



**Dodge City Public Schools
Post-Election Survey
March 9, 2009**

In February 2009, a five-minute telephone survey of 400 registered voters within the boundaries of the Dodge City Public Schools was conducted and funded by Patron Insight, Inc., Stilwell, Kansas.

The purpose of the survey was to determine the thoughts among patrons regarding why the January 27, 2009, bond issue was defeated, and what those patrons would recommend as the next step for the Board of Education on the subject of any future bond proposals.

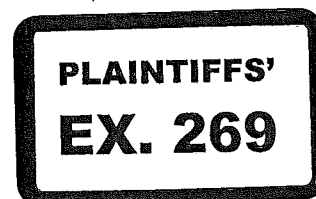
To participate in the survey, a respondent had to be the male or female head of the household and a registered voter. Additionally, a quota was set ensuring that 200 respondents (each) would come from north and south of Commanche. Assuming that the respondent cleared the first two hurdles, he or she was asked about the location of his or her residence. If he or she lived in an area where there was room under the quota when the call was placed, the survey continued.

Finding 1: Patrons chose two, economically focused, reasons why the bond issue was defeated. The most popular was "This would have lost no matter what the economy was like, because the cost of the plan to the average taxpayer was too high," followed closely by "The economy was bad."

Respondents were presented with a list of potential reasons for the bond issue's defeat, and were asked to select the "most important" and "second-most important" items. (Those who had ideas that were not among the provided choices were invited to share those as well.)

To assist in the evaluation of the results of these two questions, a two-point weighted scale was used, in which each "most important" choice was worth two points, and each "second-most important" selection was worth one.

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The results of this analysis show that financial matters – much more so than the individual components of the plan itself – primarily caused the defeat. Specifically:

- The most popular answer (with 351 total points, or 30% of the available points) was “This would have lost no matter what the economy was like, because the cost of the plan to the average taxpayer was too high.”)
- A very close second (with 314 points, or 26% of the available points) was “The economy was bad.”
- Coming in a distant third (with 97 points, or 8% of the available points), was “People were worried about whether the state would continue to pay 49% of the cost.”)

A cross-tabulation analysis by geography of the respondent (living north or south of Commanche), whether or not the household has a current district student, no current student – but a previous student – or never has had a student, and age revealed some interesting results, in terms of the middle part of the rank order. For example:

- Those who lived north of Commanche put “the overall plan was bad” in a tie for third place with the issue of the potential loss of the 49% state contribution.
- Current district parents put “people didn’t trust the district’s promise to NOT go ahead with the projects if the state stopped the funding” at #3 also, again tied with the issue of the 49% contribution by the state.
- Those 55 and older placed “people didn’t know enough about it” at #3.

When one considers that project-specific issues – that is, respondents saying that people voted “no” because they didn’t like a specific project in the plan – accounted for only 106 points (9% of the possible points), it appears that a perfect storm of financial anxiety mixed with the relatively high cost of the plan itself caused its downfall, rather than a quarrel about the specific contents.

4-5. As you may know, on January 27, the patrons of Dodge City Public Schools did NOT approve the school district’s 59 point 8 million dollar bond issue. Since that day, many ideas have been shared regarding why the bond issue did not pass. I’m now going to read you a list of the ideas that have been mentioned most frequently. As you listen to this list, please be thinking about which one you think was the most important reason why the bond issue lost. If it’s not on this list, you can tell me that, too. Here’s the list...(question 5) What was the second-most important reason? List was read to respondents and was rotated – except that “Or was something else the most important reason?” was always read last. “Don’t know” was not read. Chart below shows total mentions of each item on questions 4 and 5, and the results using a two-point weighted scale, in which each “most important” vote was worth two points, and each “second-most important” vote was worth one.

Item	Most important mentions	Second-most important mentions	Two-point weighted scale points
This would have lost no matter what the economy was like, because the cost of the plan to the average taxpayer was too high	148	55	351
The economy was bad	123	68	314
People were worried about whether the state would continue to pay 49% of the cost	25	47	97
People didn't know enough about it	29	27	85
People didn't trust the district's promise to NOT go ahead with the projects if the state stopped the funding	21	34	76
The overall plan was bad	26	13	65
People didn't believe that Dodge City Middle School was overcrowded	9	39	57
People didn't believe that turning Hennessy Hall into a second middle school was a good idea	12	16	40
People didn't think it was necessary to expand Soule Intermediate Center	4	1	9
Something else was the most important/ Second-most important reason (see below)	3	8	n/a
Don't know	0	6	n/a
Only reason was the one mentioned first	n/a	86	n/a

Verbatim "other" reasons

Didn't trust the district in making the right decisions on handling the money.

