

**COMMUNITY RESEARCH
FALL 2008 COMMUNITY SURVEYS**



St. Johns Public Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT
Likely Voters Survey September 2008
Every Residence Survey October 2008

October 22nd, 2008

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INTRODUCTION

St. Johns Public Schools is implementing its new strategic plan. Parents, administrators and other staff, and board members have teamed together during the past two years to develop this plan. Keeping in mind the district's vision to "preparing students to be successful tomorrow," a series of 15 public forums and numerous meetings with PTO parents, staff and community groups discussed the district values, educational programs and services, technology, and facilities and operations.

Key issues uncovered included inconsistencies in class sizes across the district and the subsequent effect on staffing and operating costs, a likely State mandated change to all-day, every-day kindergarten, the growing demand to teach to individual student learning levels (from at-risk to academically advanced) and learning styles, and technology and facility upgrades to meet 21st Century everyday teaching and learning needs.

Enrollment is projected to be flat, continuing the trend from recent years. The district's eligibility to participate in the State's School Loan fund allows for approximately \$72 million in new, expanded, renovated and upgraded facility and technology improvements with a net ZERO increase in mills to address the key issues stated above. However, this does extend current debt repayments approximately 23 years.

The strategic planning group's preliminary facility and technology plans include:

- ❖ Approximately \$37 million for additions, renovations and improvements at St. Johns High School -- includes additional and renovated classrooms, media center and music areas (\$12 million), infrastructure improvements (\$15 million), auditorium renovations and additions (\$3 million), gymnasium additions and renovations (\$7 million).
- ❖ Approximately \$6 million in technology upgrades, especially to enhance everyday teaching and learning in the classrooms.
- ❖ Approximately \$16 million in athletic facility improvements – a new swimming pool (\$9 million) to replace the existing aging pool (which is converted into additional space for the school's music program); new bleachers and other renovations at the athletic stadium, and improvements for the baseball, softball, soccer and track fields (\$6 million) and synthetic turf to provide more use year-round and reduce annual maintenance costs (\$600,000).
- ❖ Approximately \$13 million to build a new k-1 (or preK-1) elementary school centrally located on available land on the district's main campus, close four (East Essex, East Olive, Eureka and Riley) of the six elementary schools, and create a grades 2-3 elementary school and grades 4-5 elementary school at Gateway and Oakview. Also includes infrastructure improvements to St. Johns Middle School.

An alternative option to upgrade the six elementary schools costing approximately \$9 to \$10 million, but leave the district with an additional \$1 million to \$2 million in annual operating and maintenance overhead costs, was rejected as not affordable for St. Johns Public Schools continuing operating budget. This alternative option would have a detrimental effect on the district's ability to control overcrowded classrooms in the long-term.

As part of this strategic planning process and making related decisions for a bond issue proposal, the St. Johns district leadership acknowledges that it is essential to listen again to its parents and community and evaluate their levels of support and opposition for these capital additions and improvements. District leaders also recognize that professionally conducted community research is the initial information awareness step in a successful bond issue ballot campaign. Consequently, St. Johns Public Schools contracted with Gartner & Associates LLC to submit to conduct related community research.

Specific research goals include providing the district's strategic planning group, Board and administration with better understanding and more insight into:

1. The perceived urgency to upgrade and improve facilities and technology to enhance St. Johns Public Schools' capabilities to meet today's 21st Century educational needs.
2. The perceived urgency for improvements not directly related to classroom teaching and learning. These are the specific components of bond issues that frequently serve to mobilize opposition in many communities and act as magnets for "no" voters.
3. The levels of support and oppositions to consolidate St. Johns six elementary schools into three – comparing the educational and cost savings benefits with the emotional loss with closing neighborhood/community schools and changing attendance boundaries, and perspectives on alternate uses for the closed elementary school buildings.
4. The levels of support and oppositions to best deliver St. Johns elementary school education with a K-1 (or preK-1), 2-3, and 4-5 grades facility configuration instead of the historic k-5 grades configuration.
5. The comparative degree of support and opposition for one or more bond issues next February 2009 to finance as much as \$72 million with a ZERO increase in mills by extending debt repayments 23 years.
6. The degree to which its community's taxpayers trust St. Johns Public Schools to spend its money prudently and wisely.

In the first phase of this community research study, seven focus groups were conducted in late April and early May 2008 with representative St. Johns current parents, teachers and other staff, 12th grade students, and St. Johns business, civic, municipal, religious and other community leaders.

