 84 |
| Interview Protocol Question #11..... | 84 |
| Summary of Analysis | 85 |
| | |
| V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 89 |
| Introduction | 89 |
| Conclusions | 90 |
| Trust in District Officials | 91 |
| Know Your Public..... | 94 |
| Inform Your Public | 96 |
| Hire a Strategist..... | 97 |
| Separate Propositions | 100 |
| Recommendations | 101 |
| Recommendations for Further Study | 103 |
| Summary | 104 |
| | |
| REFERENCES..... | 106 |
| | |
| APPENDIX A | 114 |
| | |
| APPENDIX B | 115 |
| | |
| APPENDIX C | 116 |
| | |
| APPENDIX D | 117 |
| | |
| APPENDIX E..... | 118 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| FIGURE | Page |
|--|------|
| I Morris Bond Election Priorities Pyramid of School Bond Passage for Texas Public School Officials | 86 |
| II Morris Trust Bubble for Gaining and Attaining Trust in District Officials | 93 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Public school student enrollment across the United States has seen significant growth in the past several decades. From fall 1998 to fall 2008, enrollment in U.S. public schools grew by 5.9 % (Texas Education Agency, 2011). At the same time, Texas public school enrollment grew by 20.4 %: an increase of more than 800,000 students (Texas Education Agency, 2011). By 2016, Texas public school enrollment had increased by another approximately 700,000 students for a total student enrollment of nearly 5.3 million (Texas Education Agency, 2016).

Several researchers have also revealed that the age and condition of the school building might help explain student achievement; the newer and better conditioned the building, the better students achieved academically (Anderson, 1999; Duyar, 2010; Earthman & Lemasters, 2009; Tanner, 2009). According to Joyner (2004), 75 % of this nation's 86,000 schools need repairs to bring them up to today's educational standards. All across the nation, an alarming number of school buildings are badly in need of being replaced or remodeled in order to create a safe and orderly environment in which to learn (Kraus, 2009). Upkeep of older facilities and the building of new facilities can have an impact on student instruction and perceptions toward the district (Gamkhar & Olson, 2004). Further, several participating superintendents within this study agreed that it is important to consider updating facilities, even within a stagnant or declining enrollment, in an effort to remain competitive with districts who may have new facilities as a result

of student growth. More than one participant in the study stated that the administration held hopes of attracting new students by adding new and state-of-the-art facilities of instruction.

Over-crowding of school facilities has also proven to negatively impact student performance. The United States Department of Education (USDOE, 2002) completed a review of several major analyses and concluded that class size reduction in the primary grades leads to higher student achievement, and when class sizes are reduced below 20 students, the related increase in student achievement moves the average student from the 50th percentile to above the 60th percentile. This same study reports results for low socioeconomic and minority students that show greater achievement advancement when class sizes are reduced.

School district officials most often must seek school bond referenda in an effort to generate sufficient funding for building and renovating existing facilities. Need (for bonds) could be based on many factors; enrollment growth, required building maintenance, or facilities improvements to support educational delivery (Erickson, 2011). Similar to an individual's thirty year mortgage, if a bond passes, the bond principal is paid back, plus interest, via taxpayer dollars over a specified timeframe. In general, new facilities are amortized over a 20–30 year payback, and major facility retrofits have a shorter payoff. School bonds are the most cost-efficient way for a school district to finance the construction of new schools and make capital improvements, because the debt can be spread over several years (Kaufman, 1994). Tax increases in the form of the debt service tax rate for school district are adjusted as needed (upon voter

approval) to fund the issues for the life of the amortization schedule (principal plus interest). The setting provides for significant challenges when school district officials approach voters in the form of a school bond election campaign. The stress of bond election success can be potentially damning in regions where high-stakes accountability puts districts in a result-driven race and school-choice competition empowers families to move their students to the district with the highest student achievement (Bowers, Metzger & Militello, 2010). Further, in a climate and era of continual litigation and legislative strife over funding adequacy and equity, it is perhaps not surprising that the wealthiest districts often benefit from facility spending the most; the increased spending on school facilities that did occur earlier this decade was disproportionately centered in the nation's wealthiest school districts (Stasner, 2010). The poorest districts had the lowest investments in school buildings, averaging \$4,800 per student, while the wealthiest districts spent, on average, \$9,361 per student (American Society of Civil Engineers, 2013). Districts with stagnant or declining enrollment must attempt to remain competitive with districts with a growing student population as well. So, district officials in non-growing districts must attempt to enhance facilities from time to time with funding from successful bond elections.

Given the long-term effect a bond election can have on school districts' and superintendents' long-term success; it is paramount that researchers address facets that lead to successful bond elections and also understand why elections are unsuccessful. Bowers and Lee (2013) surmised that early 1970s researchers focused on two overlapping constituencies—the researcher focused on the theory of why and how bonds

come to be passed, and the practitioner examined specific, generalizable, and applicable findings that they applied to help them pass their bond, or at the least decrease its risk of defeat at the election polls. In several modern studies, researchers have used survey tools and document analysis to retain voter feedback (Faltys, 2006; Stockton, 1996). Very few researchers (Bowers et al., 2010; Clemens, 2003; Holt, 1993; Kraus, 2009; Lambert, 2012) have attempted a mixed-methods or purely qualitative approach with naturalistic design (Creswell, 2003) in an attempt to allow the true players of the game to tell their real-life stories. Research on the subject is outdated, especially as it relates to today's era of heightened accountability or scrutiny of school district spending and specifically as it relates to debt. In 2015, school districts were held to unprecedented accountability and transparency requirements, thanks in large part to legislative direction and state action. The political landscape in Texas, especially from a conservative perspective, has created a heightened level of challenge for district officials in terms of gathering public support for attaining funds for facility needs. In *Texas Transparency*, The Texas Comptroller (2015) stated that in today's environment, taxpayers need accurate information to decide whether public education institutions are meeting the responsibility of managing debt as prudently and conservatively as possible. This is simply an example of the landscape district officials face today in their efforts to sway the "yes" vote for bond elections critical for student and district success. Therefore, my study is performed in an effort to add value to the field with a new-era, qualitative approach, focusing on Texas public school districts. It was believed that by allowing current and former superintendents to elaborate on the experiences associated with successful and unsuccessful bond issue

campaigns, other district officials might increase the likelihood of bond issue success and limit the chance of bond failure. Further and as stated, existing research was outdated, inconsistent with findings, and absent of a general conceptual model to summarize drivers associated with promoting bond success and/or failure.

Statement of the Problem

The passage of a school district bond issue can have significant long-term effects on a school district's well-being. Given the significant student enrollment growth characterizing many districts and the state of Texas as a whole as well as the need for updated and/or complete replacement of instructional facilities to meet the needs of the students or otherwise attract new students; successful bond issue campaigns are imperative. Earthman and Lemasters (2009) surmised that teacher attitudes were significantly affected by the condition of facilities and classrooms in which they taught, which may in turn affect student achievement. Finally, student enrollment growth will likely continue to force districts to erect new facilities to avoid overcrowded classrooms, excessive portable building usage, or otherwise unpleasant or outdated instructional facilities.

Passage of future bond issues may remain dependent on understanding of influences contributing to successful and unsuccessful campaigns and, particularly, why those approaches were or were not fruitful. To date, researchers have failed to reveal, or at least to efficiently summarize critical themes associated with, critical facets of heightening the likelihood of passage. Further, existing literature is generally absent of focus on drivers of failed elections. Finally, existing research is outdated, failing to

address new-era district debt scrutiny, and lacking personal, first-hand views from key players in the bond issue process. Therefore, limitations within existing research are multi-faceted: (a) they are outdated, given the new political landscape; (b) they have no qualitative lens on the subject; (c) they offer limited focus on the “no” vote; (d) they reveal inconsistent findings; and (e) they lack in-depth analysis of facets within administrative control.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

In this study, I explored superintendent perceptions of critical facets related to successful school bond elections in Texas public school districts. Secondly, I investigated superintendent perceptions of critical facets related to unsuccessful school bond elections in Texas public school districts. The information gleaned from this study will provide school officials with knowledge to assist with future bond issues, told from the naturalistic, real-life point of view of current and former superintendents. The data presented should be useful for informing bond election processes and enhancing the likelihood of referenda passage.

The results of this study provide Texas public school district officials with strategies which play critical roles in successful and unsuccessful school bond elections as perceived by superintendents in Texas public school districts. As the bond referenda outlet is generally the sole source for facility funding, it is critically important for researchers to identify strategies associated with election success or failure.

Definition of Terms

Some vocabulary in this study, especially within the critical research questions driving the research, was essential to grasp in an effort for clarity and understanding. Thus, a list of key terms with accompanying definitions is provided below.

Ad Valorem Tax

An ad valorem tax is a tax based on the assessed value of real estate or personal property. Property ad valorem taxes are the major source of revenue for state and municipal governments.

Bond Proposition

The bond proposition is language on the bond election ballot which describes the items of which the bond proceeds will be used. The proposition submitted in the election must distinctly state the purpose for which the bonds are to be issued, the amount of the bonds, the rate of interest, the imposition of taxes sufficient to pay the annual interest on the bonds and to provide a sinking fund to redeem the bonds at maturity, and the maturity date of the bonds or that the bonds may be issued to mature serially over a specified number of years not to exceed forty.

Bond Referendum

A bond referendum is a voting process that gives voters the power to decide if a municipality should be authorized to raise funds through the sale of bonds.

Debt refinancing is the process through which debt obligations are reorganized by replacing or restructuring existing debts. Debt is replaced or refunded with money that is raised by issuing or creating other borrowing.

Interest and Sinking Tax Rate

The Interest and Sinking (I & S) tax rate provides funds for payments on the debt that finances a district's facilities otherwise known as bonded indebtedness. The I & S rate is also commonly referred to as the Debt Service tax rate.

Over 65 Homestead Exemption

The over 65 exemption refers to a property tax exemption (reduction) for qualifying homeowners exceeding the age of 65. In the state of Texas, the over 65 homestead exemption is \$25,000 which, for those who qualify, reduces the taxable value of the taxpayer by \$25,000.

Taxpayers

Taxpayers are persons who pay property taxes within school district boundaries to assist public education with a local revenue stream.

Uniform Election Dates

Uniform election dates refers to the allowable election dates for public entities. The uniform election dates for each general and special election in the state of Texas must be held on one of the following dates; the first Saturday in May in an odd-numbered year, the first Saturday in May in an even-numbered year (for an election held by a political subdivision other than a county), and the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What do superintendents perceive as critical facets related to successful school bond elections in Texas public school districts?

2. What do superintendents perceive as critical facets related to unsuccessful school bond elections in Texas public school districts?

Limitations

The study had the following limitation in that the sample of superintendents was drawn from a pool within a single state; results may not be generalizable to an entire population.

Delimitations

The delimitations were influenced by a desire to gain a better understanding of how superintendents perceive critical facets associated with bond election results. In an effort to align the purpose of study and framework with resulting methodology, I sought participants who were current superintendents. Hence, the views were solely from the key players, which resulted in an absence of input from other potential data subjects. The sample of selected superintendents was drawn from a reasonable pool for study validity. Views and ultimate results may not be generalizable for all superintendents.

By design, given the focus of the study, interviews served as the primary data collection tool. Additional data collection tools may enhance future research. As the existing research on the subject is almost purely quantitative, which in part prompted the qualitative need, this study was absent of a quantitative scheme. Future research may consider a mixed-methods approach in an attempt to synthesize findings from multiple paradigms.

Assumptions

The following assumptions applied to this study:

1. The selected superintendents understood the interview questions.
2. The selected superintendents responded to the interview questions accurately and honestly.

Organization of the Study

Five chapters encompassed my study. Chapter I includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, theoretical framework, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and the assumptions of the study.

In Chapter II, I present a critique of literature, which includes a background of school facilities and financing school facilities, followed by the key elements of the study: factors contributing to successful bond elections and factors contributing to unsuccessful bond elections. Chapter III contains the methodology used for this research study. It includes the research design, data sources, data collection tools, and data analysis procedures.

In Chapter IV, I present the study's findings and the results of the data analyses for the two research questions, and Chapter V consists of a summary of the entire study, conclusions drawn from the study, and recommendations for future research on the topic.

CHAPTER II

CRITIQUE OF LITERATURE

Introduction

According to Randolph (2009), conducting a literature review is a means of demonstrating an author's knowledge about a particular field of study, including vocabulary, theories, key variables and phenomena, and its methods and history. Another purpose for writing a literature review is that it provides a framework for relating new findings to previous findings in the discussion section of a dissertation. Without establishing the state of the previous research, it is impossible to establish how the new research advances the previous research (Randolph, 2009).

The purpose, in general, of this section is to give insight towards themes, key variables, and general history of existing literature on the subject of critical influences of successful and unsuccessful school bond elections. The goal of the literature review was to build a foundation for the study.

A traditional or narrative review of literature provides the foundation for the review approach. First, using key terms within subject headings, an online search was conducted, primarily focusing on peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, etc. A chart of summarized themes (characteristics or facets associated with influencing bond election results) associated with findings of existing research was developed. After research collection and review was complete, I reviewed individual studies on the subject and included a summary, synthesis, and critique of each. Following examination of individual studies, I then focused on existing themes from all literature reviewed, as a

whole. With this review of literature, I attempted to provide an ultimately balanced approach. Balance, from my perspective, follows Patton's (1990) guidance via inclusion of popular literature review approaches including a historical context, searching for gaps in existing literature, and to reveal how studies differ in approach (methods) and findings. Focus was given to different eras of research (timeframes to include the distant past and the most recent past), a myriad of writing outlets (including peer reviewed journals, dissertations, etc.), and multiple methodologies (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods).

Existing Research

Bowers and Lee (2013) surmised that researchers have generally focused on two overlapping constituencies—the researcher focused on the theory of why and how bonds come to be passed, and the practitioner looking at specific, generalizable, and applicable findings that they can apply to help them pass their bond. Researchers on the subject have generally approached studies quantitatively, focusing on drivers of bond election success or failure within specific aspects of bond elections (Bohrer, 1998; Brummer, 1999; Carter, 1995; Chopra, 1988; Dunbar, 1991; Faltys, 2006; Mathison, 1998; Simpson, 1993; Stockton, 1996).

The vast majority of existing literature on the subject simply provides resulting themes (components, facets, or categories) of quantitative data analysis; generally, survey response trends are categorically assigned, then summarized and discussed. In its simplest form of existing quantitative research on the subject, critical themes driving elections are introduced in summary. Scant qualitatively approached studies exist on the

subject, which promotes a gap in existing literature. The absence of a qualitative lens on the subject results in non-inclusion of first-hand, real-life expression from the key players as well as absence of alternative methods. “Although the majority of literature reviews will focus on the findings of prior research, there are times where literature reviews need to focus on methodology of prior research” (Denney & Tewksbury, 2012, p. 230). It is hoped that the review of literature provides a foundation for this study’s findings to re-affirm, compare, contrast, and synthesize with existing literature on the subject as well as ultimately affording new thematic conclusions.

Prior to delving into the heart of the literature review, which includes a critique of existing literature and summary of current themes, a brief discussion of school facilities, student growth, and financing for school facilities is provided in an effort to introduce the role each component plays in driving bond election needs. The background should add value to reader understanding of the critical nature of school bond election passage.

School Facilities, Student Growth, and Financing Facilities

School Facilities

School facilities are a costly part of an educational system. Odden and Picus (2008) concluded that as the average life span of a school building is estimated to be 50 years, once built, a school can influence generations of students. School buildings are perhaps the most visible expression of society’s investment in public education (Duyar, 2010). Many researchers have focused on the relationship of various aspects of district facilities with student and teacher-related variables. Though research results are mixed, a

slight majority tends to reason that newer, better facilities equate to better student performance and overall district organizational health (Anderson, 1999; Duyar, 2009; Earthman & Lemasters, 2009; Tanner, 2006). Some researchers have suggested that when it comes to considering facility conditions, it is common sense that decent, healthy, safe, and secure school facilities are essential to successful educational programs (Kowalski, 2002; Planty & Devoe, 2005). Researchers suggested the two drivers of facility needs are the condition of the buildings (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009) and student growth (Stockton, 1996). The condition of the building is sometimes driven by the need for updates to enhance the learning capabilities of students but is also a mechanism for attracting new students.

Facility Conditions

More than 45 million elementary and secondary students attend approximately 86,000 public schools in the United States. While enrollments are growing, the Department of Education has found that the average public school building in 1998 was 42 years old, and in 1995 we reported that about a third of the nation's public schools needed extensive repair or replacement of one or more buildings. (GAO, 2000, p. 11)

The American Society of Civil Engineers (2013) assigned a grade of "D" for public school infrastructure in America. Further, despite money concerns and districts only spending in total about \$10 billion on facilities in 2012, the investments needed to modernize and maintain the facilities exceeds an estimated \$270 billion (American Society of Civil Engineers, 2013).

Beyond funding constraints and glaringly apparent need for updating of facilities lies research which points towards the positive correlation of school facility conditions (age, organization, etc.) with teaching, learning, and student performance. In a recent study focusing on the relationship of facility conditions to teacher morale and student performance, Earthman and Lemasters (2009) found that responses of teachers in buildings rated as being in satisfactory condition were higher than teachers in buildings rated as being in unsatisfactory condition. Thus, attitudes of teachers in better schools were more positive and upbeat than the teachers in inferior schools. This would seem to suggest that if a teacher is assigned to a classroom space that is in good and inviting condition, the teacher will have a more positive attitude. Conversely, the attributes of a classroom in unsatisfactory condition would work to produce more negative attitudes on the part of the teacher or, at best, attitudes that are less positive than what a satisfactory classroom could inspire (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009).

