



TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Lori Weigel & Karoline McGrail
New Bridge Strategy

RE: Views of Ballot Proposals Related to School Funding

DATE: June 6, 2022

New Bridge Strategy recently completed a statistically valid and representative survey of voters throughout the Douglas County School District to assess voters' willingness to support ballot measures related to school funding.¹ The study found that support for a mill levy override and bond measures are below the 50% mark, no matter the amount tested, although any uses of funds are deemed to be important.

Specifically, the survey found that...

- **Fewer than half of voters give Douglas County Schools a grade of an A or B.** When respondents are asked to grade DCSD schools using a scale of A to F, 45 percent give the district a grade of A or B, which is equivalent to excellent and good. This grade is down somewhat from 52 percent when we first asked this question in 2014 and down 13 points from a recent high in 2018 (58 percent).
- **Many more voters say that they closely follow news and events in the Douglas County public school system than in 2014.** In 2014, 70 percent of voters said they follow news and events in the District and 23 percent did so "very closely." In 2022, there is a marked increase to 87 percent who say they follow District news and events and 42 percent who do so "very closely."
- **Both versions of the mill levy override proposal that were tested are below the 50 percent mark.** Half of respondents were asked to respond to a version of the MLO with an increase to 60 million dollars, while the other half heard or saw an amount of 40 million dollars. Respondents were provided with a fairly close approximation of how such a proposal might appear on the ballot as follows:

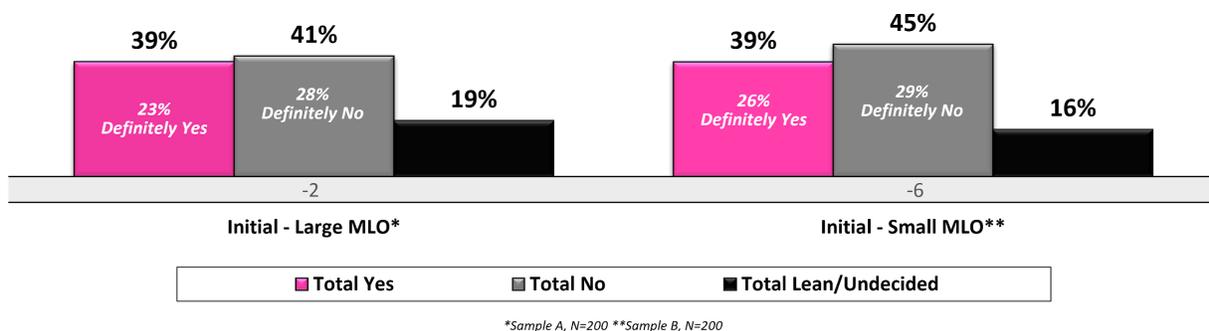
¹ **Methodology:** From May 6-12, 2022 New Bridge Strategy completed 400 interviews with registered voters throughout Douglas County on landlines and cell phones and via text message invitation to a web-based survey. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is $\pm 4.90\%$ at the 95% confidence interval; margins of sampling error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.

“Shall Douglas County School District taxes be increased **60 million dollars/40 million dollars** annually commencing in collection year 2023 and in each year thereafter for general fund purposes, including, but not limited to:

Attracting and retaining quality teachers and staff by increasing district salaries to be more competitive with neighboring school districts

and shall such tax increase be an additional property tax mill levy in excess of the levy authorized for the district’s general fund; provided that the district will be subject to an annual independent audit published on the district’s website and that expenditures will be subject to review by a board appointed citizens oversight committee; and shall the district collect property tax revenue previously approved by the voters notwithstanding any mill levy limitation; and shall the district be authorized to collect, retain and spend all revenues from such taxes and the earnings from the investment of such revenues as a voter approved revenue change?”

As can be seen on the following graph, the amount did not have a significant impact on voters’ reactions, as both versions received 39 percent support.



In comparison, the MLO proposals in 2018 were over 60 percent support.

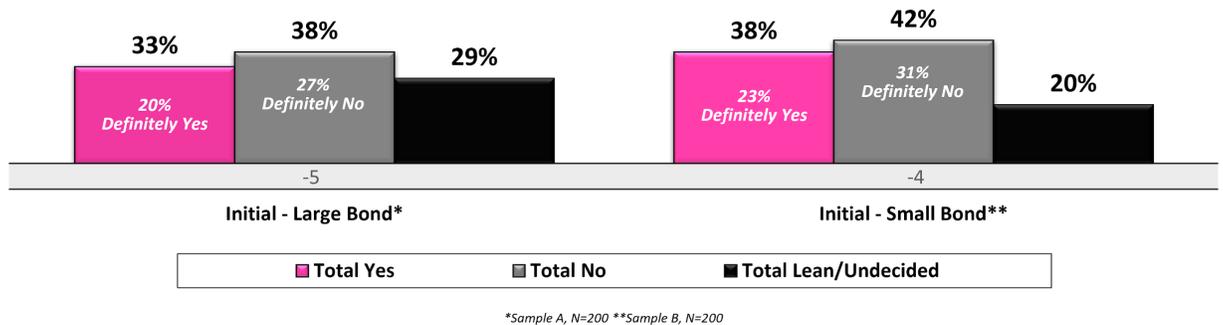
- **Fewer indicate that they would support a bond proposal, although there is slightly higher support for a smaller bond package.** We tested the same proposal at two different funding levels in order to assess if respondents would support the measure. Respondents were provided with a fairly close approximation of how such a proposal might appear on the ballot as follows:

“Shall Douglas County School District debt be increased **\$450/250** million, with a repayment cost of **\$775.4/416.1** million, and shall district taxes be increased not more than **\$49.7/32.6** million annually to pay such debt which is not expected to require any increase in the district’s current debt service mill levy of 8.054 mills, all for the purposes of...

- *Updating and repairing school and other buildings to continue providing safe, efficient, quality learning environments for students and teachers.*
- *Constructing new neighborhood elementary schools and creating additions to some existing middle schools to accommodate more students and reduce crowding at existing schools.*

and for acquiring, constructing or improving any capital assets that the district is authorized by law to own provided that the district will be subject to an annual independent audit published on the district’s website and expenditures will be subject to review by a board appointed citizens oversight committee; and shall the mill levy be imposed in any year in an amount sufficient to pay the principal of, premium, if any, and interest on such debt or any refunding debt (or to create a reserve for such payment) provided that any revenue produced by such mill levy shall not exceed \$32.6 million annually such debt to be evidenced by the issuance of general obligation bonds to be sold in one series or more, for a price above or below the principal amount of such series, on terms and conditions and with such maturities as permitted by law, including provisions for redemption of the bonds prior to maturity with or without payment of the premium of not to exceed three percent?

As can be seen on the following graph, fewer than 40 percent of voters support either version of the proposal.



In comparison, the bond proposals tested in 2018 both received majority support.

- **While the proposals do not receive majority support, the vast majority of District voters say that a number of ways in which additional funds could be used are “extremely” or “very important.”** As the following graph indicates, more than three-in-four say these are at least somewhat important uses of funds.

			<u>% Total Important</u>
Attracting and retaining quality teachers and staff by increasing district salaries to be more competitive with neighboring districts	% Extremely/Very Important	74%	92%
Increasing availability of student programming in career and technical education		70%	93%
Updating and repairing school buildings to continue providing safe, efficient, quality learning environments for students and staff		69%	92%
Enhancing safety and security resources		68%	94%
Constructing new neighborhood elementary schools and creating additions to existing neighborhood middle schools to reduce crowding in existing schools		43%	77%