



Funding School Building Improvements:

# **GUIDE TO A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL BOND INITIATIVE**

A photograph of a classroom with rows of wooden desks and red plastic chairs. In the background, there is a whiteboard with a calendar and some educational posters on the wall.

## PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS FACE TOUGH ISSUES

Funding, new curriculum standards, and paying competitive teacher salaries, are just a few.

For many districts, these issues often overshadow another important, but often ignored, matter: providing and maintaining educational facilities.

As stressful as it may be to pass a school bond for improvements, our schools need the resources to tackle some of our district's most pressing needs. With the majority of Nabholz' projects being in the arena of education, we've learned to become a partner with school districts long before a bond goes to vote. We've also created some relatively simple rules that increase the odds of a school bond passing.





# #1

## SIT AROUND THE CAMPFIRE AND SING KUMBAYA

You've heard the saying "people work with businesses they like." This absolutely applies to school districts as well—the community needs to feel that the school is a good partner.

**START BUILDING OR REBUILDING THE SCHOOL'S REPUTATION BY  
BEING ACTIVE IN THE COMMUNITY.**

Attend chamber meetings, ask to be a speaker at local civic club luncheons, and always introduce yourself as an employee / superintendent / board member of the school district at town events. Find other creative ways to reach out to the community. One superintendent we worked with has a mailing list of over 100 homeowners that he sends letters to every time something "big" is happening at the school. The superintendent personally signs each letter. The subtext of these letters reads, "I care about your feelings towards the local school system."

*Start building  
or rebuilding  
the school's  
reputation by  
being active in  
the community.*

A classroom setting with two whiteboards, a projector screen, and various educational posters on the wall. The posters include a calendar, a 'Classroom Rules' sheet, and a 'FALCONS' banner. The room has a drop ceiling with fluorescent lights.

## LEARN FROM OTHER'S MISTAKES

One school district learned this the hard way, when a bond issue failed – twice. The bond issue included the demolition of the district's historic middle school. Many of the local voters had attended this school and did not want it torn down. The district learned voters were more supportive of a complete renovation rather than a new building – regardless of cost.

Listening to the voters and making this change allowed the school to get the votes they needed to make various improvements throughout the district.

*Listen to voters.  
Find out what  
is important  
to them.*

# #2

## 2. GET ORGANIZED!

To ensure the passing of bond elections, it's crucial to be meticulously organized and have a solid plan in place.

**FORM A COMMITTEE THAT IS AS DEDICATED TO SEEING THE BOND PASSED AS YOU ARE.**

A strong committee of non-district personnel that prints and distributes flyers, places door-hangers, speak to reporters, create a Facebook page, etc. is vital to the success of a bond election. Members of your committee need to be highly visible, respected, and trusted members of the community—the more community leaders you have on your side, the better.

**MAKE SURE TO INFORM THE LOCAL SCHOOL STAFF.**

They are your inside support team! Community members look to school staff for information about school district matters, so they must know the basic facts on what the ballot initiative accomplishes. Ask for their unified support before going public.

### GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

- *Flyers*
- *Door-hangers*
- *Media contacts*
- *Social media*

### WHO'S ON YOUR COMMITTEE?

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### BRING IN OTHER SUPPORTIVE PARTIES

With a strong committee in place, start to bring in other supportive parties—such as a construction manager and architect. Having a contract with design and construction teams, contingent upon the vote passing, is often the most cost effective measure a school can take. Don't wait until after a bond passes to get these important team members on board. They have too much to offer that could help get those YES votes!

*CHOOSING A  
CONSTRUCTION  
MANAGER AND  
ARCHITECT EARLY  
IN THE PROCESS  
COULD MEAN  
THE DIFFERENCE  
BETWEEN A BOND  
PASS OR FAIL.*



# #3

## 3. DON'T SERVE THE CAESAR SALAD WITH ANCHOVIES – NOBODY LIKES THAT!

NOW, THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY IS SINGING YOUR PRAISES!

In being a good partner, active listener, and having a wickedly sharp team of supporters you now know what the hot button issues are for the voters. Like a good boy scout, you should BE PREPARED! Your connections will come into play again when creating the list of improvements to be included in the bond issue.

### UNDERSTAND WHAT VOTERS WANT

Understanding what voters will support, and just as importantly, what they absolutely will not support, is invaluable to getting your bond measure passed.