The focus group findings guided direction for the second phase of this community research -- two separate surveys – one with likely voters based on previous voting participation and the second to all residents in the St. Johns Public Schools district. A key finding from the focus groups was to divide the proposed facility additions, renovations and improvements into three separate bond issue extensions— one devoted to instructional improvements at St. Johns High School and updating technology district-wide, a second for athletic improvements combining a new pool, the stadium and synthetic turf, and a third for the elementary schools.

Gartner developed a questionnaire with consultation from the district's Board and administrations. The same questionnaire was used for both surveys, except for a couple of minor differences such as the "please complete and return by" date and the header title to distinguish them for data entry.

The Likely Voters survey was mailed September 16th by ICS Marketing Support Services (Lansing) to 1,781 district registered voters who had voted in one of eight previous local elections during the past five years identified by the district's Board members. These past elections include school board elections in 2006, 2007 and 2008, and millages for City of St. Johns (2004), Clinton County Transit System (2004), Lansing Community College (2005), Bingham Township Fire District (2008) and Bingham Township Library (2008). The list of registered voters who voted in at least one of these eight past elections was acquired from Practical Political Consulting (Lansing). Prepaid return postage was imprinted on this Likely Voters survey, and the introductory letter also included the survey's availability online via a link on the district's web site home page.

This Likely Voters survey was completed and returned by 530 district residents during the September 17th – October 15th period, which equals a very acceptable 30% response rate. The 530 respondents include 291 parents with children currently attending St. Johns Public Schools and 239 other residents of the district. The 530 respondents also include 71 staff members of St. Johns Public Schools.

The proportionately adjusted sampling error for a completed sample of 530 out of a population of 1,781 ranges between plus or minus 0.7% to 3.6% at the 95% confidence interval.

The Every-Residence survey was mailed October 2nd by ICS to 6,800 homeowners who were not included in the Likely Voters survey. The list was compiled by ICS, with the Likely Voters list merged and purged from the list of all homeowner addresses in the district. Respondents to this Every-Residence survey were not provided with any prepaid postage mechanism, and asked to either mail it to the district or drop it off at any school building. The introductory letter also included the survey's availability online via a link on the district's web site home page. This Every-Residence survey was completed and returned by 579 district residents during the October 3rd – October 21st period, which equals a 9% response rate.

Press releases written and distributed by the Board assisted in the public's awareness of the surveys and their importance to the Board's planning and decisions. The more targeted Likely Voters survey is the more important one of the two surveys to guide the Board's decisions to put specific bond issue extensions on the ballot.

The online survey was hosted transparently on the Vovici (formerly known as WebSurveyor) servers. The Vovici system was built specifically for online surveys, with substantial redundant infrastructure for 24-7 access. Gartner's annual subscription provided access to the Vovici system at zero additional cost to St. Johns Public Schools. Data entry on all returned printed surveys was performed by district administrative staff, using the same online survey versions for convenience and to minimize any data entry errors to virtually zero. Among the 530 responses to the Likely Voters survey, 224 were submitted directly online and 306 printed copies were returned. Among the 579 responses to the Every-Residence survey, 103 were submitted directly online and 476 printed copies were returned.

The research design, questionnaires, web access, data analysis and this report were developed by Gartner & Associates.

The contributions by the St. Johns Core Strategic Planning Committee and especially Stephanie Dyer (chair), St. Johns Public Schools superintendent Bob Kudwa, Mark McKeown and Janet Thelen from the superintendent's office, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction Scott Henry, and St. Johns Board President Bill Tennant and Board trustee Rhonda Dedyne are duly and appreciably noted here.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even in better economic times and with a strong turnout from parents with children currently attending St. Johns Public Schools, voters in the SJPS district are likely to only approve the \$43 million, ZERO mills bond issue extension to upgrade and renovate St. Johns High School and update technology district-wide.

These improvements are **perceived as “urgent and essential” by more than half (52%) of the current SJPS parents and by one-third (34%) of the other residents** in the Likely Voters survey. Moreover, very few perceive these improvements to the high school and for technology as “not needed at all.”

Then taking this perceived urgency to an actual bond issue extension vote, the Likely Voters survey shows **strong support from current SJPS parents -- 49% “definitely yes” versus 14% “definitely or probably no” and acceptable support from the other residents -- 35% “definitely yes” versus 29% “definitely or probably no.”** Even when this bond issue extension is also on the ballot with the other two bond issue extensions for the athletic facility improvements and the new elementary school (still as three separate votes, but together totaling \$72 million), these percentages barely change.