There is a general lack of trust in the school district.

Letting students enroll without proper ID makes many upset in town.

Not all of it was needed. Not sure what should have been eliminated, however.

Too much to do.

Didn't want all that traffic in their backyard.

I really think some of it was the lack of trust in the district and how they manage things.

Seemed like a lot to ask at this time.

Too much of the money is being used to help the Hispanics.

Overall lack of trust in the district.

I think the feeling was that this was just too much to take on at once.

Cross-tabulation: Rank order of two-point scale results for each offered reason by north or south of Commanche, presence of a current district student (“Student, yes?”), past district student, but no current student (“Student, past?”), or no district student ever in the household (“Student, never?”), and age. Note: “n” equals the number of respondents in each group, and three respondents refused to provide their ages.

Reason	Overall	N of Commanche (n=200)	S of Commanche (n=200)	Student, yes (n=117)	Student, past (n=175)	Student, never (n=108)	18-34 (n=83)	35-54 (n=155)	55 or older (n=159)
It would have lost no matter what the economy, because the cost of the plan to the average taxpayer was too high	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1
The economy was bad	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2
People were worried about whether the state would continue to pay 49% of the cost	3	3*	3	3*	3	3	3	3	4
People didn’t know enough about it	4	5*	4	5	4	4*	4	5	3
People didn’t trust the district’s promise to NOT go ahead with the projects if the state stopped the funding	5	5*	5	3*	7	7	5	4	6
The overall plan was bad	6	3*	7	7	5	4*	7	6	5
People didn’t believe DCMS was overcrowded	7	7	6	6	6	8	8	7	7
People didn’t believe that turning Hennessy Hall into a second middle school was a good idea	8	8	8	8	8	6	6	8	8
People didn’t think it was necessary to expand Soule Intermediate Center	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9

** indicates that points were tied within the vertical column*

Finding 2: When presented with a series of options, the largest percentage of respondents suggested that the district wait until the economy improves and run the same plan again. However, there were meaningful segments of the patron population that suggested that the district either do nothing, or that it shrink the plan somewhat.

When asked what the Board of Education should do next, the results were mixed.

Respondents were read a list of possible options (and, again, offered the chance to share their own ideas), and were told that they could select more than one choice, if they wished.

The most popular choice (selected by 48% of the respondents) was “Keep the same plan, but wait to run it again until the economy improves.” That was followed by “Don’t run anything – we don’t need any of these projects,” which was selected by 23%.

In terms of potential projects to eliminate in the future, 15% suggested Hennessy Hall, 12% suggested the expansion at Soule Intermediate Center, and 8% suggested the expansion and renovation projects at Dodge City Middle School.

Interestingly, the advice of those who suggested earlier that the plan would have lost “no matter what the economy” was nearly identical to those who said that “the economy was bad.” Specifically:

- Of those who said “it would have lost, no matter what the economy,” 47% said to run it again when the economy improves, while 23% said not to run anything, 17% suggested eliminating Hennessy Hall, 14% said to remove the Soule project, and 7% recommended eliminating the DCMS projects.
- Of those who said “the economy was bad,” 50% said to run it again when the economy improves, while 26% said not to run anything, 12% suggested eliminating the Hennessy Hall project, 10% suggested removing the Soule project, and 5% said to take the DCMS project off the list.

Making this even more interesting is that 20% of those who said to “run the same plan again when the economy improves” *also* selected one or more projects they would remove for a future ballot proposal. In terms of the total survey population, 30% selected at least one project to eliminate.

This would seem to suggest that a meaningful segment of even the most optimistic – and the most supportive – patrons would prefer to see the project plan trimmed somewhat before it returns for voter consideration in the future.