In a more in-depth analysis than most studies focusing on general relationships, Tanner (2009) found significant correlation of student achievement in various subjects as related to multiple school designs: movement and circulation, day lighting, and views. The Heschong Mahone Group (1999) performed a study and surmised that when controlling for socioeconomic status, students in the most well lit classrooms generally performed better in many subject areas. Facility conditions were found to be a stronger predictor of academic achievement than many family background factors and socio-economic conditions (Duyar, 2010). Given extant literature on the positive correlation of

various facets of facility conditions with student performance, renovating and building facilities accordingly is critically important.

Student Growth

Another critical motivator of the need for new or expanded facilities is public school student enrollment growth.

Public school enrollment at the elementary level (prekindergarten through grade 8) rose from 29.9 million in fall 1990 to 34.2 million in fall 2003. After a decrease of less than 1 % between fall 2003 and fall 2004, elementary enrollment generally increased to a projected total of 34.9 million for fall 2011. Public elementary enrollment is projected to continue a pattern of annual increases through 2020 (the last year for which NCES has projected school enrollment).

Public school enrollment at the secondary level (grades 9 through 12) rose from 11.3 million in 1990 to 15.1 million in 2007, with a projected enrollment of 14.5 million for 2011. Public secondary enrollment is projected to show a decrease of 4 % between 2007 and 2012, and then increase again through 2020. Public secondary school enrollment in 2020 is expected to be about 5 % higher than in 2012. Total public elementary and secondary enrollment is projected to set new records every year from 2011 to 2020. (USDOE, 2012, p. 1)

With the trend line of student enrollment growth in the nation's public education system, the need to adequately house the students for instruction continues. Facility erection will with certainty continue to track student growth, or at least facility needs will exist.

Robinson and Wittebols (1986) determined that class size does indeed affect student performance, especially in the lower level grades. Wenglinsky (1997) concluded that class size was significantly correlated with student achievement, with focus on the subject of math. Given the effect that facility conditions and student growth have on the need to renovate and erect district facilities, funding sources must be sought.

Financing Facilities

While multiple funding sources exist for Texas public school districts, including general revenue flows of the local, state, and federal variety, bond issues have usually served as the sole source to pay for building erection or any significant facility retrofit. Bond funds are predicated on voters approving language authorizing school officials to proceed with selling bonds to fund the projects. Bond are paid back, mostly via local tax payer dollars, both principal and interest. Districts are generally financially strapped, with ordinary revenue streams attempting to meet state and federal guidelines, sustain competitive salaries, and simply meet the needs of the students with limited resources. Bond payments comprise the vast majority of a school district's debt payment which, on average, continues to rise drastically. Texas State Comptroller Susan Combs (2012) stated that selling bonds approved by voters was the most common avenue for districts to incur debt, which totals \$62.6 billion within Texas public schools. Based on growth and other facility needs, this has led to a significant increase in debt service costs for districts, especially in the last 10 years, as depicted in Appendix A (permission for use of this graphic in this study was granted by the Texas Comptroller's Office).

Thanks primarily to facility needs associated with building condition and student growth resulting in bond election and issuance, the top ten school districts by total debt in the state of Texas comprise a staggering \$15,143,347,647 in total outstanding debt (Combs, 2012). Appendix B illustrates a breakdown of the top ten districts in the state in terms of outstanding debt (permission for use of this graphic in this study was granted by the Texas Comptroller's Office).

As Appendix B illustrates, with significant increases (and overall amounts) of debt service payments, districts are continually forced to seek bond elections to meet the district's needs. According to the Texas Comptroller's Texas Transparency (2015) webpage, in May 2015 there were a total of 73 bond elections, including 81 propositions up for voter consideration, across the state of Texas. Of the 81 propositions, 64 passed (79 %) and 17 were unsuccessful (21 %). In terms of summarizing the intent of the bond proceeds, most districts were seeking funds for new school construction, renovations of existing schools, technology upgrades, security needs. The purpose of new construction and renovations was to respond to aging facilities, anticipated student growth (in some cases), and overcrowded classrooms. Of all passed elections, 70 % included requests for some sort of new construction, 51 % included renovation requests, 18 % some form of technology needs, 23 % security items, and 23 % of all passed elections included something other than the four most common items. To clarify; the successful elections and previous percentages were applied based on elections including some form of the categorical requests (many included a combination of the items, which is why the totals do not add to 100 %). The items falling outside the primary categories as something

other included items such as buses and general transportation costs, athletic field renovations, bond refinance, and land purchases for future district building sites. Of the 17 total failed propositions, 58 % included requests in some form for new construction, 64 % contained renovation requests, 5 % technology needs, 5 % for security enhancements, and 5 % for other purposes. While the overall results and percentage of winning propositions attempted are encouraging, especially given the importance bond money can have on long-term district success, the future remains uncertain for those districts with failed elections.

Given the critical relationship of facility conditions and space, the future of the districts with failed elections is unattractive at best. It is likely the future for those districts consists of portable buildings and crowded facilities, neither which are generally associated positively with student performance, teacher morale, or overall district health. Based on this understanding, it is easy to see the critical nature bond elections play in affording districts with funds to meet facility needs. Further, school officials must better understand critical facets associated with successful and unsuccessful bond elections in an effort to increase likelihood of bond election success and decrease possibility of bond election failure.

Critical Review of Studies

In this initial section of the literature review, I focused on popular existing studies on the subject of factors associated with bond election success or failure. First, I included a chronological review, critique, and synthesis of research in the form of records of study and dissertations followed by popular articles from peer reviewed

journals. This was a result of online database searches using “school,” “bond,” and “elections” as keywords. Databases included the Texas A&M University online library, the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and ProQuest.

Stockton’s 1996 Record of Study

In a record of study submitted to (and approved by) Texas A&M University, Stockton (1996) performed an extensive, quantitatively driven study focusing on influences contributing to the successful passage of a school bond referendum in a selected Texas public school district. Stockton (1996) included a hint of qualitative approach early in his research when conducting interviews with key administrators in an effort to gather insight to known and established factors contributing to bond election outcomes. In simple terms, the researcher sought valuable first-hand information to better immerse himself in the field of study. He then took key facets associated with driving election outcomes as interpreted from the interviews, synthesized with existing literature on the subject, to create a final list of items to consider on a survey for data collection. Data collection included surveys mailed to voters within the selected district’s boundaries. The survey consisted of 26 questions and utilized the Likert scale, with five possible choices. After utilizing several quantitative approaches of analysis, most notably Chi Square Analysis, the researcher determined that 20 of the 26 factors were found to be significant influences on voter approval (Stockton, 1996). A few of the strongest influential factors in Stockton’s (1996) study were voters who had children in the district, population growth in the district, detailed information on bond plans, community involvement, and trust in district officials. When delving into influences of

the “no” vote, focusing on the needs of all students (or, failure to do so) and past district tax cuts surfaced.

Stockton’s study provided reasonably valuable quantitative research on the subject within limitations of a single district. Additional focus on the “no” vote would have potentially augmented the study. Alternative or added approaches could have included a qualitative (or mixed methods) perspective to gain valuable information from the key players in the effort. Finally, as with any research, and assuming additional time and resources were available, a wider scope (not limited to a single district) and validity efforts could potentially intensify the piece. As a recommendation for future research, Stockton (1996) suggested a qualitative approach utilizing extensive interviews as data collection tools.

Clemens’ 2003 Dissertation

In September 2003, Anji Clemens completed a doctoral dissertation titled *Issues and Related Strategies Used in Successful School Facilities Bond Elections in Seven Selected Orange County School Districts between June 2000 to March 2002*. Clemens (2003) utilized a mixed-methods approach including interviews and surveys as data collection tools. After defining the sample, seven school districts were chosen and agreed to participate in the study, which focused on six criteria. Surveys were distributed within the districts by the superintendent to key personnel for completion while the superintendent and his/her designee served as interviewees. Descriptive statistics and qualitative thematic analysis served as data analysis techniques. The study’s findings suggest the cost and perceived affordability of the bond to the homeowner were the most

important factors identified by the seven districts. Other contributors to bond success included the importance of a well-run, adequately financed bond campaign, and involving the community with input for long-range facility plans.

Clemens (2003) provided an advanced approach, given mixed methods, but is absent of factors attributed to unsuccessful bond elections. Further, additional efforts could have been given within the qualitative lens in terms of data collection. The results of the study were relatively similar to Stockton's (1996) in terms of key drivers of bond passage, indicating community support and introducing a new critical indicator, perceived affordability to home owner. This new facet could have arisen for many reasons, including location (and clientele) disparities in the two studies, or more likely could be related to the fact that it was one of only six criteria considered in Clemens's (2003) study versus Stockton's (1996). Clemens (2003) introduced the critical influence of demographic makeup of the voters in the community as a driver for dictating the vote. Of particular importance was the ability of district administration to develop a planning process encouraging voters to support a facility bond election within a community of rapidly changing demographics. In areas of areas with heavy growth in the Hispanic population, district officials agreed the lack of a successful bilingual campaign to promote inclusion and participation by Hispanic voters promotes a difficult setting for bond election success. It is important then to acknowledge the changing demographics and respond accordingly. Clemens' (2003) research spanned a lengthy time frame and covered multiple districts, which deepen the value of the study. One of Clemens's (2003)

suggestions for future research included focusing on what causes school bond issues to fail.

Faltys' 2006 Record of Study

In 2006, Texas A&M University doctoral student David Faltys completed a record of study titled *Factors Influencing Passage of a School Bond Referendum as Identified by Selected Voters in the Navasota Independent School District in Texas*. Similar to Stockton's (1996) study, Faltys (2006) performed a quantitative piece utilizing survey instruments as data collection tools and popular analysis tools of frequency distributions, cross-tabulations, and Chi-Square tests to determine the level of significance of various defined factors. Faltys (2006) introduced a new approach utilizing a seemingly unique situation for a selected school district. The district held separate bond elections only three months apart in 2004, with the first election resulting in failure and the second resulting in success. The unique approach surfaced in not only that special situation, but Faltys (2006) also focused his surveys on voters who had voted in each of the elections that year. The quick second referendum and change in outcome is in stark contrast to existing literature (Bowers & Lee, 2013) which suggests previous election outcome often plays a significant indicator on future referendum results. To clarify, Bowers and Lee (2013) suggest that results for either passage or failure often predict the same fate in the selected district in future referendums, especially for the near future. Further, his study emphasizes the influence the nature of bond campaign strategy truly exerts on voter decisions, as the results rarely change significantly, especially within a three-month span in the same school district. Given the ability to poll the same

voters in a failed and successful election, Faltys (2006) was also able to consider both sides of the issue; drivers of bond success and failure. In summary, trust in administration and failing to follow through with promises from previous elections played strong roles in influencing the vote on the failed election. Two recommendations for future research on the subject as provided by Faltys (2006) included a qualitative or mixed-methods approaches and a more extensive study of the “no” vote.

Kraus’ 2009 Dissertation

In 2009, Kansas State University doctoral student Brian Kraus completed a dissertation titled *A Descriptive Analysis of Selected Community Stakeholder Opinions Regarding Potentially Critical Factors in School Bond Referenda Success or Failure in Kansas During the years 2004–2007*. Similar to Clemens’s (2003) study, Kraus (2009) focused on multiple school districts for several years’ worth of bond elections. Consistent with Clemens’s (2003) study, Kraus (2009) conducted a mixed-methods study, including survey and statistical analysis from a quantitative perspective and interviews serving as the qualitative data collection tool. Data analysis tools consisted of cross tabulations and Pearson’s Chi Square for the numeric piece and thematic coding for the humanistic piece. The primary drivers found to promote school bond election success in Kraus’ study included unanimous school board support, development of ongoing public relations strategies, and communicating elements of bond referendum, clearly and in simple terms, to all patrons. Kraus (2009) furthered existing research by including districts that were unsuccessful in recent bond elections. The end results

indicated that district officials of the failed election campaigns appeared to be less “in-tune” with community patrons (than those in “passing” districts).

Lambert’s 2012 Dissertation

Superintendent Perceptions of the Success and Failure of School Construction Referendums from 2008-2010 in the State of Indiana is the title of a dissertation performed by Walter Albert Lambert. To date, Lambert’s (2012) study was one of the first purely qualitative in methodology. Further, the researcher introduces one of the best approaches to date in terms of focusing on both successful and unsuccessful election results and drivers thereof. Lambert (2012) selected eight superintendents, four associated with successful campaigns and four serving districts with recent unsuccessful bond elections, while interviews served as the collection tool. Open and axial coding provided the data analysis technique to produce the final, common, most populous themes deriving from the study. Findings of the study were similar to existing studies, with primary indicators of successful elections including clear communication, a strong community committee, and a long-range facility plan. Lambert suggested that knowing the community and voters plays a critical role in the eyes of superintendents in terms of promoting bond election success. A consistent theme occurring in those districts with failed campaigns included significant issues with formal opposition groups and failed communication. One of the four superintendents cited lack of board unanimity as a contributing factor. Lambert’s (2012) findings generally agree with other existing research while providing a new focus on failed elections. In short, Lambert found factors associated with bond election failure are frequently the inability to accomplish factors

associated with successful campaigns. Two recommendations for future research included performing a case study and measuring the impact of economic conditions on bond election passage.

Giles, Gatlin, and Cataldo's 1976 Individual Study

In a 1976 journal article, Giles et al. (1976) performed a study titled *Parental Support for School Referenda*. The researchers evaluated the relative effects of four factors—social status, powerlessness, specific support and taxpayer revolt—on the reported willingness to vote for an increase in school taxes (Giles, Gatlin, & Cataldo, 1976). The researchers utilized a quantitative approach which included surveys of voters in the community. Data for the study were drawn from a survey of white parents of school-age children in seven desegregated Florida county school districts (Giles et al., 1976). When analyzing output resulting from correlation coefficient tables, the researchers determined powerlessness, school integration, and taxpayer revolt all relatively equally influenced voters, while status was the least weighted factor. The study was one of the earliest on record attempting to introduce factors influencing voters on school tax referenda. By its very nature, it is valuable to “kick things off.” Utilizing only white voters limits the response or views of response. Further, the study is absent of a qualitative lens, limited to a relatively small set of criteria for study, and lacks focus on the “no” vote. Given the time frame of the study, the results generally do not concur with later studies, likely due to the criteria researched (later research tended to focus on other era-appropriate criteria).

Sonstelie and Portney's 1980 Individual Study

A piece by Sonstelie and Portney (1980) titled *Take the Money and Run: A Theory of Voting in Local Referenda*, when compared with other existing literature of other eras, introduced a unique concept, challenging a conceptual theory while measuring via traditional quantitative means. The researchers proposed the “Theory of Super-Rationality” as a potential driver of voter behavior. With focus on a potentially key voting motivator of the effects of referenda passage on tax collections (and increased tax costs to voters), the theory sought to confirm whether voters would look beyond benefits of a bond proposal based on concern for the expected effect on the voter’s property value (Sonstelie & Portney, 1980). Using correlation effects, the researchers were unable to confirm their theory of super-rational referendum voting. However, property value effects were positively and significantly related in the study to the likelihood of a “yes” vote. This unique study provided an alternative approach to existing research by generating and testing a theory. However, the study was limited in scope and approach.

Beckham and Maiden's 2003 Individual Study

More than two decades later, in an article fitting for the era, Beckham and Maiden (2003) introduced a study titled *The Effects of Technology Inclusion on School Bond Election Success in Oklahoma*. As technology gained momentum in utilization for classroom instruction and student learning, so too arose the challenge for districts to adequately fund technological needs. School districts must think of technology funding, not only as an ongoing expense, but also as one requiring a large initial capital outlay

(Beckham & Maiden, 2003). The researchers conducted the study to determine if there was a relationship between technology inclusion and the voting percentages or the pass/fail rate in bond issues. While the study was performed in an effort to focus on technology, the backdrop provided what could potentially add value to any election. To clarify, if it was determined that inclusion of technology in an election heightened the likelihood of election success, district officials may be inclined to search for technology needs to “swing the vote.” When considering multiple variables (amounts of issue, size of district, technology inclusion in issue, election outcome, etc) associated with elections across the state of Oklahoma, Beckham and Maiden (2003) initially found that 57.9 % of elections included no technology funding and that 42.1 % included at least some funding for technology. Of the 220 elections which included funding for technology, 202 (91.8 %) passed, while 104 of the 122 unsuccessful issues had no technology funding (Beckham & Maiden, 2003). The researchers surmised that although technology funding in bond issues was significant and a useful predictor (of election success), the relatively low variance accounted for indicated that many other factors exist which may ultimately affect affirmative voting percentages (Beckham & Maiden, 2003). One alternative conclusion was drawn from the results of study: the amount of the bond proposal is a significant factor of bond passage—as the amount of the bond increased, passage rates decreased. These findings were in stark contrast to Sielke (1998) who concluded the amount of the bond and number of election attempts were each non-significant. Further contrary to Sielke’s (1998) study, Beckham and Maiden (2003) determined district enrollment as a significant predictor of bond election success—as enrollment increases,

so does the likelihood of bond passage. This study, as compared with existing literature on bond election drivers, introduced a new, era-appropriate consideration with the focus on influence of technology in elections. By its very exploratory nature, therefore, the study provides value to the field. The research, however, is limited in scope for its focus solely on technology, its absence of qualitative views, and its lack of focus on the “no” vote. One suggestion for future research provided by the researchers included introduction of a qualitatively-focused frame.