However, the current economic instability may still cause others who have historically not voted in local school elections, bond issues or millages to actually vote in order to not pay more taxes. **“This may be an inappropriate time to ask for an extension of our debt”** is a representative example of this concern and current mood of the electorate, and casts doubt on a successful bond issue extension vote for even the high school and technology improvements. This concern was expressed more frequently in the comments of the respondents in late September and early October than by those who replied more in mid-September. The tone of the respondents to the later Every-Residence survey is especially more negative, especially with respect to the economy’s troubles.

The other two areas of facility improvements and related bond issue extensions evaluated – for **athletic facilities and a new elementary school – are questionable among the Likely Voters respondents, even in a better economy.** Opposition is considerably more pronounced among the Every-Residence survey respondents, including current parents and as expected from the other residents.

There is just insufficient perceived urgency for a new swimming pool, athletic stadium and field renovations, and especially a synthetic turf. **Perceived urgency for the synthetic turf is especially problematic**, with only 7% of current parents and 3% of other residents in the Likely Voters survey saying it is “urgent and essential.” Moreover, more than one-third of current parents (36%) and almost one-half of other residents (48%) regard the synthetic turf as “not needed at all.”

With all three bond issue extensions on the ballot, this \$16 million bond issue extension for athletic facility improvements receives **almost as many “no” responses (31%) as it does “definitely yes” responses (35%) among current SJPS parents and strong opposition from other residents -- 44% of other residents indicate they will vote “no,” almost twice as many as who say they are “definitely yes” (23%) voters.**

“Education of the children is first, then the luxury of sports” and “Synthetic turf - ridiculous!” are representative comments explaining their “no” votes. This bond issue extension ***perhaps could be pursued in better economic times if the synthetic turf would be eliminated.*** At that time, it may also be wise to separate the new swimming pool and the athletic stadium and fields renovations into two separate bond issues.

There is ***substantial dissatisfaction with the classroom sizes in the elementary schools -- more than twice as many of the current parents are dissatisfied (59%) than who are satisfied (28%), including a substantial 34% who are “very dissatisfied.”*** Also, ***many more of the other residents are dissatisfied (46%) than who are satisfied (29%).***

However, there is ***at least as much strong opposition as there is strong support for the district’s proposed recommendation to close the four rural elementary schools and build a new elementary school*** either in town or on the growing south side of the district -- ***23% of current SJPS parents and 21% of other residents “strongly support” it, while 25% of current parents and 28% of other residents “definitely oppose” it.***

With all three bond issue extensions on the ballot and totaling \$72 million, a \$13 million bond issue extension to build a new elementary school and minor renovations to Gateway, Oakview and St. Johns Middle School receives ***at least as many “no” responses (31%) as it does “definitely yes” responses (30%) among current SJPS parents*** and ***significantly more “no” responses (37%) than “definitely yes” responses (28%) among other residents*** responding to the Likely Voters survey. Additionally, the percentage of “definitely no” voters (28%) is equal to the percentage of “definitely yes” voters among the other residents.

Reasons given to vote “no” reflect the opposition to closing the four rural elementary schools and concern about longer bus rides ... “What some have termed mere emotions and nostalgia for the small school environment, I call proven results. I see both rural and town on a daily basis and I choose small schools” and “It would end up costing more money because of more busing and longer bus rides.”

Opposition to consolidating the elementary schools is unlikely to dissipate unless more dramatic improvements to the education delivered to all St. Johns students are offered.

One suggestion from a parent is to relocate and improve the vocational education programs ... “Can we look at using the country schools for Vo tech programs? The automotive/shop areas are so outdated, that they could use the existing paid-for buildings.” A new high school designed to deliver 21st Century teaching and learning rather than a new elementary school would be an even bolder solution. Then, the existing high school could serve a variety of purposes, such as an elementary school and as an in-town early childhood center for preschool and the economically mandated all-day every-day kindergarten. It could also be utilized partially as a community education facility.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. *As expected, significantly more parents with children currently attending St. Johns Public Schools believe that the facilities improvements being considered by St. Johns Public Schools are “urgent and essential” than do the other residents without children in the schools.* And conversely, more of the other residents without children currently in the schools reply “not needed at all” than do the current parents, especially for a new synthetic turf.

Urgency of facilities improvements among Likely Voters

Improvements, upgrades, renovations and additions	“Urgent and essential”		“Not needed at all”	
	% of current parents	% of other residents	% of current parents	% of other residents
Technology	54	37	1	4
Safety & security	40	42	3	7
Energy & operational efficiency	44	40	1	4
St. Johns High School	52	34	5	12
New swimming pool	33	26	11	17
New bleachers and other renovations to stadium & fields	31	17	11	17
Synthetic turf	7	3	36	48
Elementary classroom size*	34	25	7	8
(n)	(291)	(239)	(291)	(239)

* Note: “Very dissatisfied” replies reported under “urgent and essential” and “very satisfied” replies under “not needed at all.”