The proposed bond measure needs to be a combination of the districts' top priorities and what the electorate is willing to pay for. Don't put measures on the ballot that nobody wants. No anchovies!

Sometimes, unfortunately, nothing is going to make the voting constituents happy at this time. While this may be a hard pill to swallow, it is better to know beforehand than to waste your time. Take this opportunity to plan for the future and begin planting those seeds for the next time.

# #4

## 4. ACT LIKE A MIDDLE SCHOOL KID - LOVE YOUR FRIENDS AND IGNORE YOUR ENEMIES

There are some people who will never ever vote to increase taxes. Nor will they vote to keep the taxes at their current state. Only a “lower taxes” vote will sway their decision. Breathe in, say “it is what it is,” and focus on your friends—the “yes” voters!

### CONCENTRATE EFFORTS

A good rule of thumb is to concentrate efforts on those who agree to positive change and will actually take the time to vote. They already understand the importance of the bond issue. Get these people to the polls and ask them to take along a friend, husband, neighbor, or sibling! If you get these people to the polls they will far out-number the nay-sayers!

*WHO ARE YOUR  
BIGGEST FANS?*

*ASK THEM TO COMMIT TO  
GETTING THEIR FRIENDS TO  
THE POLLS TOO!*

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# #5

## 5. WRITE CLEAR, SIMPLE MESSAGES THAT RESONATE

### YOUR MESSAGE IS VITAL!

Townspeople want to know exactly what they are voting on. Don't slip in a swimming pool for the teacher's lounge when your message has been "Building Safer Schools." The truth is always the best option, and remember – voters NEVER forget. If a bond project ten years ago resulted in a less than desirable outcome, you already have an uphill battle. Don't repeat that mistake!

Remember that your message should always include an established NEED! Schools want new flooring that is lower maintenance. However, they need a tornado safe room. Everyone, and I mean everyone, wants their children's basic needs, including safety, taken care of.

*WHAT DOES YOUR  
SCHOOL NEED?*

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*WHAT DOES YOUR  
SCHOOL WANT?*

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# #6

## 6. BE THE MASTER OF YOUR DOMAIN

### BE READY TO ANSWER QUESTIONS. LOTS OF QUESTIONS

Even if the entire town seems to be supportive of the bond initiative, always be ready. One bad public meeting can quickly sway those “yes” voters. If someone was on the fence before, they are locked into the “no” camp now.

### GET A CONSTRUCTION MANAGER SOONER RATHER THAN LATER

From very early preliminary discussions, a construction company can create a fairly accurate budget of costs and a detailed scope of work. This helps decide the dollar values to be included on your bond issue. Think of the pickle you’ll be in if you promise the voters a Cadillac and later find out that you only asked for enough money to build a Pinto!

### PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW EXACTLY HOW DOLLARS WILL BE USED.

Those who are representatives of the bond need to know where the new building will sit on the property, what the renovated cafeteria will include, project budget amount, the type of football turf to be used – every piece of information you can give them. Make sure your team members can assure the community that their dollars are being spent wisely.

*PICK A  
CONSTRUCTION  
MANAGER EARLY.  
THEY CAN OFTEN  
CREATE A FAIRLY  
ACCURATE BUDGET IN  
THE EARLY PLANNING.  
  
DON'T PROMISE A  
CADILLAC BUT ONLY  
ASK FOR ENOUGH  
MONEY FOR A PINTO!*



# #7

## 7. HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

THE TOWN NOW KNOWS AND TRUSTS THE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

You have verified what items are going to deliver a “yes” vote. Members of your committee are informed, energized, and professional. The message is clear and concise. Now it’s time to campaign!

**TIMING IS CRITICAL.**

But wait one minute, Goldilocks. Start too early and you give the opposition plenty of time to organize and gain momentum. Start too late and you won’t have enough time to spread the word. The timing has to be just right. Kick off the campaign about 2-3 weeks before early voting begins and then rock the house.

Don’t go to the school dance just to hang out alone against the wall with your punch and cookie! Get out there and dance!

NABHOLZ is proud of our record in supporting community efforts in bond and millage elections.

If you think Nabholz is good before construction starts, just wait and see what we can do on the jobsite! If you need additional information or to schedule a visit, give us a call and ask for your area business development officer at 1.877.NABHOLZ.