Bowers, Metzger, and Millitello’s 2010 Individual Study

In one of the most in-depth analyses in recent years, Bowers, Metzger, and Millitello (2010) introduced a study entitled *Knowing What Matters: An Expanded Study of School Bond Elections in Michigan, 1998–2006*. Examining 789 total bond elections while utilizing popular statistical logistic regression models, Bowers et al. (2010) focused on ten criteria, most of which have been examined in existing literature, with mixed results. The study’s results suggest student low SES makeup, percentage of district population with only a high school degree, voter turnout, and ballot positioning further down the ballot were all negative and significant factors, while district long-term debt and holding the election later in the calendar year are both positive and significant factors (Bowers et al., 2010). The conclusion that increasing low socioeconomic percentage of voters reduces chances of bond success confirms Sielke’s (1998) previous study. Further, as overall level of voter education decreases so too does likelihood of bond issue success, which confirms an early study from Piele and Hall (1973). The studies do not go into detail, however, in terms what influence voter turnout in the areas

of greater poverty and lesser voter education may have had on the findings. Contrary to existing research by Sielke (1998) and Zimmer and Jones (2005), this research surmises that, over time, district enrollment ceases to be a significant factor in determining bond election passage.

The Bowers et al. (2010) study is perhaps the most in-depth, well-written, and complete research on the subject within the last few decades. The study focused on each side of the ledger via influences of the “yes” and “no” vote and included a great synthesis of existing research to drive the study. In what has become a common theme of literature on the subject, one of the recommendations for future research provided by Bowers et al. (2010) suggested a qualitative lens which would help to understand the complex work and interrelationships of district and community actors during the bond proposal and election phases.

Bowers and Lee’s 2013 Individual Study

In the most recent significant research on influences associated with bond election success or failure, Bowers and Lee (2013) introduced yet another quantitative approach meant to adapt focus to factors that are under the influence of school administrators. Further, focus was given to elections from within the state of Texas for a span stretching from 1997 to 2009, including a significant (compared to other research) 2,224 bond elections for data disaggregation. Adding a unique touch to existing literature, Bowers and Lee (2013) concluded that three factors should be considered by superintendents when approaching a bond election: winning the first election, as subsequent attempts become notably less likely of success; paying attention to bond

purpose and wording, as inclusion of renovations appears to be a successful strategy; and focusing on ballot positioning, given that the top of the ballot is important. The importance of first election passage confirms an earlier study from Bowers et al. (2010), however, each is in contrast to Faltys (2006), as within his study, different election results (first election failed, subsequent selection was successful) arose with elections held within a year of each other. The bond wording conclusion introduced a new focus for future study consideration. Overall, the study added value to the field, especially in terms of defining approaches potentially within control of district officials. An interesting approach would have been a mixed-methods study in an effort to gain superintendent feedback (or confirmation) for the findings of the study as stated.

This section of the literature review included a critique of individual studies which provided an initial synthesis of existing research as well as a foundation for the study. Some studies exist which attempt to define factors contributing to passage of bond elections, most of which utilize quantitative approaches with a focus on correlations of various bond election variables with election success. Very few studies attempt a humanistic, qualitative approach which attempts to allow the critical players to tell their story. Further, absent from existing research is focus on drivers of failed elections and items within administrative control. Generally, findings are mixed in terms of the key drivers of bond election success or failure, while general conceptual themes related to the plethora of variables analyzed is non-existent. Consensus from researchers on suggestions for future studies reveals suggestions of a qualitative lens focused on key district officials including the “yes” and “no” votes. Within the next sections, I will

attempt a summary of themes existing in current literature as derived in the previous section in terms of factors associated with successful and unsuccessful bond elections. This should allow for further, narrowed synthesis of research via summarized themes ultimately promoting similarities, contrasts, and gaps in existing literature.

Themes: Factors Contributing to Successful Bond Elections

Although sparse and mostly outdated, literature exists in which researchers have attempted to define critical facets associated with driving school bond election passage. In this and the subsequent sections, a summary of themes existing in literature to date is afforded. Researchers have primarily focused on a plethora of individual factors contributing to voter decision (to vote “yes” or “no”). These factors include specific, detailed items such as the low socioeconomic percentage of the district to more general categories of district characteristics. In a relatively recent study, Bowers and Lee (2013) surmised that three general categories or characteristics exist which motivate bond election behavior by voters: community characteristics, bond characteristics, and election characteristics. Generally, the Bowers and Lee (2013) summary coincides with the themes arising within my literature review; however, several additional summarized factors should be added as populous themes in research to date: district characteristics, trust in district officials, and community involvement. Many of the categorical themes are interchangeable or at the very least overlap others to a certain extent. For example, clear communication from district officials is likely a key driver in developing trust in administration. Further, community involvement could fall within the Bowers and Lee (2013) summary of community characteristics. Nonetheless, as an updated review of

thematic existent drivers influencing successful bond elections as included in literature to date, the following sections are provided.

Bond Characteristics

Existing research suggests that individual and collective characteristics of the bond issue itself are motivators in determining election success. In fact, this summary of facets surrounding a bond election arises as the most popular theme. In simple terms, researchers (e.g., Beckham, et al., 2003; Bowers & Lee, 2013; Clemens, 2003; Faltys, 2006; Sonstelie et al., 1980) concluded that various bond characteristics played critical roles in shaping the fate of bond elections. Specifically, the cost of the issue and perceived effects on taxpayers were individual factors arising in many studies (e.g., Beckham, et al., 2003; Clemens, 2003; Faltys, 2006; Sonstelie, 1980). In a unique and era-appropriate study, Beckham et al. (2003) found that technology inclusion in the bond issue increased likelihood of bond passage while Bowers and Lee (2013) surmised that inclusion of building renovations was a valuable addition to the bond issue intent for sparking a “yes” vote.

Community Involvement

Community involvement ranks second to bond characteristics in terms of popularity within existing literature of themes associated with increasing likelihood of school bond election success. Community involvement, under this heading, takes many forms. Stockton (1996) and Kraus (2009) individually and collectively found that a defined and consistent public relations campaign was an essential driver of community support leading to increased chance of bond election success. A strong and informed

bond/strategic planning committee was also introduced as a key driver of the “yes” vote as introduced by Lambert (2012). Finally, any parent-involved activities, especially those campus-based, were a successful approach in educating voters of the needs associated with bond issues, thus promoting bond passage (Faltys, 2006; Stockton, 1996).

Election Characteristics

Factors, approaches, and techniques associated with the bond election itself, according to research to date, contribute to bond election success. Election characteristics, such as ballot positioning and access to early voting can be relevant to the passage or failure of a bond referendum. Bowers and Lee (2013) surmised that if the bond election proposition is part of a larger election with many other propositions, the higher towards the top of the ballot the bond proposition is located, the greater likelihood of bond passage. Further, if the other driving element of facility retrofit and is included on a bond election ballot, it should be positioned at the beginning (top) of the ballot to enhance the “yes” vote (Bowers & lee, 2013). Finally, according to Stockton (1996), early voting opportunities and location thereof as well as a creative and consistent bond theme affect voter decisions.

District Characteristics

Within studies to date, researchers suggest that individual district characteristics have an effect in determining the likelihood of school bond election passage. Particularly, Stockton (1996) found that population growth played a role in voters

approving an election. Generally, the concept was that voters appear to see the growth with their own eyes and connect what they see with a request for additional facilities. Some studies have determined that the district's enrollment in terms of size plays a role in predicting bond passage or failure. Beckham et al. (2003), Zimmer and Jones (2005), and Sielke (1998) found a constant relationship between district enrollment and likelihood of bond passage, while other studies, such as researchers Piele and Hall (1973) found district size as a non-significant factor. Finally, though relatively little focus has been given to the subject to date, Bowers, et al. (2010) concluded that overall district student socio-economic makeup influenced the likelihood of bond election success. They determined that an inverse relationship existed, in that the lower a district's free and reduced lunch counts were, the greater likelihood of bond passage, and vice versa. As the students generally are not eligible to vote, one may assume the likelihood of overall voter decision within a district was dictated based on the overall "wealth" level of its voters.

Community Characteristics

Similarly in line with district characteristics, community characteristics have been found to contribute to likelihood of bond passage. Having children in the school district enhances the "yes" vote result (Stockton, 1996). Piele and Hall (1973) deduced that voter education was also a heavy predictor of bond election success. Building from Piele and Hall's (1973) research, Bowers et al. (2010) found that the likelihood of the "yes" vote is inversely related to the percentage of the population who hold only a high school diploma. To clarify, the fewer numbers of registered voters who held "just" a

high school diploma, the higher likelihood of bond election success. This finding appears to suggest that the more well-educated the voting public, the greater chance of passing an election; however, other potentially important variables were not controlled for. Similar to findings associated with student demographics by Bowers et al. (2010), Clemens (2003) theorized that voter demographics play an integral role in dictating or promoting bond passage.

Trust in Administration

Finally, various specific factors pointing toward a theme of “trust in the administration” are evident in existing literature. At different levels, trust in the district increases the likelihood of a successful campaign. Stockton (1996) found that general trust in the district was a critical indicator, while Clemens (2003) focused on how a well run campaign can lead to community and voter trust. Faltys (2006) surmised that trust honed directly on administration swings the vote, while Kraus’s (2009) mixed-methods research magnified the imperative nature of unanimous school board support in driving community trust. Consistent, clear, collective, and unwavering communication by district officials to all outlets contributes to bond election success via promoting trust in the district. Stockton (1996), Kraus (2009) and Lambert (2012), even within different methodological approaches and eras of study, each concluded that crystal-clear communication is important to having voters support a school bond election. In the next section, focus on existing literature will shift to themes identified as factors contributing to unsuccessful bond elections.

Themes: Factors Contributing to Unsuccessful Bond Elections

Scant literature exists which focuses on key drivers contributing to unsuccessful bond elections, thus themes are difficult to come by. Generally, researchers agree that facets associated with failed bond elections are most often either failure to accomplish the factors associated with bond passage as defined in the previous section, or the inverse effect of these factors. Faltys (2006) conducted perhaps the most extensive analysis focusing on the “no” vote by reaching out to the same voters who first voted down an election, followed by election passage less than three months later. However, even Faltys (2006) concluded that, in general, failure to accomplish tasks to promote passage were the largest drivers of defeat. For instance, inability to gain the trust of the community, only having one proposition on the ballot, and too expansive a monetary effect on tax payers resulting from bond passage would, in essence, promote bond failure. Faltys (2006) did conclude one additional driver as a main, stand-alone initiator of the “no” vote: school officials’ failure to follow through with promises in previous elections. However, this could also fall within the category of failing to instill trust in the administration, so it doesn’t necessarily shed advanced light. Similarly, Sielke (1998) and Bowers et al. (2010) discussed the inverse relationship of students’ low socioeconomic makeup as a driver for unsuccessful elections. To clarify, Bowers et al. (2010) and Sielke (1998) found that as low socioeconomic student percentages increase, the chance of bond passage decreases. Yet again, this finding is essentially under the same umbrella (in the opposite direction) as discussion for drivers of bond success.

In one of the only purely qualitative approaches existing in research to date, Lambert (2012) concluded that three main drivers exist which promote bond election failure: formal opposition groups, failed communication, and lack of total board support. The influence of formal opposition groups introduced by Lambert (2012) was unique to other existing literature on the subject. Bowers, Metzger, and Millitello (2010) confirmed that the percentage of voters with no more than a high school diploma (as this percentage increases, likelihood of passage decreases), bond proposition location on the ballot, and voter turnout as primary indicators of a likely unsuccessful bond election. Kraus's (2009) mixed-methods approach introduced an interesting summary of concepts attributed to the "no" vote, finding that district officials involved in failed elections were generally less "in-touch" with the voters, and that all districts are unique. Kraus (2009) determined that most districts who had failed elections generally appeared to care as much and were confident in their election campaign efforts.

Summary and Drivers for Future Research

In summary, literature to date on the subject of facets associated with bond election success and failure does exist, though sparse, similar in methodology, outdated, and inconsistent in nature. The first section of the literature review provided a foundation for the imperatives bond elections can present for district officials, given the urgency for bond money deriving from facility needs. Secondly, discussion included drivers of facility needs in the form of student enrollment growth and extensive research showing the critical relationship of student achievement with various facility factors. Next, an analysis and synthesis was provided of popular individual studies in search of

similarities, contrasts, and gaps in research to date. Finally, a discussion of favored themes existing in research of each driver of election success and failure was provided.

Unquestionably, although valuable research has been performed, gaps exist within current literature, which allows for new research to add value to the field. First, with focus on research approach, almost no research exists which utilizes a qualitative lens seeking input from key district officials in an effort to allow them to tell their story. Additionally, scant specific focus is given to drivers of the unsuccessful school bond election. Finally, there is an absence of consistent, efficient thematic summary of drivers, with a need for updated research given today's climate. Fittingly, several of the gaps previously listed were introduced in the recommendations for future research sections of existing studies (Beckham & Maiden, 2003; Bowers et al., 2010; Clemens, 2003; Faltys, 2006; Lambert, 2012; Stockton, 1996), especially the need for a qualitative lens and focus on the drivers of "failed" elections.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Introduction

Total public elementary and secondary enrollment is projected to set new records every year from 2011 to 2020 (USDOE, 2012). Even more imperative from a facility perspective is the relationship of student achievement, teacher instruction, and overall staff morale with facility conditions (Anderson, 1999; Duyar, 2009; Earthman & Lemasters, 2009; Tanner, 2009). Given the critical need for new and updated facilities, dollars must be secured to meet these needs. Bond issues resulting from successful bond elections provide the primary source of funds for facility renovation and erection (Kaufman, 1994). I designed a qualitative research study which tackled the topic of factors associated with bond election passage and defeat in an effort to provide updated research with a new design. Specifically, the purpose of my study was two-fold: (a) to determine superintendent perceptions of critical facets related to successful school bond elections in Texas public school districts, and (b) to determine superintendent perceptions of critical facets related to unsuccessful school bond elections in Texas public school districts.

Research Design

For my study, I employed a qualitative research design driven by a case study methodology. Qualitative research is the study of a phenomenon or research topic in context. Phenomena tend to be exploratory in nature, as researchers examine topics that have not been investigated or need to be investigated from a new angle (Hays & Singh,

2012). Within the Hays and Singh (2012) definition, the use of case study attempted a new qualitative lens on the subject, providing a fresh angle of and for research on the topic of study. A case study design was selected as best suited to the intent of this study; its advantages included the intimate setting of data collection, data source selection, and efficiency. To clarify and using Yin's (1994) case study definition as a foundation, this is an inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context. The interview location served as the real life setting, while the true phenomenon of a school district bond election (critical facets of election drivers) was explored. Merriam (1988) described a qualitative case study as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit. A case study design is ideal for this study in order to gain new knowledge that would likely differ from other research conducted in this field (Stake, 1981).

Participants selected for this study included superintendents who were able to share their lived experiences. Within the case study scheme, the investigator was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and the mode of inquiry is inductive.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What do superintendents perceive as critical facets related to successful school bond elections in Texas public school districts?
2. What do superintendents perceive as critical facets related to unsuccessful school bond elections in Texas public school districts?

Internal and External Validity

Validating the study provided a challenge; however, several efforts undertook to increase internal and external validity and accuracy of the study. Creswell (2003) surmised several strategies often utilized to promote research study validity: triangulation, member-checking, using rich and thick description, clarifying researcher bias, presenting negative or discrepant information, spending prolonged time in the field, practicing peer debriefing, and utilizing an external auditor for review. I included several of Creswell's (2003) validity approaches as well as others most fitting, given the scope and limitations of the research.

Data Triangulation

Data triangulation is the use of a variety of data sources in a study (Patton, 1990). Triangulation occurred in this study via utilization of multiple data sources, including interviews, archival data, and documents.

Participant Feedback

Participant feedback was employed to determine accuracy of facts and interpretation thereof. Participant feedback was sought at two levels: (a) after interview transcription to seek confirmation of the accuracy of transcription, and (b) after initial completion of findings, to discuss general themes arising and confirm validity with participant intent.

Rich, Thick Description

Rich, thick description was afforded to convey the findings. This should propel readers to the setting and give the discussion a hint of shared experiences.

Selection of Participants

Creswell (2006) surmised that qualitative research is best served when participants are purposefully selected in an effort to assist the researcher with capturing the essence of the problem and answering the research question(s). Given the focus of this qualitatively driven study on attempting to attain perceptions of the key players in school bond elections, participant selection strategy included a semi-purposeful, multi-layered approach. I attempted a unique approach compared to existing research via seeking superintendents who have lived through unsuccessful and successful elections within the same school district. Particularly, I focused on the most recent three years (2013–2015) for superintendents who participated in failed elections and subsequently passed elections in the next election attempt within this timeframe. Document analysis for participant selection was accomplished by reviewing the Texas Comptroller's Financial Transparency (2015) web page to search for superintendents who meet the selection criteria above for a semi-purposeful selection.

After identifying those districts (population) that have held each an unsuccessful election followed by a fruitful bond election at the next attempt within the timeframe established, I then categorized the districts into (a) urban, (b) suburban, and (c) rural districts. My intent in doing so was to first make a distinction based on district makeup which promoted varying responses, and secondly to add depth and breadth to the research by providing for a comparison of results within the three well-established district designations. This effort afforded a fresh and unique approach to the field. I conducted a total of three interviews: (a) one superintendent from an urban district, (b)

one superintendent from a suburban district, and (c) one superintendent from a rural district. As Hayes and Singh (2012) suggested; “Sample size in qualitative inquiry depends largely on the degree to which the research purpose is met” (p. 172). Creswell (2006) posited that four to six interviews in a single study provides a copious amount of information to identify themes and patterns, thus a total of three quality interviews in my study, especially given superintendents’ lived experiences from a total of six elections, should provide significant data. A phone call served as the first communication attempt to secure interview participants, followed by participant consent and site authorization form completion. Participant selection was based on a first come, first selected basis to select the first superintendent from each of the three district designations of urban, suburban, and rural.