2. Among the seven categories of facilities improvements (excluding for now overcrowded elementary school classrooms) evaluated in this survey, **upgrading and renovating St. Johns High School (52%) and updating technology district-wide (54%) received the two highest percentages of “urgent and essential” replies from the current parents** in the Likely Voters survey.

3. Comparatively, the **other residents without children in the schools give nearly equivalent urgency to safety and security improvements (42%), energy and operational efficiency improvements (40%), updating technology district-wide (37%), and upgrading and renovating St. Johns High School (34%).**

4. **Athletic facility improvements -- the new swimming pool, new bleachers and other renovations to the stadium and fields, and especially a synthetic turf – are perceived as “urgent and essential” by significantly fewer current parents and other residents.**

Perceived urgency for **the synthetic turf is especially problematic**, with only 7% of current parents and 3% of other residents in the Likely Voters survey saying it is “urgent and essential.” Moreover, more than one-third of current parents (36%) and almost one-half of other residents (48%) regard the synthetic turf as “not needed at all.”

5. In the Likely Voters survey, there are ***more than twice as many of the current parents who are dissatisfied (59%) than who are satisfied (28%) with the classroom sizes in the elementary schools, including a substantial 34% who are “very dissatisfied.”***

Even among the ***other residents, many more are dissatisfied (46%) than who are satisfied (29%),*** with another 24% replying “don’t know.”

6. However, there is ***at least as much strong opposition as there is strong support in the Likely Voters survey for the district’s proposed recommendation to close the four rural elementary schools and build a new elementary school*** either in town or on the growing south side of the district.

While 23% of current SJPS parents and 21% of other residents “strongly support” this recommendation, 25% of current parents and 28% of other residents “definitely oppose” it.

7. The ***overall dissatisfaction with the elementary school consolidation plan is further reflected in the preference percentages associated with the five grade configuration/new school location options*** in the Likely Voters survey.

Three of the five options have higher “most dislike” percentages than “prefer most” percentages among both the current parents and the other residents.

Both current parents (25%) and other residents (29%) responding to the Likely Voters survey most prefer (Option 1) the new elementary school built in-town on the corner of Townsend & Lansing as an early elementary school for grades preK-1, and then house grades 2-3 at Oakview and grades 4-5 at Gateway. However, this same option receives at least as many “most dislike” responses among the current parents (28%), and more than any of the other four options.

Comparatively, the other residents (29%) responding to the Likely Voters survey “most dislike” (Option 5) the new elementary school built in the growing southern side of the district for grades preK-5 and with a grades preK-2 school at Oakview and grades 3-5 school at Gateway.

8. The Likely Voters survey shows ***strong support from current SJPS parents for a \$43 million bond issue extension with ZERO additional mills to upgrade and renovate St. Johns High School and update technology district-wide -- 49% “definitely yes” versus 14%***

“definitely or probably no.” When this bond issue extension is also on the ballot with the other two bond issue extensions for the athletic facility improvements and the new elementary school (still as three separate votes, but together totaling \$72 million), support from current parents is still strong – again 49% “definitely yes” versus a few more (17%) “definitely or probably no” replies.

This same bond issue extension shows ***acceptable support from the other residents -- 35% “definitely yes” versus 29% “definitely or probably no”*** when asked by itself. When grouped with the other two bond issue extensions, these percentages from the other residents barely change – 36% “definitely yes” versus 31% “definitely or probably no.”

9. ***Reasons to vote “no”*** to this bond issue extension to upgrade and renovate St. Johns High School and update technology district-wide are ***primarily related to not wanting to pay more taxes for anything, the poor economy, and disbelief that the suggested improvements will materially enhance the education provided to students*** ... “Taxes are very high in St. Johns” and “The economy is terrible - bad timing” and “Fancy rooms don't teach. Teachers who Teach do.”

10. It is ***uncertain and perhaps questionable if either the current SJPS parents or the other residents responding to the Likely Voters survey would support a \$16 million bond issue extension for a new pool and renovations to the athletic stadium and fields, including a new synthetic turf at the stadium.***

With all three bond issue extensions on the ballot and totaling \$72 million, this receives statistically ***almost as many “no” responses (31%) as it does “definitely yes” responses (35%) among current SJPS parents residents*** responding to the Likely Voters survey.