6. **As the Dodge City School Board thinks about its next steps, which of the following would you recommend, or would you recommend something else? You can choose more than one of these suggestions, if you have more than one recommendation. List was read, and respondents were permitted to make more than one suggestion, if desired. As such, percentages will add to more than 100%. "Don't know" was not read.**

Response	Percentage
Keep the same plan, but wait to run it again until the economy improves	48%
Don't run anything – we don't need any of these projects	23%
Make the plan smaller by eliminating the plan to use Hennessy Hall	15%
Make the plan smaller by eliminating the expansion at Soule Intermediate Center	12%
Make the plan smaller by eliminating the plan to add classrooms and renovate Dodge City Middle School	8%
Don't know (not read)	7%
Something else (see below)	3%

Verbatim comments from those who said "something else"

We were in favor of the whole plan, but Dodge City will never approve the tax increase.

It just seemed like a lot to handle, so cut back somewhere.

Require all students to produce a birth certificate and Social Security card. This will eliminate crowding and eliminate the need for projects like these.

Not sure anything would help. Perhaps educating us more.

They should review what really needs to be done.

Only do one project rather than all of them at once.

I am more for a sales tax.

Give out more specific information on where money is to go.

They should have sales tax pay for school projects.

Build a whole new middle school.

Cross-tabulation: Advice for the future among those who chose “It would have lost, no matter what the economy” or “the economy was bad” as one of the reasons it lost (either most important or second-most important)

Recommendation for the future	Those who selected “It would have lost, no matter what the economy”	Those who selected “The economy was bad”
Keep the same plan, but wait to run it again until the economy improves	47%	50%
Don’t run anything – We don’t need any of these projects	23%	26%
Make the plan smaller by eliminating the plan to use Hennessy Hall	17%	12%
Make the plan smaller by eliminating the expansion at Soule Intermediate Center	14%	10%
Make the plan smaller by eliminating the plan to add classrooms and renovate Dodge City Middle School	7%	5%

Additional items of note:

- *38 of the 191 respondents (or 20%) who said “keep the same plan, but wait to run it again until the economy improves” also selected at least one project they would recommend removing in the future.*
- *120 respondents total (30%) picked one of the “make it smaller” choices.*
- *19 of those 120 respondents (16%) selected more than one project to eliminate.*

Finding 3: The survey group consisted of a good mix of current/past/never student families, with respondents from a broad cross-section of ages.

The survey closed with a question about the household’s student status and age, and the random digit dialing process produced a good mix of participants in both areas.

Specifically, 117 current district student families took part in the survey, along with 175 previous student families (meaning that they had a district student in the household in the past, but did not now), and 108 households which have never had a district student.

In terms of age, 21% were between 18 and 34, while 39% were between 35 and 54, and 40% were 55 or older. (One percent – three respondents – refused to provide this information.)

Our last two questions will help divide our interviews into groups.

7. Do you presently have a child or children in the Dodge City Public Schools? If not, did you have a child or children who were previously students in the district, but who have graduated?

Response	Percentage
Yes, current district student	29% (117 respondents)
No current district student, but past student	44% (175 respondents)
No, never had a district student	27% (108 respondents)

8. In what age group are you? Is it...*Choices were read to respondents. "Refused" was not read.*

Response	Percentage
18 to 24	4%
25 to 34	17%
35 to 44	19%
45 to 54	20%
55 to 64	22%
65 or older	18%
Refused (not read)	1%

Summary

The results of this survey suggest quite clearly that the patrons' decision-making process on the bond issue was driven much more by the financial aspect of the proposal than it was by the specific projects.

In essence, it appears that there were three segments of voters:

1. Those who were comfortable with the cost and the projects.
2. Those who were comfortable with the cost, but became uncomfortable upon reviewing the projects.
3. Those who were not comfortable with the cost.

Unfortunately, groups two and three outnumbered group one and – more than likely – will continue to do so for the foreseeable future as the national economic news continues to be uneasy (even if the local news is not as difficult).

The challenge going forward will consist of scope, timing and budget. Patrons appear to be looking for a smaller proposal in the future, and it seems unlikely that supporters of the January 2009 proposal would *not* support a smaller ballot issue next time. The ideal timing for such a proposal remains an open question. But, it seems clear that a healthy, ongoing dialogue with patrons will be essential so that they understand that the district is biding its time until the moment is right to ask again.