Instrumentation

Yin (2003) recommended six forms of data sources for use in a case study, including documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. For the purposes of this study and given the new qualitative lens on the subject focusing on lived experiences of the key players, I utilized semi-structured interviews as my primary data collection tool. The interview instrument is believed to be the most attractive route, given the need for an intimate setting to gather feedback from a prescribed set of data sources via district superintendents.

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. The issue is not whether observational data is more desirable, valid, or meaningful than self-reported data. The fact of the matter is that we cannot

observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit (Patton, 1990, p. 278).

Secondary data sources included archival records and documents. The Texas Education Agency Texas Academic Performance Reports (TEA TAPR, 2016) were reviewed to capture district specific data (demographic). Documents within the Texas Comptroller's (2015) webpage were also reviewed to gather bond election results for the 2013–2015 time frames.

Data Collection

Data collection included semi-structured interviews which lasted approximately two hours each. The interviews took place at a location of convenience for the participants. The interviews were conducted at the offices of the participants in an effort to promote comfort for the individuals and collect data in a naturalistic setting. Initially, the subjects were be allowed an open-ended platform to “tell his/her story” prior to consistent, prescribed questions. The standard and uniformly utilized interview questions were developed based on a combination of questions in existing research, themes

resulting from the literature review performed in my study, and critical factors associated with the intent of my study. Some additional questions did arise during the interviews.

Below is the foundation of interview questions for the ultimately selected participants:

1. What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other characteristics for the unsuccessful election?
2. What do you perceive to be the biggest contributors to the unsuccessful election?
3. Please describe your perceptions of the community and district climate surrounding the unsuccessful bond election?
4. Please explain your election strategies employed during the unsuccessful election campaign?
5. What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other bond/election characteristics for the successful election?
6. What do you perceive to be the biggest contributors to the successful election?
7. Please describe your perceptions of the community and district climate surrounding your successful election?
8. Please explain your election strategies employed during the successful election campaign?
9. Why do you feel the second attempt was successful and not the first?
10. How and how much do you feel today's political climate may have shaped your elections' outcomes?
11. What advice would you give other superintendents who are preparing to

conduct a bond election?

Additional data collection with the secondary data sources included reviewing the TEA TAPR report of each of the three districts and the state comptroller's webpage for bond election results. Altheide and Johnson's (1994) *analytic realism* further served as a guiding frame of data collection. While normally associated with an ethnographic study, the frame was the most fitting for the interviews within the case study method, given the all inclusive methods, exploratory nature of the research, and theme development strategy within data analysis. Analytic realism is founded on the view that the social world is an interpreted world. Analytic realism rejects the dichotomy of realism/idealism and other conceptual dualisms as being incompatible with the nature of lived experience and its interpretation (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). This frame, in short, is guided by a principal belief that it is "okay" for the researcher's and research subjects' lived experiences to "tell the story," which is congruent with the case study approach. For the purposes of this study, the data sources were semi-purposefully selected based on lived experiences; therefore, it was critically important to allow the real-life stories to be told and unfold within this study to capture critical themes. In an effort to strictly adhere to the guiding framework, the subjects were allowed to end the interviews with an open forum to give feedback. Electronic recording (hand-held audio recorder) of the interviews served as the specific collection tool. Field notes followed immediately after the interview in an attempt to capture summarized, immediate thoughts and potential themes as well as to seize the essence of the interview. Finally, the entire audio-recorded interviews were transcribed in preparation of data analysis.

Data Analysis

The research design for this study consisted of two qualitatively driven research questions: (a) what do superintendents perceive as critical facets related to successful school bond elections in Texas public school districts? and (b) what do superintendents perceive as critical facets related to unsuccessful school bond elections in Texas public school districts? The research design served as the primary driver of the selected data analysis technique and approach.

Stake (1995) discussed four major forms of data analysis with case study designs: (a) categorical aggregation, (b) direct interpretation, (c) pattern identification, and (d) naturalistic generalization. Additionally, Creswell (2006) surmised that researchers utilizing a case study approach should analyze the details and facts of the case via case description. For the purposes of my study, I utilized a combination, in a sequential scheme, of Stake's (1995) categorical aggregation, pattern identification, and naturalistic generalization. Within the first two levels; stage one included breaking down the data and beginning of categorization, stage two included pattern identification via taking the initial categories and further comparisons describing relationships between categories. Finally, core categories emerged to tell the central story of the data and allow for synthesis with existing research. The primary objective of the third and final step was to produce the critical themes for naturalistic generalization application (or perhaps theory introduction). This approach was believed to add the best value to the study, given the reflexive nature of the frame, which focuses on the lived experiences of the participants. Prior to the actual analysis via Stake's (1995) approach, a summary of

thematic responses from interviewees from each interview protocol was given. This was accomplished in an attempt to provide a foundation for the analysis by capturing critical themes.

An attempt to enhance validity and trustworthiness arose in the form of interview transcription review. To clarify, after interview transcription, the participants were allowed to review the transcript summary for validity and reliability. In simple terms, the participants were asked to verify the transcribed interview questions and responses for accuracy. Analysis of secondary data sources via documents included direct interpretation of existing data.

Summary

This study, entitled *Superintendent Perceptions of Critical Facets Related to Successful and Unsuccessful School Bond Elections in Texas Public School Districts*, focuses on the experiences of public school officials in identifying factors associated with school bond election success or failure.

The research questions were:

1. What do superintendents perceive as critical facets related to successful school bond elections in Texas public school districts?
2. What do superintendents perceive as critical facets related to unsuccessful school bond elections in Texas public school districts?

Utilizing a qualitative case study design, interviews with semi-purposefully selected superintendents were accomplished to capture the real-life points of view from professionals in the field. Upon completion of a reasonable number of semi-structured

interviews, data analysis was completed. Chapter IV provides the results of the qualitative study, followed by Chapter V, focusing on the summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This qualitative study investigated the perceptions of Texas public school district superintendents who conducted unsuccessful and successful school bond elections between 2013 and 2015. In a unique approach to the field, superintendents who participated in an unsuccessful election followed by a successful election at the next attempted referendum, all within the 2013 to 2015 years, were selected as the participant pool. Particularly, one superintendent meeting the criteria from an urban, suburban, and rural school district, respectively, was selected for study participation. The purpose of the study was to determine superintendent perceptions of influential factors driving election outcome, which may enhance the likelihood of referenda passage and limit the chances of bond election failure for other practicing superintendents and district officials.

According to the Texas Comptroller's Financial Transparency (2015) web page, a total of 423 school bond election referenda were held between 2013 and 2015 (see Appendix C). Of these 423 election propositions, 335 passed and 88 were unsuccessful. Of those that were unsuccessful, 35 districts attempted a second bond election within the specified timeframe. Of the 35 which attempted subsequent elections, 24 passed, and 11 failed. Based on these numbers and given the intent of study, this produced a participant pool of 24 districts/superintendents. For this study, a total of three participants were selected; one superintendent from an urban district, a superintendent from a suburban

district, and a superintendent from a rural district. The three superintendents were asked to answer the Interview Protocol questions in Appendix D. Superintendent responses were examined to determine trends and themes among the interview participants from this study as well as existing research on the subject. The superintendents were afforded an opportunity to elaborate on perceptions of drivers of election success and failure with additional focus as to why the election outcome was different within a relatively short timeframe within the same school district.

The interviews with the superintendents were held in December 2015, which afforded great insight, especially for those elections held in November. Lasting approximately one to two hours in length, each superintendent interview was conducted at the central office of the respective superintendent. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed in preparation of analysis. As the information within the interviews includes sensitive information, the identity of the participants in this study will remain confidential and anonymous.

Interview Results

The interview findings are discussed in this section, following a brief summary of the selected superintendent's district and bond election characteristics. The interview results are presented in the order in which they were conducted. In an effort to maintain superintendent anonymity, few specific details are included. The emerging primary themes are analyzed at length in Chapter V. The superintendent participants are referred to as "he" or "she" at random, for further efforts at confidentiality. The interview protocol structure was set up with the intention to first focus on the unsuccessful

election, followed by the same questions applied to the fruitful election, and finally to give general thoughts on the causes of different election outcomes within the same district and community.

Superintendent #1

The first interview conducted was with a superintendent of a suburban Texas public school district. With a total student enrollment of between five thousand and ten thousand students, the district has seen an increase in student enrollment of approximately 1 % over the past three years combined with a current low socioeconomic makeup well below state average (TAPR, 2016). The community of which the district serves includes 84% White, 21.2% with a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and a median household income of \$52,714.

The superintendent participated in first an unsuccessful bond election followed by a successful election in the next attempt. The interview provided new components to research on the subject while also confirming and contradicting existing research. Each question asked of the interview participant alongside his/her perceived referendum process is discussed. The interview protocol was precisely followed; however, some additional questions did arise during the interview, primarily to confirm understanding and expound on the responses for clarity.

The first question posed to this superintendent was, "What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other bond/election characteristics?" The superintendent mentioned that the bond was to primarily fund new construction but also included some renovation (due to aging infrastructure) as well as security and technology upgrades. The

superintendent stated, “The new construction was primarily to facilitate fairly significant student enrollment growth which included moving some of the student population around.” He went on to add that the anticipated effect on the tax rate was going to be substantial due to poor selection of financing bonds from previous administration.

When asked about what the superintendent perceived as the biggest contributor to the unsuccessful election, the superintendent touched on several reasons. He mentioned that the district’s “scar” was still fresh from the legislature reducing funds to school district in 2011. More than one parent expressed to the superintendent support for the district and superintendent, but any attempt to raise the tax rate, given the economic conditions, would be met with a “no” vote (even if that meant more portable buildings). Further, the community itself was traditionally conservative. He stated that he learned a lot about the community during this election, which resulted in a nearly two-to-one defeat.

The third question was, “Please describe your perceptions of the community and district climate surrounding the unsuccessful bond election.” The superintendent mentioned the recession and economic conditions as a key contributor, particularly given that the bond election would cause an increase in the property tax rate. Other recent elections from the county and city had all met defeat, even those with very minimal potential impact on the tax rate. He went on to state that the district had given dozens of presentations and significant overall effort to try to promote community involvement while getting out the information about the bond. The superintendent mentioned, “So, the timing was difficult, but other negatives which quickly arose with tremendous force

were political, creating the formation of very vocal and well organized opposition groups.” There was a general sense of anti-government/spending from groups even from other areas of the state. Generally, he suggested that the climate was consistent with the norm across the state at that time. When prompted to discuss further the vocal opposition groups, the superintendent stated,

It was absolutely a factor. It didn’t matter if what they said was truth, truth in part, or bold-face lies. They were willing to put it out there and push it out to the community, so that’s what the community heard. It got real ugly at times, with groups shouting at each other in terms of those that were pro-bond and anti-bond. Some of this happened on election day itself and I had never seen anything like it. Finally, I think it was simply tough economic times for a lot of folks, and we are in a very, very, very conservative community.

He mentioned that the bond election really wasn’t that close, given a nearly two-to-one defeat. Seeking additional depth on the superintendent’s perceptions as to why the first election was unsuccessful, he was prompted to elaborate on the subject. He stated that several of his board members held a belief that the bond election success was as simple as telling the community what the district needs were, and they would then go out and vote yes. The superintendent, however, stated that he realized that there was more to the story than the suggested, fantasy world–like setting. He mentioned that prior district financial dealings and decisions were not received well by the community, and it created an undertone of negativity. Prior to his arrival at the district, officials elected to utilize a significant portion of the district’s financial reserves on athletic-related needs. These

efforts not only set the district's financial stability back several years but also stained community perception towards the district. The superintendent stated, "You know, the thing we heard over and over again was that we already had a 'Taj Mahal' (a very visible and extravagant campus building resulting from a previous bond election), so why would voters want to approve an increase in tax rate for something similar?" He then circled back around to a belief that the economy was likely a primary motivator of bond election demise as well as the extremely vocal opposition groups. However, he confirmed once again the existence of a negative perception about the district and district financial dealings from previous efforts. The superintendent stated, "Some folks believed or even stated that they simply didn't believe the school district had been spending their tax dollars as prudently as they should be." He then summarized that there were simply some missteps that led to the lack of success on the bond election.

At this point, the participant was prompted by a secondary question to the prescribed protocol based on his last response when asked if he thought the "missteps" led to a lack of trust in district officials. He quipped,

I think that's likely, particularly with anything that had to do with athletics. Some were not just like, '[not] no, but hell, no' to any bond election which included anything that had to do with athletics, regardless of academic needs.

Based on this, further inquiry was made as to whether the district had considered creating separate propositions for academics and athletics. He suggested that they (he and his board) had a conversation about this, but the decision was made to have it all lumped into one proposition. The belief was that "by separating items into separate

propositions, we're saying that not all of the items are essential and we might just pass one but not the others.”

Getting back to the interview protocol; when questioned as to the election strategies employed during the unsuccessful election, the superintendent responded that it was a very traditional election with few deviations from the norm. He mentioned that the district looked towards their long standing architect for guidance on the election in terms of building renderings and then administration would make presentations with the information. He went on to state, “Most of the information came from the architectural firm and the election was run like an election would have been run 15–20 years ago.” He suggested that the approach perhaps should have been updated or adjusted based the recession of the times, which may have helped voters rationalize the bond election. The election strategy was very simple: “Here it is, here’s how much it costs, now go vote for it.”

The fifth interview question transitioned to the successful election campaign by beginning with the same questions yielded in questions one through four, but slightly rephrased as, “What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other bond/election characteristics for the successful election?” The superintendent began his response by touching on a strategic change: separating propositions; one for deferred maintenance items (including some technology); a second proposition for safety and security items; and finally the third proposition for new construction of school buildings to respond to student population growth. Given the responses to the first round of questions, he was asked about any inclusion of athletic-related items. The superintendent responded,

“There were really two athletic-related items that were separated based on intent within two (of the three) propositions.” He went on to confirm that a gym renovation was included in the renovation or deferred maintenance proposition, while new athletic facilities would be included with the new construction proposition.

When prompted to provide the superintendent’s perception of the biggest contributors to the successful bond election campaign, the superintendent provided significant insight. He responded that first and foremost, a significant factor in the successful campaign was that the district changed its architectural firm. He suggested that the district had a longstanding relationship with an architect, and in retrospect perhaps the exiting architect did not provide as much insight as one could or should have during the unsuccessful campaign. Much effort was expended in selecting a new, qualified architect via presentations, numerous reference checks, etc. The RFQ focused on seeking input from proposers in terms of mechanisms the architects would use to assist with bond election passage. The superintendent stated, “It really didn’t matter how awesome the facilities of the architects looked if we couldn’t get the bond passed in the first place.” He then mentioned that the economy had rebounded, if only slightly, since the unsuccessful campaign, but he whole-heartedly believed one of the biggest contributors to the success of this election was the selection of a new architect with an accomplished background of assisting districts with bond election passage. Particularly, the architect firm provided what would become a “bond strategist” to assist the district with bond election passage.

He went on to discuss other differences in this campaign versus the unsuccessful election. The successful campaign had more community involvement via a Facilities Assessment Committee (FAC). This FAC spent six months or more involved in studying district needs and making recommendations. Also in this election, the bond strategist proposed and the district utilized a climate survey intended to gauge the general needs of the community and its willingness to take on debt per project type. The first thing landed on was a dollar amount range which indicated a reasonable amount slightly lower than the previously failed referendum. The superintendent stated, “In all, the Board gleaned very useful information from the live telephone survey conducted, and the overall approach in this election was much more scientific than the previous.” Finally, the survey allowed for a ranking of items that would garner support; athletics was the lowest rated area of acceptable expense. He suggested that the phone calls afforded a scientific approach to determine what would pass and what should be included in the bond proposition.

Looping back to the interview protocol questions, question number seven asked the participant to provide his perception of the community and district climate surrounding the successful election. The climate was much better the second time, according to the superintendent. He suggested that while there were folks combing the community, spreading the “vote no” mantra during the first election, they really didn’t see any of that during the successful election.

When asked about election strategies surrounding the successful campaign, the superintendent responded that generally speaking, the election strategies had not

changed in terms of polling locations, etc. but he did re-affirm the changes in ballot wording as well as the use of a bond strategist.

Getting to the meat of the interview questions, I asked for the superintendent to plainly and simply state his perception as to why the first bond election was unsuccessful while the second one was successful. The superintendent surmised,

I think one of the big reasons we won was [that] the environment this time was much different. We didn't get the outside interference, and we involved a lot more people on the front end this time. This allowed for more conversation and understanding as to what the community wanted and the district needed.

The next question prompted the superintendent to give his thoughts on how the political climate may have shaped the election outcome. He mentioned that there was significant turnover in his board. The board president changed from one election to the next. Whereas the first unsuccessful campaign setting included a long-time board member well established in the community, that person was defeated by a relative newcomer to the community. There were also several other board member changes during that time.

Finally, in an effort for a general addition to the field of research, the participant was asked to offer "any advice for other superintendents who are preparing to conduct a bond election." The superintendent stated,

Well, I'm sure it depends in part on the size or location of the district but I will say for us it was extremely important to lean on our bond strategist, who does this for a living. Think about it; this is how they make their living and their

expertise was critical for us and I expect it would be very helpful in any district but especially those who do not have bond elections every year or so. They do hundreds of these elections throughout their careers. For my Board, I think it was really important to get a grasp on what our community would tolerate as well as being very inclusive and transparent.