Moreover, ***44% of other residents indicate they will vote “no,” almost twice as many as who say they are “definitely yes” (23%) voters.*** Additionally, the percentages of “definitely no” voters (26%) is at least as large as the percentage of “definitely yes” voters among the other residents without children attending SJPS schools.

The percentage responses are very similar when this bond issue extension was evaluated earlier in the survey after mention of the high school renovations but before mention of the new elementary school.

11. ***Reasons to vote “no”*** to this bond issue extension for these athletic facility improvements are ***primarily related to again the poor economy, but also even more opposition to funding improvements perceived as not directly related to education, and especially to the synthetic turf ...*** “Check the economy! You people are in the dark” and “Education of the children is first, then the luxury of sports” and “Synthetic turf - ridiculous!”

12. It is also ***uncertain and questionable if the current SJPS parents and the other residents responding to the Likely Voters survey would support a \$13 million bond issue extension to build a new elementary school and minor renovations to Gateway, Oakview and St. Johns Middle School.***

With all three bond issue extensions on the ballot and totaling \$72 million, this receives ***at least as many “no” responses (31%) as it does “definitely yes” responses (30%) among current SJPS parents*** and ***significantly more “no” responses (37%) than “definitely yes” responses (28%) among other residents*** responding to the Likely Voters survey.

Additionally, the percentage of “definitely no” voters (28%) is equal to the percentage of “definitely yes” voters among the other residents.

13. ***Reasons to vote “no”*** to this bond issue extension for a new elementary school are ***related somewhat to the poor economy, but with even more opposition to closing the four rural elementary schools and concern about longer bus rides ...*** “Learn to live with the economy as I have to do” and “What some have termed mere emotions and nostalgia for the small school environment, I call proven results. I see both rural and town on a daily basis and I choose small schools” and “It would end up costing more money because of more busing and longer bus rides.”

14. As expected even with all three bond issue extensions on the ballot, there is ***strong support from St. Johns Public Schools staff.*** Among staff responding to the Likely Voters survey, percentages of “definitely yes” voters include: 64% to upgrade and renovate St. Johns High School and update technology district-wide (versus just 7% “no”), 54% for the athletic facilities renovations (versus 18% “no”), and 53% to build a new elementary school (versus 23% “no”).

15. Approximately ***two-thirds of both the current SJPS parents (65%) and other residents (69%) responding to the Likely Voters survey feel St. Johns Public Schools with its taxpayers' money***, including 19% of current SJPS parents and 23% of other residents who reply “very responsible.”

Among the Likely Voters, only 8% of current SJPS parents and 7% of other residents reply “not responsible at all.”

16. Approximately ***five-sixths of both the current SJPS parents (84%) and other residents (82%) responding to the Likely Voters survey would recommend to families to enroll their children in St. Johns Public Schools***, including 42% of current SJPS parents and 41% of other residents who reply “definitely yes.”

Among the Likely Voters, just 3% of current SJPS parents and 4% of the other residents reply “definitely no.”

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RESPONDENTS PROFILE

Parents with children presently attending St. Johns Public Schools

	% of total sample	
	Likely voters survey	Every-residence survey
Parents with children presently attending SJPS	55	49
Other residents	45	51
(n)	(530)	(579)

St. Johns Public Schools attending

	% of current parents	
	Likely voters	Every-residence
East Essex	5	7
East Olive	7	8
Eureka	8	6
Gateway	7	7
Oakview	9	11
Riley	11	17
St. Johns Middle School	37	34
St. Johns High School	44	42
Wilson Center	1	1
(n)	(291)	(281)

On staff at St. Johns Public Schools

	% of total sample	
	Likely voters	Every-residence
SJPS staff member	14	5
(n)	(530)	(579)

Residents with children attending other schools

	% of total sample	
	Likely voters	Every-residence
Public school in another district	3	3
Parochial or religious school	7	4
Private school	<1	1
Charter school	0	<1
Home schooled	1	1
(n)	(530)	(579)

Parents with special education children

	% of current parents	
	Likely voters	Every-residence
With children in special education programs	10	8
(n)	(273)	(264)

Tenure residing in St. Johns Public Schools district

	Likely voters survey		Every-residence survey	
	% of current parents	% of other residents	% of current parents	% of other residents
Less than 1 year	0	1	1	1
1 to 5 years	6	5	13	7
6-10 years	16	6	16	8
11 to 15 years	14	2	14	5
More than 15 years	64	85	55	80
(n)	(279)	(239)	(271)	(291)

Internet access at home

	Likely voters survey		Every-residence survey	
	% of current parents	% of other residents	% of current parents	% of other residents
Yes, high-speed	58	53	56	40
Yes, dial-up	31	28	30	32
(n)	(275)	(226)	(271)	(292)



Community Research Parents & Residents Survey

September 9th, 2008

Greetings:

We're off to a fast start in the new school year that promises exciting opportunities for St. Johns Public School students, including the implementation of our strategic plan. Parents and school district residents, administrators and staff, students and board members have worked together during the past two years to develop the plan that focuses on the district's vision of "Preparing Students Today... to be Successful Tomorrow."

