

NORTHWEST ALLEN COUNTY SCHOOLS

REFERENDUM LESSONS

WHAT WE DID WELL

District Information Machine

NACS built an entire page of information, resources, and data – Budget breakdowns, state funding explanations, and district comparison materials.

Still available at nacs.k12.in.us/future under “Funding Challenges and Future Projects”

Voters had no shortage of data.

PAC Had It's Own Voice

Our dedicated PAC website and Facebook created an independent channel of information separate from the district, but created a unified voice.

Community engaged meaningfully in both platforms

Reached Our Target Audience Repeatedly

Traditional Methods: Mailers, newspaper ads, TV media interviews, presence at school events

Non-traditional: Website, Facebook, Phone and Text Banking

CHALLENGE 1: THE HUMAN CONNECTION

The Root Cause

COVID-ERA DIVISION created lasting mistrust among teachers, parents, and business owners-- many were reluctant to be seen publicly supporting the referendum.

FEAR OF BACKLASH meant even strong supporters were relatively silent. So many gave personal support to our team members, but never made public statements or shared our mission with their network.

What We Were Missing

- Personal video testimonials
- Quotes from teachers, parents and business leaders
- Volunteers to canvas or make actual phone calls
- Door-to-door canvassing
- Stories of positive impact
- Models of opportunities from other districts

CHALLENGE 2: PERCEPTION VS REALITY

Community Perception

“With all this building, why can’t you pay teachers? You MUST be wasting money somewhere”

“Cut admin salaries to pay teachers”

“We have a excellent, high ranking school district with a great reputation already, why would they need more money?”

“Tax increase is unaffordable and will force me to move.”

Reality

NACS receives an average of \$2,300 less PER STUDENT in total public funding than the rest of the districts in Allen County. It’s an income issue and not a misuse of funds issue.

The public did not understand the funding buckets or felt like they should not be responsible for paying for a “broken system”.

Overcoming our success while “doing more with less” was a challenging ask.

Communication about how their taxes would change was a challenge since SB1 was supposed to decrease taxes next year.

CHALLENGE 3: THE CONSEQUENCE GAP

Opportunities vs. Status Quo

Yes Voters

- Found value in the opportunities offered through CTE – matched community survey and strategic plan.
- Saw an investment in the community
- Valued teacher salaries and retention
- Wanted safer schools and an increase in resource officers

No Voters

- Things are just fine as they are
- I cannot afford this increase

How to Overcome

Clearer impactful consequences

If the referendum fails

- Class sizes increase to 30+ students minimum
- Expanded walk zones or no transportation
- Students will be behind their peers when applying for high paying trades positions

Show how other districts are expanding CTE and career pathways programming (videos or interviews + their funding amounts)

OTHER INFLUENCES

- **Well Funded Opposition:** A well-resourced opposition campaign successfully mobilized rural voters- areas that turned out at nearly 30% in some areas and did not favor a yes vote.
- **Government Shutdown:** Election fell during an active government shutdown with SNAP benefit cuts hitting households in our district. Affordability anxiety was real.
- **Election Day chaos:** Three voting locations opened with only two machines each, creating wait times approaching two hours at times. Early voting was not available within our district.