Superintendent #2

The second interview conducted was with the superintendent of an urban Texas public school district. This large urban district has had a student enrollment decline of about 3 % over the last three school years with a 2015 student population exceeding forty thousand and a low SES population well above state averages (TAPR, 2016). The community makeup of which the district serves includes 72% Hispanic population, 24.6% with a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and a median household income of \$33,986.

The interview provided great insight for the study, confirming trends arising in the other interviews. Each question asked of the interview participant is discussed alongside his perceived referendum process. The interview protocol was consistently followed; however, some additional questions did arise during the interview, primarily to confirm understanding and seek clarity.

The first question posed to this superintendent was, "What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other bond/election characteristics?" The superintendent took the opportunity to immediately delve deep into the election and even the subsequent successful campaign. He meticulously described the process leading up to the election,

primarily based on an external building needs assessment which yielded an average age of school buildings of approximately twenty-five years. The district was in a fairly unique situation, given a relatively steady decline in student enrollment even though the district was an “open enrollment” district. The superintendent suggested that hopes for the bond election were to stop declining enrollment and perhaps to attract more students with the prospective new facilities. He mentioned that the district had utilized normal practices of performing a professional demographic study and facility assessment as well as trips to facilities with the “facility group.” The superintendent further discussed that a projects needs list recommended by the facility committee, made up of community members, was scaled down by the board to what was believed to be a reasonable level, resulting in a total bond election with a single proposition of several hundred millions of dollars primarily for renovation needs and new facilities (to respond to outdated facilities some of which were not salvageable (particularly if other options existed)). The anticipated affect on the tax was fairly substantial, at easily more than ten cents.

When asked about what the superintendent perceived as the biggest contributor to the unsuccessful election, the superintendent touched on several reasons, mentioning that the findings were defined in part as a result of a survey performed after the unsuccessful campaign. He mentioned that most district officials were feeling pretty good about the election’s likelihood of success going into the final stages. He further stated that officials attributed many potential reasons for the narrowly negative outcome (the issue failed by less than 3 %), including another local entity holding an election at

the same time. The survey, performed by an external group popular within the state, revealed scientific conclusions as to why the election failed. The superintendent stated,

What we found out was that most people who voted “no” did so because they simply did not have enough information. They did not realize we had such an attractive local homestead exemption, which the survey responses suggested would have changed their vote. We also found that a very large portion of the voter turnout was over sixty-five and only very small representations of voters who are most likely the age to currently have students in the district.

The third question was, “Please describe your perceptions of the community and district climate surrounding the unsuccessful bond election?” The superintendent mentioned that generally the pulse of the community and district seemed favorable, with no vocal opposition groups or the like. When prompted as to the election strategies employed during the unsuccessful election, the participant responded that normal approaches were utilized with no real unique efforts on the part of the district.

The fifth interview question transitioned to the successful election campaign by beginning the same questions yielded in questions one through four, restated as, “What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other bond/election characteristics for the successful election?” The superintendent surmised that the general intent of the bond election really did not change via focus on facility renovations and construction intended to respond to an aging set of campuses. The bond amount decreased by just under 5 %, yet the entire package was once again in the form of a single proposition.

When prompted to state the superintendent's perception of the biggest contributors to the successful bond election campaign, the superintendent provided significant insight. He mentioned that the survey performed immediately after the failed election was utilized as a springboard and guide for the subsequent successful campaign. He confirmed, "It was clear that we needed to change our strategy and go back out quickly." The district then proceeded to hire a bond strategist, absent in the first election, who was an expert working with the architectural firm servicing the district. The superintendent felt that this approach was most fitting, as the strategist's job was precisely to assist districts with bond passage. The strategist assisted the district with planning and characteristics of group presentations, creating a survey to get a read on voter needs and ranges of reasonableness, etc. Particularly he mentioned that an appropriate survey tool via a phone application allowed district officials to define parameters of yes voters, no voters, and those who were uncertain. Officials made it a priority to retain the yes vote, to swing the uncertain voters in a positive direction, and at least attempt to sway the no voters. A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis was performed and assisted with understanding district and community needs. Also, there was much more stakeholder involvement with the successful campaign versus the first attempt, with a more well defined and stronger facility advisory committee (FAC) which also intentionally included naysayers or "no" voters from the first election. Further, teacher groups were far more involved in general and specifically with the FAC, as were the principals.

Question seven asked the participant to provide her perception of the community and district climate surrounding the successful election. He yet again confirmed that the climate didn't generally change; however, there was greater involvement and participation. She mentioned that the district climate was positive in both elections.

When asked about election strategies surrounding the successful campaign, the superintendent responded that election strategies had not generally adjusted since the first election but that the community simply had more information on this attempt as opposed to the first.

The superintendent was then asked to afford his perception as to why the first bond election was unsuccessful, while the second one was successful. He affirmed yet again that thanks in large part to the guidance of a bond strategist, the district better informed the voters about the needs of the district and the current tax breaks for the district, and focused on voters within the age range to likely have children in the district. The superintendent quipped,

The survey was one of the biggest features, given it suggested that we were going to be ok if we went back out for a second election. I truly think it was especially beneficial for our school board, given they are elected officials and there could have been a rising hint of negativity given the failed election, however, there would have been a no-doubt decrease in district morale had we attempted and failed a second election in such a quick time frame. It took courage to go back out so quickly, but we knew that the needs of the district remained and we needed to do what was best for our students.

The last question specifically tied to both elections prompted the superintendent to give insight towards just how much he felt today's political climate may have shaped one or both of the election outcomes. The superintendent mentioned that there wasn't anything negative or election wavering, to her knowledge. The only item which did arise which positively impacted the second election was the state proposition (which was held on the same election) which would have further benefitted tax payers, given an increase in the state homestead exemption from \$15,000 to \$25,000. This was discussed with the community and it did ultimately pass, as well.

Finally, in an effort for a general addition to the field of research, the participant was requested to offer "any advice for other superintendents who are preparing to conduct a bond election." The superintendent responded that it is critically important to get information out. Further he stated,

Don't be afraid to hire a strategist. That was something that was entirely new to our district and even surrounding districts. It was well worth it. They are used to running elections, as it is what they do for a living. They know how to read voters via surveys and other tools. The survey gave us the courage to go back out a second time. Finally, you must build trust in your community with district officials and administration. We interviewed with everyone who asked (presented to all of those who requested). Particularly, we looked forward to getting in front of the naysayers to give them responses to their questions, set them at ease, and hope to give them sufficient information to trigger a yes vote.

Superintendent #3

The third interview conducted included the superintendent of a rural Texas public school district. With a student population decline of approximately 5 % over the last three school years, this rural district houses less than one thousand students while maintaining a low socioeconomic makeup easily above state averages (TAPR, 2016). The overall community demographics within the district's boundaries include 93.2% White, 13.6% of the population with a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and a median household income of \$29,710.

Several interesting items arose in the interview which would each add new components to research on the subject while also confirming and contradicting existing research. Each question asked of the interview participant alongside his perceived referendum process is discussed. The interview protocol was precisely followed, however, some additional questions did arise during the interview, primarily to confirm understanding and expound on the responses for clarity.

The first question posed to this superintendent was, "What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other bond/election characteristics?" The superintendent mentioned that the bond was packaged within a single proposition and primarily included campus renovations/additions (no new construction). The renovations and additions were to upgrade elementary and secondary campuses, based on program and general facility needs. According to the superintendent, one of the existing secondary campuses failed to adequately meet the needs of the students. To make matters worse, the facility was not very old, resulting from bond proceeds of another past bond election.

Also, the bond did include some athletic considerations with additional facilities/fields to accommodate expansive numbers of student athletic participation and general absence of sufficient space for sports to take place. In terms of the potential effect on the tax rate of the bond election, he stated, “The increase was going to cost about twenty-five cents.” This increase would represent a substantially larger tax bill for taxpayers via an increase of approximately 25% from the previous tax year, or an increase of roughly \$250 a year for a home valued at \$100,000.

Prior to delving into the next prescribed interview protocol question, the superintendent afforded a brief history of bond elections for the district. He mentioned that it took multiple attempts to finally get voter support to build the existing secondary facility, and even though it did finally pass, the election was extremely close. The facility and bond elections surrounding the facility had been a point of contention within the community, with vocal discussions in local restaurants, and shops. In the superintendent’s opinion, the result of the previously passed election resulting in the erection of the facility was “a fiasco.” He mentioned that the facility not only failed to meet the needs of the secondary-aged students housed in the facility, it also failed to adhere to the original scope of work/architectural plans presented to the public at the previous election. The reality of the situation had left a bitter taste in the mouths of many community members and introduced a challenging setting for the current election.

Feeding off of the responses about the community climate, the superintendent was prompted to expound on what he perceived as the biggest contributor to the unsuccessful election. He mentioned that it was a combination of poor promotion,

politics, and absence of board cohesion. The superintendent elaborated that his board, in particular some specific board members, basically told him, “This is the board’s election. We will make the decisions.” Thus, the board took absolute control, often leaving the superintendent out of the loop. “It was a nightmare at public presentations, as the Board couldn’t answer questions when posed, and there was simply general disarray.” Several of the board members believed that if the election flew under the radar, so to speak, and didn’t draw a lot of attention, it would simply pass. The superintendent even suggested that the board consider splitting propositions, given his concern that potential negativity of many in the community towards athletics would bring down the overall vote and cause the failure of the academic components of the bond election. Straying from superintendent recommendation, the board elected to lump everything into one proposition. The superintendent suggested that the board felt, “No, if they’ll vote for any or the other, they will vote for all.”

The third question was, “Please describe your perceptions of the community and district climate surrounding the unsuccessful bond election?” The superintendent mentioned that much of the community perception was uncertainty as to what the school would actually spend the bond money on. He recalled the previous election failures, and when the one issue did pass, the resulting facility was incongruent with what was presented to the community. In short, the community appeared to have an absence of trust towards district officials, based on previous district and administrative actions. He mentioned that the board should have perhaps listened to the public input with more

consideration. Another large contributor to the unsuccessful election was the district's large contingency of over-sixty-five (years of age) voters. The superintendent said,

It didn't matter what was said to the group in public. We could explain how over-65 values are frozen and thus an increase in tax rate resulting from the bond election would not cause their taxes to go up. It didn't matter how much we tried to get them to understand that the students of this district had needs which needed to be met. They either wouldn't listen or simply didn't believe. They would say even if it doesn't increase the taxes I have to pay it does increase the taxes on the home which would affect the potential sale of my property. The over-65 voters played a large role in this election outcome.

While no well-organized, vocal opposition groups were present during the election, there was certainly a "negative undertone." Finally, he restated that including all of the components within a single proposition promoted a likely negative election outcome.

When prompted as to the election strategies employed during the unsuccessful election, the participant responded that there were no special or unique election strategies employed. Polling was held at traditional locations, forums were held to discuss the bond and district needs.

The fifth interview question transitioned to the successful election campaign by asking the same questions yielded in questions one through four, but phrased as, "What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other bond/election characteristics for the successful election?"

The superintendent summarized that nearly all of the characteristics were exactly the same as the first unsuccessful election in terms of the amount of the bond and projects to be performed. The only deviation from the first election was to create separate propositions for academics and athletics. He mentioned that the first election discussion led them to believe that the voters “wanted a choice” within their voting in terms of selecting instructional and athletic items separately. The result was a successful academic/instructional-heavy proposition and an unsuccessful athletically focused proposition.

Given his response to the previous question and the adjusted approach to separating propositions versus the failed election, the superintendent was asked just how he was able to get the board to change their mindset. He mentioned that the board president seated during the failed election had been voted off the board, and there was at least one other new board member since that time. The fact that there were new board members and lessons learned from the failed election allowed them to take a different approach with the propositions and particularly to separate athletics from academics. The superintendent went on to say that the new board president discussed the previously failed election and the approaching election during superintendent evaluations. The board made it clear that passage of the subsequent election would weigh heavily on the following year’s evaluation, and as such they were now giving the superintendent full control. He recalled that the previous election processes were in large part performed by the board which at times even disregarded his recommendations, while this time it was “his show.” Also, for this election, he seemingly had all trustees on-board. Whereas the

first election included at least one board member who spoke negatively about the bond, the full, seven-member board was genuinely behind him and the bond election itself. The importance of a unified board as it relates to bond election success was also confirmed in Kraus' (2009) study.

When prompted to state his perception of the biggest contributors of the successful bond election campaign, the superintendent provided significant insight. He mentioned that separating the propositions loomed large in allowing folks to vote for the instructional items yet have a choice to vote against the athletic items if they so chose. Further, the participant provided substantial discussion about facets promoting election success, stating,

I tried not to make it the board's election but to make it the community and the kids' election. The entire approach was student-centered. We had our drama teacher put together a video featuring kids. It was sort of a good guy/bad guy approach where we discussed bad information and good information and we blasted the video out on our webpage and every chance we got. Our community campaign was much better this time. I went out and presented to local Chambers of Commerce, City Council, and even focused on locations where I knew there was a core of non-believers. I knew I was not going to change all of their minds, but I wanted to give them an opportunity to fire that pistol at me and answer their concerns with facts, which sometimes didn't happen in the first campaign. So, that helped.

He went on to discuss how the district was heavily populated with some

older-aged residents, the “over-65 folks,” and this presented a difficult challenge for an election which would increase the tax rate (even though their taxes were “frozen”). He mentioned that they did all of the work themselves in terms of promoting the bond by creating brochures, flyers, and the like. Another contribution to success, in his view, was simply giving out more information to the voting public. One example included a pre-detail architectural rendering of the new and updated facilities as well as a fly-around feature which allowed the community to take a virtual tour of what the new/updated facilities would look like. He quipped, “There was nothing where someone could say you are not getting out enough or the right information.”

Question seven asked the participant to provide his perception of the community and district climate surrounding the successful election. He mentioned that first, the community appreciated that the propositions were split, thereby giving voters a choice. So, the climate was better and the superintendent firmly believed that by following through with promises made during this election it would create the ability to get the athletic and other needs accomplished in future elections.

When asked about election strategies surrounding the successful campaign, the superintendent responded that no unique approaches were attempted, and exactly the same characteristics were accomplished as with the failed election.

Getting to the heart of the interview questions, the superintendent was asked to give his perception as to why the first bond election was unsuccessful while the second one was successful. The participant circled back to items previously discussed, including the fact that the board gave him control, separate propositions were afforded, more and

better information was given to the public, and stakeholder buy-in followed. He hinted that he wished the first election would have been handled differently, but given the negative tone associated with the election even prior to that one, which led to distrust in previous administration; the outcome may have been inevitable.

The last question specifically tied to both elections prompted the superintendent to give insight towards just how much he felt today's political climate may have shaped one or both of the election outcomes. He quickly responded, "I think the economy has an effect on any and all elections here." He mentioned the very high population of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch prices and fixed-income families. He transitioned to the political climate, stating that the district was fiscally sound, students academically outperformed peer districts in the area, and that the feel is that the district provides a good education. Finally, the participant mentioned that in recent years the district was able to enhance financial reserves as a result of conservative budget building efforts related to student enrollment projections and tax revenue collection estimates. The board may consider using some of the reserve funds to tackle athletic needs which were not able to be met as a result of the unsuccessful athletic-heavy proposition.

Finally, in an effort for a general addition to the field of research, the superintendent was asked to give "any advice for other superintendents who are preparing to conduct a bond election." The superintendent openly stated,

I think the first thing you have to remember is it begins and ends with the cornerstone; you must remember it is their kids, it is their district, and it is their money. If you ever lose sight of that, you'll never get enough trust in the

community to do things you need them to do. The district belongs to the community and not vice versa.

Data Analysis

This section provides analysis of the data, focusing on themes arising in the interview responses. This section also provides a foundation for Chapter V's conclusions and recommendations. The research design for my study consisted of two qualitatively driven research questions: (a) What do superintendents perceive as critical facets related to successful school bond elections in Texas public school districts? and (b) What do superintendents perceive as critical facets related to unsuccessful school bond elections in Texas public school districts? In an effort to answer the primary questions associated with the study, an interview protocol, intended to supply sufficient response for analysis, was consistently utilized during superintendent interviews. The interview questions are listed below.

1. What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other characteristics for the unsuccessful election?
2. What do you perceive to be the biggest contributors to the unsuccessful election?
3. Please describe your perceptions of the community and district climate surrounding the unsuccessful bond election?
4. Please explain your election strategies for the unsuccessful election.
5. What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other characteristics for the successful election?

6. What do you perceive to be the biggest contributors to the successful election?
7. Please describe your perceptions of the community and district climate surrounding your successful election?
8. Please explain your election strategies for the successful election.
9. Why do you feel the second attempt was successful and not the first?
10. How and how much do you feel today's political climate shaped your election outcomes?
11. What advice would you give other superintendents who are preparing to conduct a bond election?

While the previous section focused on individual interview responses by protocol question, this section includes discussion of themes arising (by interview protocol question) for synthesis and exploration of participant responses as well as to set a foundation for further analysis.

Interview Protocol Question #1

What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other characteristics for the unsuccessful election? All three superintendents responded that their respective unsuccessful campaigns consisted of one sole bond proposition as well as inclusion of renovations of existing facilities. The needs for renovations were consistently applied based on the existence of outdated facilities. Somewhat unique to the group, the rural district superintendent cited the existence of a secondary facility which generally failed to meet even the basic needs in terms of science labs, etc. While each superintendent

included renovations, two of the three also approached new construction items in terms of additional facilities, with the rural district as the only participant to not include completely new erection of facilities (he did include some additions, but for the purposes of this assessment those are lumped under renovations). In addition to general new facility and renovation needs, the urban school superintendent mentioned inclusion of technology and security items. Each of the three elections did include athletic-related items, ranging from new gyms to updated fields and the like. All three of the superintendents responded that the potential effect on the district's tax as a result of the bond election, were it to pass, would be "substantial," easily exceeding an additional ten cents on the debt service (I & S) tax rate. The urban district superintendent further offered that one of the reasons for significant effect on the tax rate was poor selection of bond financing by previous administration.