This past spring, the strategic planning team conducted 15 public forums and attended numerous PTO meetings, staff meetings and met with community groups to appraise the district values, educational programs and services, technology, and facilities and operations. An independent research firm was also contracted by the St. Johns Board of Education to conduct seven, focus group sessions with parents and other residents, representatives of local businesses and civic organizations, staff and students.

Discussions at the various meetings identified the following key issues:

- Today's classroom instruction must focus on individual student learning levels (from at-risk to academically advanced) and learning styles.
- Technology and facility upgrades are necessary to meet teaching and learning needs of the 21st century.
- Undersized and outdated classrooms at St. Johns High School, especially in science and fine arts instruction, along with its auditorium and supporting space for music, drama and art programs.
- Inconsistent and inequitable differences in classroom size and teaching/learning environments between the district's four older and smaller rural elementary schools, and two newer and larger in-town elementary schools.
- Being academically ready for school from the first day of kindergarten, and pending State of Michigan legislation that will mandate a change to all-day, every-day kindergarten.
- Athletic facilities needing repair, replacement or additions; ex: additional gym and locker room at the high school to accommodate changes in MHSAA girls athletic scheduling, new bleachers at the athletic stadium, athletic fields improvements, new swimming pool.

The district's eligibility to participate in the State of Michigan School Loan fund allows for a *bond issue extension with a net ZERO increase in mills to property taxes to finance approximately \$72 million in new, expanded, renovated and upgraded facility and technology improvements that will address the key issues noted above.* An extension of the existing issue would *extend current debt repayments approximately 23 years.*

Please read and complete the following survey, and return it no later than September 30th (October 10th for the Every Residence Survey). All responses are confidential and anonymous. This survey is also available online at the school website <http://stjohns.edzone.net>; click on the link labeled "Community Survey."

Your input and assistance in completing the survey is greatly appreciated as we work together to guarantee the continued success of all SJPS students - now and for decades to come.

Thank you.

Bill Tennant, president St. Johns Board of Education and Robert Kudwa, superintendent St. Johns Public Schools

Your Family

1. Which St. Johns Public Schools do your children attend? (circle as many as apply)

None		
East Essex Elementary	East Olive Elementary	Eureka Elementary
Gateway Elementary	Oakview Elementary	Riley Elementary
St. Johns Middle School	Wilson Center	St. Johns High School

2. Do you have any children attending a public school in another school district, a parochial or other religious school, a private school, a charter school, or being home schooled? (select as many as apply)

None	Yes, a public school in another school district	Yes, a charter school
	Yes, a parochial or other religious school	Yes, home schooled
	Yes, a private school	

3. Do you have any children in a special needs or special education program?

Yes No

4. Are you also a staff member of St. Johns Public Schools?

Yes No

5. How long have you lived in the St. Johns Public Schools district?

Less than 1 year	1-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	11-15 yrs	More than 15 yrs
Do not live in the St. Johns district				

6. Do you have Internet access at home?

No Yes, high-speed (cable, dsl, satellite) Yes, dial-up

District-wide Facilities Improvements Importance

Our strategic planning team has identified a list of possible improvements, upgrades, additions and repairs throughout the district, and arranged them into the following categories:

- **Technology upgrades** includes computers, multimedia, network and telecommunications equipment to improve both the district’s technology infrastructure and classroom teaching and learning.
- **Safety and security improvements** to better monitor building security and supervision.
- **Energy and operational efficiency improvements** such as mechanical and heating systems, electrical and lighting upgrades, restrooms and parking lots, especially at St. Johns High School.

1-3. For each of the following categories of improvements, please tell us if you think they are “urgent and essential”, or are “important but not urgent,” or “would be nice to have,” or are “not needed at all.”

	Urgent and essential	Important but not urgent	Nice to have	Not needed at all	Don't know
1. Technology upgrades	—	—	—	—	—
2. Safety & security	—	—	—	—	—
3. Energy & operational efficiency	—	—	—	—	—

St. Johns High School

Parents, staff and students have voiced their concern about undersized and outdated facilities at St. Johns High School that are now inadequate for today’s learning and teaching, especially in the science and music areas. This includes:

- Additional and renovated classrooms and labs, music support area, and the media center (library) -- approximately \$12 million.
- Infrastructure improvements related to energy efficiency and security such as mechanical and heating systems, electrical and lighting upgrades, restrooms and parking lots -- approximately \$15 million.
- Auditorium renovations -- approximately \$3 million.
- A second gym and a second girls locker room at the high school, especially to avoid Title IX violations with boys and girls basketball now played in the same season -- approximately \$7 million.

Additionally, approximately \$6 million is need to upgrade technology not only at the high school, but also throughout our district at all school buildings. This is mostly for computers and multimedia equipment to enhance everyday teaching and learning in the classrooms, but also includes network and telecommunications infrastructure.

1. How urgent is the need to upgrade and renovate St. Johns High School with additional and renovated classrooms and labs, infrastructure improvements, a renovated auditorium, and a second gym and second girls locker room?

Urgent and essential Important but not urgent Nice to have Not needed at all Don’t know

2. How would you personally vote on a bond issue extension to finance approximately \$43 million to upgrade and renovate St. Johns High School plus technology upgrades at all school buildings throughout our district, with **ZERO additional mills**?

Definitely yes Probably yes Probably no Definitely no Don’t know

3. If you replied probably or definitely no, why?

Athletic facilities

Parents, students and staff have also identified the following athletic facility improvements totaling approximately \$16 million:

- A new swimming pool to replace the existing pool. The pool has aged to the point that regular maintenance and repairs are very costly, and building new is more economical in the long run. Additionally, the space occupied by our current pool could be better used to accommodate our growing fine arts instructional and co-curricular programs. Our pool is used extensively as a community pool for Sea Lions, open swimming and especially by senior citizens, in addition to its use in physical education classes and for the high school swim team -- approximately \$9 million.
- New bleachers and other renovations at the athletic stadium, and improvements for the baseball, softball, soccer and track fields -- approximately \$6 million.
- A synthetic turf at the athletic stadium to provide more use year-round and reduce annual maintenance costs -- approximately \$600,000.

1-3. For each of the following categories of improvements, please tell us if you think they are “urgent and essential”, or are “important but not urgent,” or “would be nice to have,” or are “not needed at all.”

	Urgent and essential	Important but not urgent	Nice to have	Not needed at all	Don't know
1. New swimming pool	—	—	—	—	—
2. New bleachers, and other renovations to the athletic stadium and fields	—	—	—	—	—
3. Synthetic turf	—	—	—	—	—

4. How would you personally vote on a bond issue extension to finance approximately \$16 million to upgrade and renovate the athletic facilities described above in our district, again with **ZERO additional mills**?

Definitely yes Probably yes Probably no Definitely no Don't know

5. If you replied probably or definitely no, why?

Elementary Schools Classroom Size & Facilities Inequities, & Grade Configurations

Upgrading the existing six schools would cost approximately \$9 to \$10 million, but also leave the district each year with an additional \$500,000 to \$1 million in operating and maintenance overhead costs. Moreover, this still does not address the classroom size inequities from one elementary school to another, and even from one grade to another in the same school because East Essex, East Olive, Eureka and Riley are too small to have more than one or two sections (classrooms) in any grade.

Therefore, the district’s strategic planning committee is suggesting that our six current elementary schools be consolidated into three schools – Gateway, Oakview and a new school to be built. This could eliminate the inequities in classroom size. Our district would then put the East Essex, East Olive, Eureka and Riley buildings up for sale after a new school is constructed. A new early elementary school plus minor renovations to Gateway and Oakview (and to St. Johns Middle School) is estimated to cost approximately \$13 million.

Additionally because of the State’s legal requirements, ***our projected flat or even slightly declining district-wide enrollment prevents the district from adding space to any elementary school to solve classroom size difficulties without simultaneously eliminating classroom space in the other schools.*** School operating costs and funding from the State of Michigan have made it unaffordable for even the most affluent districts in our state to have classrooms with fewer than 20 students.

This suggested change also allows our district to begin its own high-quality preschool program – operated on a fee basis at break-even cost -- to enhance academic readiness from the very first day of kindergarten. It also provides our district with the flexibility for the pending State of Michigan legislation phasing in a change to all day-every day kindergarten.