Interview Protocol Question #2

What do you perceive to be the biggest contributors to the unsuccessful election? Given the extremely open-ended nature of this question, there were a variety of responses from the participants. As the previous subsection addressed the specific interview responses, I have attempted to focus on general themes, consistencies, and outliers for discussion. More than one superintendent pointed out that his/her ability to truly assess why the election was unsuccessful didn't become clear until after the subsequently successful election was accomplished (in order to compare the two). A unanimous reason cited as a contributor to the lack of election success was that the voting public was simply uninformed. All three participants stated that he/she felt that

poor promotion of the bond in terms of getting out to the voters why the bond was needed, cost of the bond, etc., contributed to the unsuccessful campaign. Another consistent theme highlighted by the rural and suburban superintendents was the apparent lack of trust in district officials, stemming from past questionable district financial dealings (looked upon harshly by the public) and perceived failure to accomplish “promises” from past bond elections. The rural superintendent felt strongly and even agreed to an extent with the public that previous administrations had failed to accomplish items from previous bond elections. The mistrust in district officials led to the assumption that the public was either being misled yet again or that at very least not enough information was yielded for the public to make an informed voting decision. All three interviewees also afforded responses about the lack of “knowing our voters.” Two superintendents mentioned that more work should have been accomplished to get to know the needs of the voters and how much they were willing to spend. Also, both the urban and rural superintendent spoke to the failure to recognize and approach the extremely large contingent of over-65 (years of age) voters, which in large part helped sway the elections in a negative direction. The rural and suburban superintendents agreed that economic conditions played a role in determining election outcome. The suburban district superintendent cited the legislative cuts from two years prior as still a “fresh scar” affecting the election within a very conservative community. Further, community response suggested that any action which would lead to an increase in the tax rate would be met with near-certain scrutiny. The suburban and rural district superintendents both also congruently confirmed that board/superintendent cohesion, or

lack thereof, assisted with the negative outcome. Particularly, in two instances, the board president essentially took over the election, failing to at times adhere to superintendent recommendations and believing that an “all we have to do is put it out to the voters” approach would result in a successful election. Finally, the suburban and rural district superintendents, who each had specific athletic-related items included in their bonds, agreed that failure to give voters a choice led to election demise. In short, they collectively believed that if the athletic items were separated from the instructional items, it may have yielded at least a positive outcome for the larger, more critical academic needs.

Interview Protocol Question #3

Please describe your perceptions of the community and district climate surrounding the unsuccessful bond election. This question/statement yielded relatively little response from the urban district superintendent, but the other two did afford some elaboration. The urban district superintendent generally felt that the community and district pulse was “favorable,” while the suburban and rural district superintendents agreed that a negative undertone existed. As previously discussed in a prior question, superintendents one and three were dealing with a voting public which had mistrust in district officials. Superintendent one elaborated on the previously discussed point of contention with the public over financial dealings, based on the district’s decision to use a healthy portion of district financial reserves for an athletic facility erection. Though accomplished several years prior, the decision to deplete fund balance and circumvent the ability of voters to approve or disapprove the measure, the negative aroma was still

very alive in the community, particularly with any purchase that included a hint of athletic items. Superintendent three brought up yet again that the failure of the previous administration to accomplish items previously “promised” from earlier elections, creating a negative feeling in the community. Finally, only one of the three superintendents mentioned that the existence of a vocal, well-organized, and informed opposition group helped shape the election in a negative frame.

Interview Protocol Question #4

Please explain your election strategies for the unsuccessful election. Except for leaning on the architect for architectural renderings and general advice by the urban district superintendent, the trio collectively accomplished no special or unique election strategies. Each confirmed that traditional polling locations were utilized via joint municipal elections.

Interview Protocol Question #5

What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other characteristics for the successful election? Transitioning the questions to the subsequent, successful bond elections for the three superintendents, the following summary of themes provides for interesting results. Two of the three superintendents did adapt their approach in this election in terms of creating more than one proposition for voters to consider. The rural and suburban district participants each created three separate propositions for this successful election, while each only had one proposition in the first, unsuccessful campaign. In both cases, they separated athletic-related items from the academic needs, and the suburban district also created a third proposition focused on technology and

security. The urban district maintained one and only one proposition. In terms of changes in amount versus the prior election, the responses provide for a mixed bag of results. The urban district reduced the size of the bond by more than 35 %, while the urban district reduced the bond by about 5 %. Finally, the rural district superintendent increased his bond amount by nearly 10 %.

Interview Protocol Question #6

What do you perceive to be the biggest contributors to the successful election? Similar to interview protocol question number two, which posed the same request for the unsuccessful election, the respondents provided tremendous insight to this question. In terms of consistent themes arising, each superintendent touched on the fact that more effort was afforded to get to better know their public (than with the first unsuccessful election). This meant attempting to understand the community needs, willingness to spend, items to steer clear from, etc. Each of the participants cited the fact that surveys were utilized in this election (none were used in the failed elections by any of the three) to get voter feedback. Each also utilized his/her architects in a greater fashion in this campaign as opposed to the first election. Specifically, each hired a bond strategist tied to the architectural firm who assisted with the entire election process from beginning to end. The collective thoughts of the respondents noted the fact that bond strategists “do this for a living.” The tactics afforded by the strategist were proven to increase the likelihood of bond passage in the collective opinion of the three superintendents. All three participants also agreed that this campaign included more community involvement, particularly focused on attaining greater stakeholder buy-in. Committees were formed

and more information was received and dispersed. More information included delving into more in-depth analyses of building status, growth projections, effect on the tax rate, etc. Two of the three superintendents who adjusted the bond ballot by adding separate propositions each mentioned that giving their voters the ability to vote on more than one option featured strongly in determining the outcome. Particularly the ability to separate athletics from the instructionally related proposition had significant meaning with the public and voter decision. In short, voters wanted to feel that they did not have to vote for athletics; they preferred options. Each believed that by getting out more information, increasing stakeholder involvement, and giving voters options, the community felt that the administration was “shooting straight” with what was going on. Ultimately, the trio of superintendents believed these efforts promoted a greater trust in administration, which helped swing the vote. The suburban district superintendent mentioned that he believed the recent economic rebound (of the state/country/etc) played a role in the bond election outcome.

Interview Protocol Question #7

Please describe your perceptions of the community and district climate surrounding your successful election. This question yielded fairly concise responses. Two of the superintendents believed the climate was significantly more positive. The suburban district superintendent stated that no vocal opposition groups were apparent in this campaign, and the rural district superintendent mentioned that separating propositions (removing athletics) created a much better community climate. The urban district superintendent suggested that very little change in district and community

climate had arisen since the previous failed election; however, there was more stakeholder involvement.

Interview Protocol Question #8

Please explain your election strategies for the successful election. Each of the superintendents mentioned that generally, no adjustments were made for this election in terms of election strategies versus the previous campaign. The suburban district recalled that hiring a bond strategist and changing the proposition approach loomed large in determining election outcome, while the urban superintendent reaffirmed that greater community involvement played a significant role.

Interview Protocol Question #9

Why do you feel the second attempt was successful and not the first? While this question had presumably been discussed, given previous questions addressing contributors to election success for both elections, the participants offered fruitful responses. All three of the participants restated that three items contributed heavily to the outcome: more and better information was dispersed; there was a better understanding of community needs (to better know their public); and hiring a bond strategist was critically important. Heightened community involvement/stakeholder buy-in also arose in the response from all three. The two superintendents who had adjusted the approach in terms of adding additional propositions stated yet again that doing so was an important reason why the first one didn't pass while the second campaign was successful.

Interview Protocol Question #10

How and how much do you feel today's political climate shaped your election outcomes? While there were no consistent themes arising from this question, good information was afforded. The suburban district superintendent mentioned that there was a significant local political shift in his board member makeup, particularly the new board president who was voted in between elections. The urban district superintendent mentioned recent legislative changes which meant that a public vote to increase the local homestead (tax) exemption (which passed) could have shaped the election results. Finally, the rural district superintendent responded that he believed the local economy shaped any and all elections in his district.

Interview Protocol Question #11

What advice would you give other superintendents who are preparing to conduct a bond election? Shifting from questions related directly to the bond elections and in an attempt to add true value to the field of research, this question provided a platform for the superintendents who have lived the experience of both a failed and a successful bond election within the same school district to simply share his/her thoughts. Even with the open-ended, non-specific question, all superintendents responded with three consistent items: (a) Hire a bond strategist; (b) Get to know your voters; and (c) Inform your public. Additionally, two superintendents agreed that building trust in your community with district officials is critically important.

Summary of Analysis

After exploring the themes as well as the inconsistencies from superintendent responses from each interview protocol question, the next step was to follow through with data analysis. A combination, via a sequential nature, of Stake's (1995) categorical aggregation, pattern identification, and naturalistic generalization was used for data analysis. Within the first two levels, stage one included breaking down the data (via a spreadsheet) and beginning of categorization (similar to open coding), and stage two included pattern identification by taking the initial categories and reducing down to manageable levels for arising themes. Finally, core categories emerged to tell the central story of the data and allow for synthesis with existing research (and see additional information in Chapter V). Upon completion, the final emerging facets that superintendents of Texas public school districts believe must be considered when attempting to pass a bond election include, by priority: (a) Trust in district officials; (b) Getting to know the community and district; (c) Informing the community and district; (d) Hiring a bond strategist; and (e) Separating bond propositions (when applicable). Figure I on the following page was developed to summarize the critical arising themes of the study in an easy to interpret format.

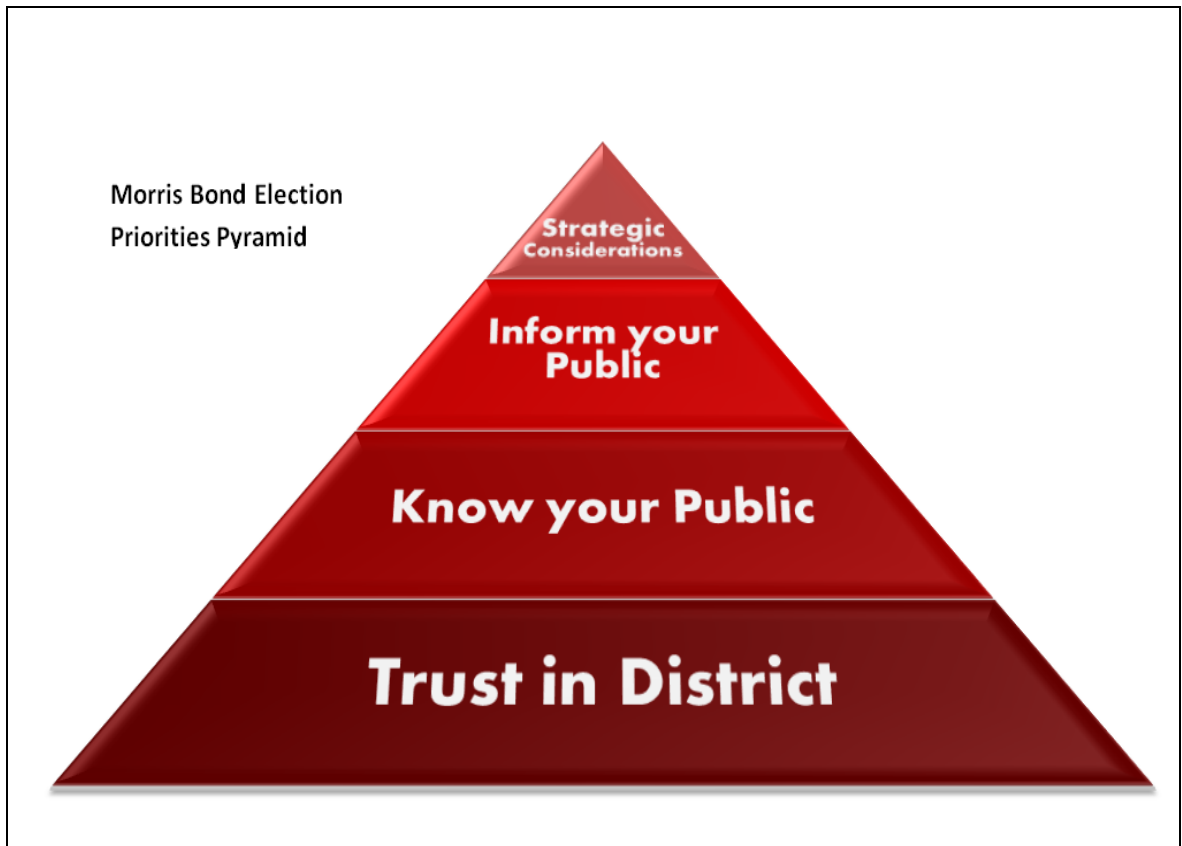


Figure I. Morris Bond Election Priorities Pyramid of School Bond Passage for Texas Public School Officials.

The Morris Bond Election Priorities Pyramid captures the primary themes arising within data analysis in terms of the facets which superintendents’ believe when giving focus and efforts hereto, will increase the likelihood of bond passage. Failing to consider these facets or accomplish tasks which will address these items often accompany unsuccessful bond election campaigns.

In terms of synthesizing critical facets associated with bond passage arising within the literature review but not necessarily surfacing during this study, several items can be explored with use of document analysis. Document analysis was accomplished by

reviewing the TAPR (2015) reports for the school districts of the three participating superintendents. With specific focus on comparing researching findings of this study with existing research on the subject, spreadsheets were built to identify specific district data. Three years (2013-2015) of data was analyzed for each district including student enrollment (and growth trends) and student low socioeconomic percentages.

While Stockton (1996) found that student population growth was positively correlated with increasing the likelihood of bond election passage, two of the three superintendents and districts within this study yielded a second, successful election despite having a declining student population over the previous three years. Beckham et al. (2003), Zimmer and Jones (2005), and Sielke (1998) found a constant relationship with district enrollment, in that the larger the district, the greater the likelihood of bond election success. On the other hand, Piele and Hall (1973) found district size a non-significant factor. This study somewhat confirms both sides, given three very different districts of significantly varying sizes, each of which held unsuccessful and successful elections within a relatively short time frame. While Clemens (2003) found the critical influence of demographic makeup of the voters in the community as a driver for dictating the vote, this study indicated no connection existed between the two variables. This suggests that factors other than district size and enrollment growth trends may be greater indicators of bond election success. Bowers et al. (2010) concluded that overall district student socio-economic makeup influenced the likelihood of bond election success, in that the poorer the student makeup, the less likelihood of bond success. Yet again, this study suggests that this influence is at best a minimal factor, given one district

with a lower than state average SES makeup and two with a higher than average. This once again posits that other factors such as the critical strategic facets arising in this study are greater indicators of bond election success than that of many district and community characteristics often cited within existing literature on the subject. This points to the significance of focusing on items within administrators' control, on which this study focused.

One item which arose as a finding within the study within document analysis (not as a result of interview participant responses) was that of the disparity of election success based on election timing. Based on a summary of election results from the previous three years (see Appendix C), election timing may affect likelihood of election passage. Of those 423 attempted Texas school bond elections within the last six election cycles and three fiscal years, 85 % of those held in November were successful while only 74 % of elections attempted in the month of May ended with success.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to determine superintendent perceptions of critical facets related to successful and unsuccessful school bond elections in Texas public school districts. In an effort to provide valuable and updated research, I focused on Texas public school bond elections held between 2013 and 2015. I purposefully sought superintendents from three categories of districts: urban, suburban, and rural. This approach was intended to accomplish a wide-ranging view of participants and to also capture any noticeable trends among the groupings. My study also focused on a superintendent interview from each of the three previously defined categories of districts who had each lived the experiences of first an unsuccessful election followed by a victorious election, all within the specified three-year timeframe. Finally, my study was intended to focus on items within administrator control so as to attempt to add value to the field for practitioner purposes.

Interviews were accomplished via a prescribed interview protocol with each of the three selected superintendents. Additional questions arose during each interview based on participant-specific responses in attempts at confirmation and/or clarity. Interviews were utilized for data collection in an attempt to approach the topic of study from a new and fresh angle, given that most existing research on the subject is almost purely quantitative. The interview questions were designed to promote respondents' real-world perceptions of factors which may assist district officials with increasing the

likelihood of bond election passage and reducing the chance of election failure. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by the investigator in anticipation of data analysis which was discussed lightly in the previous chapter. The next subsection begins discussion of findings and conclusions drawn from the research.

Conclusions

It is hopeful that the findings of this study will assist district officials with passing future bond elections by accomplishing critical facets which enhance likelihood of bond passage while avoiding items which produce greater chance of a less fruitful outcome. Given constraints of school district and state budgets and the massive costs of responding to rapid student enrollment growth as well as outdated instructional facilities, the bond election route is generally the sole option for superintendents. Because seeking voter approval, particularly with instances of increasing taxes, will always be a challenge, the study may afford some industry-specific guidelines for promoting success.

Analysis of the data in Chapter IV yielded support for existing research on the subject as well as introduction of new considerations in terms of themes identified which can sway public school bond election outcomes. One significant confirmation arose in this study that is consistent with existing research, in that items which promote bond election demise are generally the inverse relationship or failure to accomplish the facets deemed prudent to promote bond election success. The themes arising in my study include: (a) building and maintaining trust in district officials; (b) getting to know the public; (c) informing the public; (d) hiring a bond strategist; and (e) separating propositions.