Because smaller classroom sizes can be most assured with more sections of a single grade at any one school building, the district’s strategic planning committee is suggesting to build the new school for the early elementary grades preK-1, and then create a grades 2-3 school at Oakview and grades 4-5 school at Gateway. However, other grade configuration options are also possible to have fewer transitions for elementary school students from one building to another. While the district does have available land on the corner of Townsend and Lansing for a new elementary school, it is also possible for a new elementary school to instead be built toward the southern side of our St. Johns district (at a site to be determined) to accommodate the expected population trends, especially if the preference is to have three schools each with grades preK-5.

1. How satisfied are you with the current classroom sizes in our elementary schools, with some grades in some schools having 20 to 25 students in a classroom, while other grades in the same school or in different schools have 30 to 35 students in a classroom, just because of the number of students in a particular year in that geographic part of our St. Johns district?

Very satisfied Somewhat satisfied Somewhat dissatisfied Very dissatisfied Don't know

2. To what extent do you support or oppose the strategic planning committee's recommendation to consolidate our six current elementary schools into three schools – Gateway, Oakview and a new school to be built – and close East Essex, East Olive, Eureka and Riley?

Strongly support Probably support Probably oppose Definitely oppose Don't know

3. If the four smaller elementary schools were closed and a new elementary school were to be built, which of the following grade configuration and location options do you **prefer**?

- The new school is built on the corner of Townsend and Lansing as an early elementary school for grades preK-1, and then house grades 2-3 at Oakview and grades 4-5 at Gateway.
- The new school is built on the corner of Townsend and Lansing for grades preK-3, with Oakview also for grades preK-3 (to have fewer building transitions for the younger students), and then grades 4-5 at Gateway.
- The new school is built on the corner of Townsend and Lansing for grades preK-5, with Gateway and Oakview also serving grades preK-5.
- The new school is built toward the growing southern side of our St. Johns district as an elementary school for grades preK-5, with Gateway and Oakview also serving grades preK-5.
- The new school is built toward the growing southern side of our St. Johns district as an elementary school for grades preK-5, but then create a grades preK-2 school at Oakview and grades 3-5 school at Gateway to better manage classroom size and keep it small.
- Don't know

4. Which of the following grade configuration and location options do you **most dislike/oppose**?

- The new school is built on the corner of Townsend and Lansing as an early elementary school for grades preK-1, and then house grades 2-3 at Oakview and grades 4-5 at Gateway.
- The new school is built on the corner of Townsend and Lansing for grades preK-3, with Oakview also for grades preK-3 (to have fewer building transitions for the younger students), and then grades 4-5 at Gateway.
- The new school is built on the corner of Townsend and Lansing for grades preK-5, with Gateway and Oakview also serving grades preK-5.
- The new school is built toward the growing southern side of our St. Johns district as an elementary school for grades preK-5, with Gateway and Oakview also serving grades preK-5.
- The new school is built toward the growing southern side of our St. Johns district as an elementary school for grades preK-5, but then create a grades preK-2 school at Oakview and grades 3-5 school at Gateway to better manage classroom size and keep it small.

5. How would you personally vote to on a bond issue extension to finance approximately \$13 million for a new elementary school and minor renovations to Gateway, Oakview and St. Johns Middle School, again with **ZERO additional mills**?

Definitely yes Probably yes Probably no Definitely no Don't know

6. If you replied probably or definitely no, why?

Other Bond Issue Options

1-3. How would you personally vote on each of the three bond issue extensions described above, if all three were separately on the ballot and totaled approximately \$72 million, but still with **ZERO additional mills**?

	Definitely yes	Probably yes	Probably no	Definitely no	Don't know
1. \$43 million to upgrade and renovate St. Johns High School plus technology upgrades at all school buildings	—	—	—	—	—
2. \$16 million to build a new pool and renovate the athletic stadium and fields	—	—	—	—	—
3. \$13 million for a new elementary school and minor renovations to Gateway, Oakview and St. Johns Middle School	—	—	—	—	—

In Closing

- How financially responsible do you believe St. Johns Public Schools is with its taxpayers' money?
 Very responsible Somewhat responsible Somewhat not responsible Not responsible at all Don't know
- Would you recommend to families to enroll their children in St. Johns Public Schools?
 Definitely yes Probably yes Probably no Definitely no Don't know
- Do you have any comments about the issues in this survey or anything else about St. Johns Public Schools?

Thank you! Your answers will provide valuable assistance to our St. Johns Public Schools planning.

Please complete and return this survey by September 30th (October 10th for the Every Residence survey).

Random sample survey of likely voters
<http://vovici.com/wsb.dll/s/405cg374c0>

Every-residence survey of parents & residents
<http://vovici.com/wsb.dll/s/405cg376f5>