Trust in District Officials

Based on the collective responses from all superintendents within the study, trust in district officials arose as the single most critical facet which influences voter behavior and bond election outcome. Trust in district officials certainly overlaps within some of the other findings or at least appropriately accomplishing other more specific items assists with securing the highly influential trust factor. The participants each spoke of items which shaped the first unsuccessful election that suggested an absence of trust in district officials which caused voters to turn down the election. While trust may be accomplished by completion of some other factors such as clear and consistent communication and getting to know and informing your public, the specifically mentioned factors contributing to the lack of trust in district officials were primarily identified with previous, questionable actions and failure to follow through with promises, and a unified school board. A couple of items specifically cited were: (a) the questionable use (depletion) of district reserves for athletic items without significant public input; (b) a new campus built from the proceeds of a previous bond election which failed to accomplish items promised and generally did not meet the needs of the students; (c) absence of a unified board in support of the bond election and/or failure of certain board members to adhere to superintendent recommendations; and (d) a simple lack of information provided to the public. The challenge arises when a superintendent is still relatively new to a district and the actions of previous officials have led to the distrust. Gaining trust generally takes time, with attention to following through with items as promised. More than one superintendent in the survey mentioned that

incremental trust gain is better than no trust enhancement at all. Clear, concise, and consistent communication about the affairs of the district and bond data assists with building trust, as well. In general, all participants agreed that consistently “doing the right thing by students” over time will assist in gaining trust when bond election needs arise.

In terms of any disparity in the “trust” consideration between the districts and district superintendents based on district category (urban, suburban, and rural), very little difference was apparent. This suggests that trust is just as important in the smallest rural district as in the largest urban districts in the state. It did appear that the smaller district participant had a greater challenge in gaining voter trust. However, that is believed to simply be a coincidence based on factors associated with previous administration and longevity of the superintendent within the larger urban district. It is interesting to note that in one of the district’s the unsuccessful bond referendum was in fact called by the previous administration while in the rural district the unsuccessful bond was called by the current administration/superintendent.

The finding of this study of the important nature that trust in officials has on influencing election outcome has loosely been touched on within existing research. Faltys (2006), Stockton (1996), Clemens (2003), Kraus (2009), and Lambert (2012) discussed how trust in general or items which promoted influence to trust (to include absence of accomplishing facets) were factors contributing to voter behavior. Given the popularity of the theme of “trust” arising within the study, Figure II on the following

page is provided to capture the essence of superintendent responses in terms of avenues which are critical to gaining and attaining “trust”.

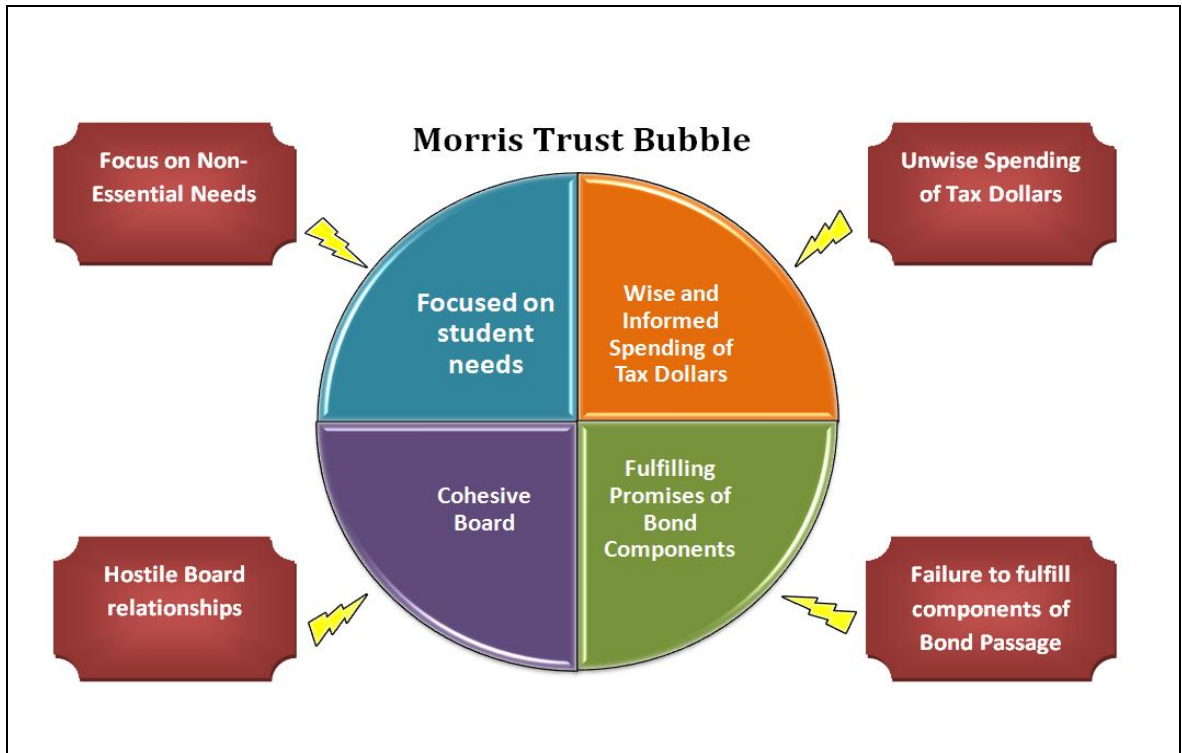


Figure II. Morris Trust Bubble for Gaining and Attaining Trust in District Officials

Similar to the inverse relationship of accomplishing or failing to secure the facets associated with successful and unsuccessful bond elections, building and maintaining trust in district officials compared with losing or complete absence of trust has a similar relationship. For example and as Figure II details; focusing on student needs assists districts with entering the community and voter “trust bubble” while adhering to non-essential needs promotes an environment and location outside the bubble. Similarly, fulfilling promises of past bond elections promotes trust by the community with district

officials while failing to accomplish previous promises is indicative of an environment of absence of trust.

Know Your Public

Each of the seasoned superintendents acknowledged the imperative nature of getting to know the public. This facet arose in each unsuccessful and successful election questions in terms of agreement that additional effort could and should have been afforded prior to the first election to better understand the community. Additionally, more extensive and creative efforts to promote public knowledge were accomplished prior to the successful campaigns for all participants (as opposed to the efforts surrounding the first, fruitless election). Getting to know your public translates to items such as better understanding what the district and voters' needs are, how much the public is willing to spend on potential increases in property taxes associated with the election, areas to stay away from, and more specific voting projections. To accomplish better knowledge of the general voting public, approaches included telephone and email surveys, bond committee meetings with parent and local business representation (as well as the vocal opposition groups), etc. Failing to "get to know" the public also potentially falls under the "trust in district officials" heading as failing to receive adequate input, which could promote distrust in officials. The rural district superintendent may have said it best when he stated,

I think the first thing you have to remember is it begins and ends with the cornerstone; you must remember it is their kids, it is their district, and it is their money. If you ever lose sight of that, you'll never get enough trust in the

community to do things you need them to do. The district belongs to the community and not vice versa.

Generally, there was no deviation based on district makeup (urban, suburban, and rural) as to the imperative nature that getting to know the public plays in shaping election outcome. The only real difference arose in the manner by which the superintendents sought to achieve this task. Perhaps not surprisingly, the smaller rural district utilized no special bells or whistles, approaching public knowledge dissemination via face-to-face, town hall-type events, while the larger district (partially based on bond strategist recommendations) utilized fresh technological approaches including survey phone apps which would assist with lumping voters into three categories: likely to vote yes, likely to vote no, and undecided. This allowed district officials in the larger urban district to reach out to voters based on initial survey responses and get to better know why they were leaning the direction they were.

When considering the “get to know your public” facet and its prominence within this study, the literature review reveals relatively minor inclusion. Only a few areas within the literature review yielded results which loosely could be included as understanding the public or the importance of community involvement (Stockton, 1996; Krauss, 2009) and community characteristics (Bowers & Lee, 2013) in general. For instance, “getting to know your public,” as touched on by the superintendents within this study, could certainly include the need to know who your voters are, including the over-65 (years of age) contingency, low SES makeup, college graduate percentage, etc. Bowers and Lee (2013) surmised that knowing these demographics can help predict

election outcome, but that getting to know the makeup is important. Hence, a loose correlation with this study's findings exists. Further, existing literature includes many items within a "bond characteristics" heading which influences voter behavior and which would be linked under the "know your public" mantra. Particularly, the cost of the issue and perceived effect on taxpayers were individual factors arising in existing literature (e.g., Beckham, et al., 2003; Clemens, 2003; Faltys, 2006; Sonstelie, 1980).

Understanding or "knowing" these specific items certainly falls within the category of "getting to know your public" in terms of their willingness to take on debt, etc. Knowing the answers could dictate bond structuring and election outcome.

Inform Your Public

Lambert (2012) introduced the effect a strong and informed bond/strategic planning committee can have on increasing the likelihood of the "yes" vote in a public school bond election. Faltys (2006) and Stockton (1996) agreed that any and all parent-involved activities which were intended to educate voters on the needs associated with bond issues were critically important to limiting chance of election failure.

Along these lines, the superintendent responses within my study yielded a collective understanding of importance as it relates to informing the public about the needs of the district and the bond election itself as well as the significance of community involvement/stakeholder buy-in. A common theme of respondents was that in the first, failed election, there simply wasn't enough effort to inform the public of the needs of the district, the necessity of the bond election, etc. Additional efforts were made to "get the word out" for the second campaigns, which were fruitful. More than one of the

participants suggested that their respective boards felt that a “fly under the radar” and/or “we simply need to tell the public what we need and they will oblige” approach was all that was required. They found out the hard way that this simply wasn’t an effective approach and that additional efforts to inform the public and seek buy-in are required to pass a bond in today’s environment. Public information approaches ranged from telephone solicitation and public forums to videos of district needs placed on district web pages, etc. The rural superintendent quipped about his successful campaign, “There was no way anyone could suggest that we either didn’t give out enough information or failed to respond to any question which arose.” As with many other facets already revealed, “informing your public” or the absence thereof could certainly be lumped into the “trust in officials” heading, as the community often times perceived lack of information as potential “shady” dealings, leading to mistrust in district officials. In terms of district category response on the subject, there exists no disparity on the stances from the superintendents among the urban, suburban, and rural districts. The superintendents collectively agreed that a better informed and involved public swayed election outcome in consecutive district elections from defeat to victory.

Hire a Strategist

With essentially no existence within current literature on the subject, my study revealed a new finding promoting the need to hire a bond strategist in order to increase the likelihood of bond passage and limit the chance of defeat. Two of the three superintendents in the study utilized a bond strategist during the second, successful campaign after not seeking assistance in the first, failed election. They felt strongly that

the inclusion of the bond strategist, who was in each case employed by the district's architectural firm, was a critical factor contributing to election success. Each surmised that bond strategists "do this for a living," so why not hire the experts who deal with dozens of bond elections each year? Bond strategists can play a crucial role in the entire election process as well as assisting the district with accomplishing items two and three within my study: getting to know the public and informing the public. The strategists brought to the table unique technological, era-appropriate survey approaches which allowed officials to gauge voter behavior, adjust bond strategy accordingly, and present a package which would more likely garner majority voter support.

Given the uniqueness of this finding with a general absence of its mention in existing research, and in an attempt for additional research value, I reached out to a bond strategist to seek her (anonymous) opinion on two questions: (a) What does a bond strategist believe are the most critical facets to passing a bond election; and (b) How does a bond strategist add value to districts in terms of enhancing likelihood of bond success?

The bond strategist responded that her role was to essentially act as a communications specialist who helps bridge the divide between technical bond planning (architecture) and educating the public (voters) about process, prioritization, and possibilities. After this introduction from her with focus on the role a strategist plays in general, she responded to question one by categorizing critical facets, stating, "There are three primary important factors to consider when attempting to pass a bond, including transparency, communication convenience, and stakeholder consistency." Within the

transparency arena, she spoke to the importance of engaging stakeholders in a process to review district needs, prioritize work items, and have the stakeholders finalize the decisions about what is right for their community. This first area of discussion relates directly to other findings in my study in terms of the importance of getting to know your public and district needs as well as informing your public with a clear and consistent message. For the purposes of the second question, which focused on just how or why a bond strategist adds value to districts in terms of enhancing likelihood of bond success, the bond strategist very matter-of-factly stated,

A bond strategist assists in bond-related community surveys and polling that provides valuable information about voters' opinions and positions. We also serve as a liaison between the school district's information-only campaign and the stakeholders' (PAC) promotional campaign to ensure that facts related to the bond are consistent on both sides. As strategists do this for a living, we understand the importance of simplifying what could otherwise be a very complicated taxing proposition to the typical voter, thus we micro-target a message to supporters that increases the likelihood of their voting. We focus on getting District staff to vote, and finally we assist in developing strategic messages and keeping everyone on task.

The responses from the accomplished bond strategist provided tremendous insight in terms of confirming the importance to accomplish tasks already defined within this study and also defining how a strategist can attempt to assist districts with doing so.

In short, it appears that the strategist generally helps the district accomplish the facets critical to increase the likelihood of bond success and limits the chances of failure.

Separate Propositions

My study findings further introduced another fresh facet affecting voter behavior which was absent within the literature review on the subject: the importance to separate propositions when applicable and feasible. Creating more than one option for voters figured prominently in two of the three districts of the superintendents within my study. More specifically, in each case, athletic-related items were originally included in a single proposition in the first, unsuccessful election, which swayed voter decision. The superintendents heard from voters after their first election who candidly stated that they would have voted for the academic/instructional needs in the first election if they were separated from the athletic items. Ultimately, failure to give voters options or choices by separating propositions led to election demise in the first campaign. Ironically, after separating the propositions for the subsequent election, even the athletic items passed (narrowly). This suggests that perhaps the voting public didn't necessarily disagree with the athletic-related items, but felt that having no options was unfair and a "shaky" approach by district officials. Yet again, this could also fall within the "trust in administration" umbrella as giving the appearance of forcing voters into passing athletic-related items in order to pass instructional item needs and could promote an absence of trust by the community with district officials.

Recommendations

This study was designed to attempt to answer two primary research questions:

1. What do superintendents perceive as critical facets related to successful school bond elections in Texas public school districts?

2. What do superintendents perceive as critical facets related to unsuccessful school bond elections in Texas public school districts?

Both questions are answered by the same continuously arising facets or themes within the study: a) building and maintaining trust in district officials; (b) getting to know the public; (c) informing the public; (d) hiring a bond strategist; and (e) separating propositions. Superintendents perceive that focusing and giving credence to accomplish these facets are related to successful school bond elections in Texas public school districts. In contrast, superintendents perceive that absence of focus on or failing to accomplish these facets are related to unsuccessful school bond elections in Texas public schools.

The recommendations arising within this study which may be useful for practitioner purposes in terms of critical facets superintendents perceive to enhance the likelihood of bond election success and limit the chances for bond failure. Adhering to the recommendations afforded in this section may assist Texas public school superintendents with passing critically needed bond referenda. It is important to note that the recommendations are simply a guide, and other factors may need to be addressed to pass a bond, particularly given district and community-specific characteristics.

Critically important and at the center of all facets for promoting bond success, trust in district officials is absolutely paramount. Absence of trust in the district administration and board creates an extremely difficult bond election setting. Thus, it is

essential that superintendents do everything that is necessary to maintain and build trust in the community. Accomplishing a heightened level of trust can be as simple as following through on promises (of bond elections or other), spending taxpayer dollars wisely, seeking community input, approaching decision-making with continual emphasis on doing what is best for students, and general ethical behavior. Absence of trust in officials in large part promotes a futile effort in a bond election, even if the other important factors are successfully approached; however, many are non-exclusive from trust in district officials. Continually accomplishing tasks which promote trust will slowly but almost certainly lead to greater trust by the community in time. In contrast to accomplishing the facets which promote trust in district officials, failure to consider them will promote an unsuccessful campaign (as perceived from superintendents in this study). Lack of consideration as it relates to following through on promises of previous bond elections, questionable spending of district funds and a non-unified school board are facets which promote unsuccessful campaigns. Perhaps the most arduous challenge in this arena for superintendents is for those who are new to a district which has a community lacking trust in district officials based on efforts of the immediate past administration and/or board. This promotes a tough setting, but as several of the superintendents spoke to within this study, trust can be earned, even if it is a slow and incremental process.

Other areas of focus which superintendents should focus on to create a setting for bond election success and which also generally promote trust in officials include getting to know you public, informing your public, hiring a bond strategist, and separating bond

ballot propositions (when applicable and feasible). Understanding your public's needs as well as promoting stakeholder buy-in/community involvement is collectively vital to enhancing the likelihood of bond election success (e.g., Beckham et al., 2003; Bowers & Lee, 2013; Clemens, 1996; Faltys, 2006; Kraus, 2009); Lambert, 2012; Sonstelie, 1980; Stockton, 1996).

Recommendations for Further Study

During my research for this study, several items arose which could/should be addressed in future research on the subject to potentially add value to the field. The topics are listed below without consideration of priority sequence.

1. Consider a mixed-methods approach on the subject. One of the gaps in literature which assisted in shaping this study was that research on the subject was sparse, and those which did exist were nearly purely quantitative. This study affords a straight qualitative approach, and future researchers should consider mixed methods to compare results. Perhaps the findings of this study could be utilized in an updated survey seeking input from many more superintendents, and the results could be deciphered quantitatively.

2. Consider the impact of election timing. While neither existing research nor this study hinted at the potential difference of overall election results based on when the election was held, it should be researched further. In reviewing data for this study, the investigator noted some disparity in election success rate based on whether the election was held in November versus May. From 2013 to 2015, Texas public school districts held over 400 school bond elections; the November election success rate was 85 %,

while the May election success rate was considerably lower, at 74 %. Future researchers should delve deeper into this to expand the timeframe and other characteristics to seek election success correlation with election timing.

3. Consider inclusion of Board members as participants. Adding board members could provide for unique responses. Further, interviewing board members within the same district as superintendents interviewed would allow for a comparison of responses of just what took place during elections as viewed from the two most powerful district constituencies.

4. Consider further focus on items within administrator control. This study intended to accomplish this based on the investigator's desire to provide real-life solutions for practitioners. Many studies exist which focus on items that can allow officials to estimate likelihood of bond success, such as voter education, low SES makeup, etc.; however, many of these are simply out of the controllable realm of superintendents. While the information is good to know, much of it means little for superintendents, thus, additional focus on items within administrator control is prudent.

Summary

This research was conducted in an effort to determine superintendent perceptions of critical facets related to successful and unsuccessful bond election in Texas public schools. Focus was on the real life point of view of current superintendents who have lived the experience of an unsuccessful and passing election within the same school district. The intent of the study was to produce findings which could assist district

officials with increasing the likelihood of bond passage for critically important bond elections.

Five primary recurring themes arose from this study as critical facets to consider when attempting to increase the possibility of bond success and decrease the chances of bond election demise. The five primary findings include: trust in district officials, getting to know your public, informing your public, hiring a bond strategist, and considering separate bond propositions when applicable and feasible. While there is no guarantee that adhering to the concepts revealed through this research will result in bond election triumph, following the Morris Matrix can contribute to achieving school facility funding success.

REFERENCES

- Altheide, D., & Johnson, J. (1994). Criteria for assessing interpretive validity in qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative Research*, 10, 485-499. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- American Society of Civil Engineers. (2013). *Infrastructure report card*. Retrieved from <http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/fact-sheet/schools>.
- Anderson, S. (1999). *The relationship between school design variables and scores on the Iowa test of basic skills* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Georgia, Athens.
- Beckham, J., & Maiden, J. (2003). The effects of technology inclusion on school bond election success in Oklahoma. *Journal of Education Finance*, 28, 557-576.
- Bohrer, S. D. (1998). *Politics of rural school elections*. Paper presented at the annual invitational Conference of Rural Schools Facilities, Kansas City, Mo.
- Bowers, A. J., & Lee, J. (2013). Carried or defeated? Examining the factors associated with passing school district bond elections in Texas, 1997-2009. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 49, 732.
- Bowers, A. J., Metzger, S. A., & Militello, M. (2010). Knowing what matters: An expanded study of school bond elections in Michigan, 1998-2006. *Journal of Education Finance*, 35, 374-396.
- Brummer, K. C. (1999). *School bond elections in Iowa: An analysis of factors, strategies, and policies that influence outcomes* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Drake University, Des Moines.

- Carter, M. A. (1995). How to blow a bond issue-or not, if you'd prefer. *Clearing House*, 68, 289-292.
- Chopra, R. K. (1988). How we passed a bond issue hard on the heels of a tax hike. *The American School Board Journal*, 176, 26-29.
- 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.
- Combs, S. (2012). Your Money and Education Debt. A Texas State Comptroller Publication. retrieved from http://www.texastransparency.org/Special_Features/Your_Money/Education_Debt/.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. (2006). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Denney, A. S. & Tewksbury, R. (2013). How to write a literature review. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 24, 218-234.
- Dunbar, D. W. (1991). *A comparison of mail ballot elections and polling place elections for school bond issues in Kansas* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Oklahoma State University, Stillwater.

- Duyar, I. (2010). Relationship between school facility conditions and the delivery of instruction. *Journal of Facilities Management*, 8, 8-25.
- Earthman, G., & Lemasters, L. (2009). Teacher attitudes about classroom conditions. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 47, 323-335.
- Erickson, P.W. (2001). Passing the bond. *American School and University*, 83, 14-18.
- 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* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Texas A&M University, College Station.
- Gamkhar, S., & Olson, J. (2004, Sept. 24). Money for school facilities needs to be part of equation. *Austin American-Statesman*.
- General Accounting Office. (2000). *School facilities, construction expenditures have grown significantly in recent years*. Retrieved from <http://www.gao.gov>.
- Giles, M. W., Gatlin, D., & Cataldo, E. (1976). Parental support for school referenda. *Journal of Politics*, 21, 442-452.
- Hays, D., & Singh, A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Heschong Mahone Group. (1999). *Daylighting in schools: An investigation into the relationship between daylighting and human performance*. Report presented to Pacific Gas and Electric Company on behalf of the California Board of Energy Efficiency Third Party Program.

- Holt, C. (1993). *Factors affecting the outcomes of school bond elections in South Dakota* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of South Dakota, Vermillion.
- Joyner, A. (2004). A billion-dollar building boom. *American School Board Journal*, 191, 14.
- Kaufman, G. C. (1994). CISD board president explains need for \$85.815 million bond O.K. *People Scene*, 9, 1-3.
- Kowalski, T. J. (2002). *Planning and managing school facilities* (2nd ed.). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Kraus, B. W. (2009). *A Descriptive analysis of selected community stakeholder opinions regarding potentially critical factors in school bond referenda success or failure in Kansas during the years 2004-2007* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Kansas State University, Manhattan.
- Lambert, W. A. (2012). *Superintendent perceptions of the success and failure of school construction referendums from 2008-2010 in the state of Indiana* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Indiana State University, Terre Haute.
- Mathison, T. R. (1998). Successful bond elections. *School Business Affairs*, 64, 30-31.
- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in education* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc.

My Texas Public School. (2014). Retrieved February 13, 2014, from

<http://mytexaspublicschool.org/system/funding/bonds.html>.

Odden, A. R., & Picus, L. R. (2008). *School finance: A policy perspective*. Boston, MA: McGraw- Hill.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Piele, T. N. & Hall, J. S. (1973). *Budgets, bonds, and ballots*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company Publishing Inc.

Planty, M. & DeVoe, J. F. (2005), *An examination of the conditions of school facilities attended by 10th-grade students in 2002*, US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC.

Plumley, J. P. (1978). *The impact of school building age on the academic achievement of pupils from selected schools in the State of Georgia* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Georgia, Athens.

Randolph, J. J. (2009). A guide to writing the dissertation literature review. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 14*, 1-8.

Rivera-Batiz, F. L., & Lillian M. (1995). *A school system at risk: A study of the consequences of overcrowding in New York City public schools*. New York Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.

- Robinson, G. E., & Wittebols, J. H. (1986). *Class size research: a related cluster analysis for decision making*. Arlington, VA.: Educational Research Service, Inc.
- Sielke, C. C. (1998). Michigan school facilities, equity issues, and voter response to bond issues following finance reform. *Journal of Education Finance*, 23, 309-322.
- Simpson, J. B. (1993). The 81-cent solution. *The American School Board Journal*, 180, 28-30.
- Sonstelie, J. C., & Portney, P. R. (1980). Take the money and run: A theory of voting in local referenda. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 8, 187-195.
- Stake, Robert E. (1981). *The art of progressive focusing*, 65th Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Los Angeles, CA.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications, Inc.
- Stasner, M. K. (2010). *Bond underwriting costs: Texas school districts and the hidden cost of issuing bonds* (Unpublished dissertation). Texas A&M University, College Station.
- Stockton, D. (1996). *Influences contributing to the successful passage of a school bond referendum in the Conroe Independent School District* (Unpublished record of study). Texas A&M University, College Station.
- Tanner, C.K. (2009). Effects of school design on student outcomes. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 47, 381-399.

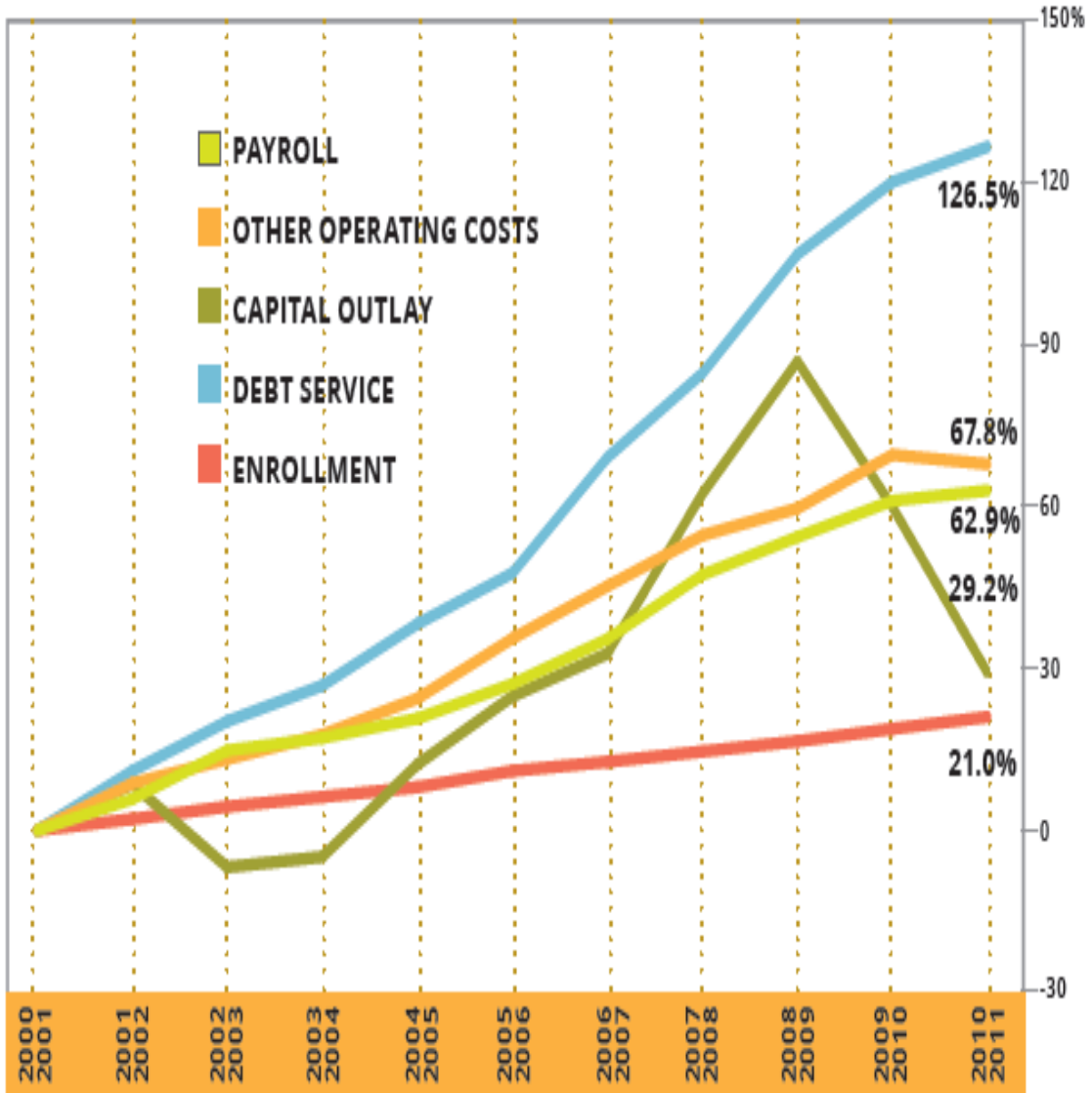
- Tanner, C.K. (2006). Effects of the school's physical environment on student Achievement. *Educational Planning, 15*, 25-44.
- Texas Education Agency. (2011). *Enrollment in Texas public schools, 2010-11*. (Document No. GE12 60101). Austin, TX.
- Texas Education Agency. (2016, March 1). Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR).
- "Texas Transparency." (2015). *Texas Transparency*. Texas State Comptroller. Retrieved from <http://www.texastransparency.org/>.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *Reducing class size: What do we know?* Washington, DC: The Department of Education. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Reducingclass/Class_size.html
- U.S. Department of Education. (2012). National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=65>.
- Wenglinsky, H. (1997). How money matters: the effect of school district spending on academic achievement. *Sociology of Education, 70*, 221-237.
- Yarborough, K.A. (2001), *The relationship of school design to academic achievement of elementary school children* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Georgia, Athens.
- Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods*. (2nd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing, Inc.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Zimmer, R. W., & Jones, J. T. (2005). Unintended consequence of centralized public school funding in Michigan education. *Southern Economic Journal*, 71, 534-544.

APPENDIX A

GROWTH RATE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS COSTS

2000-01 THROUGH 2010-11 SCHOOL YEARS



Source: Texas Education Agency

APPENDIX B

SCHOOL DISTRICT DEBT

As of Aug. 31, 2011, Texas school districts issued more than **\$63.6 billion** in outstanding debt, or about **\$2,573.15** per Texas resident and **\$13,530.12** per student. **Ten** large urban

and fast-growing suburban districts had more than **23 percent** of school district debt. The Bond Review Board lists no debt for **170 (16.6 percent)** of districts.

TOP 10 SCHOOL DISTRICTS BY TOTAL DEBT OUTSTANDING

AS OF AUG. 31, 2011

| DISTRICT | TOTAL DEBT OUTSTANDING | DEBT PER RESIDENT* | DEBT PER STUDENT | 2001-2011 ENROLLMENT GROWTH | RANK IN SIZE*** |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| DALLAS ISD | \$2,619,400,000.00 | \$2,565.91 | \$16,707.06 | -2.9% | 2ND |
| HOUSTON ISD | \$2,448,992,502.30 | \$1,865.64 | \$12,046.56 | -2.5% | 1ST |
| CYPRESS-FAIRBANKS ISD** | \$1,765,185,000.20 | \$3,553.46 | \$16,674.71 | 66.7% | 3RD |
| NORTHSIDE ISD (BEXAR)** | \$1,755,365,000.00 | \$3,399.04 | \$18,549.38 | 48.5% | 4TH |
| FRISCO ISD** | \$1,247,258,098.51 | \$7,648.93 | \$33,670.55 | 412.1% | 30TH |
| NORTH EAST ISD** | \$1,225,367,690.00 | \$3,089.85 | \$18,464.34 | 30.4% | 8TH |
| KATY ISD** | \$1,083,556,063.96 | \$4,216.52 | \$17,888.43 | 75.6% | 12TH |
| LEWISVILLE ISD** | \$1,014,778,489.35 | \$3,787.29 | \$19,782.03 | 31.2% | 17TH |
| CONROE ISD** | \$1,006,845,000.00 | \$3,894.29 | \$19,800.68 | 45.6% | 18TH |
| PLANO ISD | \$976,599,803.60 | \$3,014.52 | \$17,661.95 | 17.2% | 14TH |
| ALL OTHER 844 DISTRICTS WITH DEBT | \$48,481,058,300.71 | \$2,459.41 | \$12,689.92 | 17.9% | |
| TOTAL (854 DISTRICTS WITH DEBT) | \$63,624,405,948.63 | \$2,573.15 | \$13,530.12 | 18.9% | |

*District resident information is from the 2010 U.S. Census. These data are the most recent measure of district resident population available.

**Denotes fast-growing school districts that are in the top 20 percent of enrollment growth from 2001-2011.

***The Rank in Size column is a ranking of all 1,024 school districts from largest enrollment to smallest enrollment.

Sources: Texas Bond Review Board, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, Texas Education Agency, U.S. Census Bureau

APPENDIX C

Texas Public School Bond Result Analysis 2013 to 2015

| | Total Props | Passed | Failed | % Successful | Passed in Next Attempt | Failed in Next Attempt | Total Attempted A Second Election |
|----------|-------------|--------|--------|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| May-13 | 61 | 41 | 20 | 67% | 10 | 3 | 13 |
| Nov-13 | 100 | 81 | 19 | 81% | 8 | 1 | 9 |
| May-14 | 82 | 63 | 19 | 77% | 4 | 6 | 10 |
| Nov-14 | 50 | 43 | 7 | 86% | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| May-15 | 82 | 65 | 17 | 79% | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Nov-15 | 48 | 42 | 6 | 88% | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Averages | 70.5 | 55.8 | 14.7 | 80% | 4.8 | 2.2 | 7.0 |
| Totals | 423 | 335 | 88 | | 24 | 11 | 35 |

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

1. What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other characteristics for the unsuccessful election?
2. What do you perceive to be the biggest contributors to the unsuccessful election?
3. Please describe your perceptions of the community and district climate surrounding the unsuccessful bond election?
4. Please explain your election strategies employed during the unsuccessful election campaign?
5. What was the general intent of the bond proceeds and other bond/election characteristics for the successful election?
6. What do you perceive to be the biggest contributors to the successful election?
7. Please describe your perceptions of the community and district climate surrounding your successful election?
8. Please explain your election strategies employed during the successful election campaign?
9. Why do you feel the second attempt was successful and not the first?
10. How and how much do you feel today's political climate may have shaped your elections' outcome?
11. What advice would you give other superintendents who are preparing to conduct a bond election?

APPENDIX E

VITA

ERICH H. MORRIS

Education

Doctor of Education, Texas A&M University, 2016

Major: Educational Administration

Master of Science, Texas A&M University-Commerce, 2010

Major: School Business Management

Bachelor of Business Administration, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, 1999

Major: Management

Graduate: Livingston High School, Livingston, Texas, 1995

Professional Experience

Assistant Superintendent of Operations, 2016-present, Magnolia Independent School

District

Chief Financial Officer, 2008-2016, Magnolia Independent School District

Director of Business & Finance, 2004-2008, Calallen Independent School District

Director of Finance & Operations, 2003-2004, La Vernia Independent School District

Business Manager, 2001-2003, Anderson-Shiro Consolidated Independent School

District

Financial Advisor, 2000-2001, Morgan Stanley Dean Witter