

12-15-2007

An Anatomy Of An Unsuccessful School Bond Election In A Rural School District

Leigh Barrett Mobley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/td>

Recommended Citation

Mobley, Leigh Barrett, "An Anatomy Of An Unsuccessful School Bond Election In A Rural School District" (2007). *Theses and Dissertations*. 470.

<https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/td/470>

This Dissertation - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Scholars Junction. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholars Junction. For more information, please contact scholcomm@msstate.libanswers.com.

AN ANATOMY OF AN UNSUCCESSFUL SCHOOL BOND
ELECTION IN A RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

By

Leigh Barrett Mobley

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Educational Administration
in Instructional Systems, Leadership, and Workforce Development
in the College of Education

Mississippi State, Mississippi

December 2007

Copyright by
Leigh Barrett Mobley
2007

AN ANATOMY OF AN UNSUCCESSFUL SCHOOL BOND
ELECTION IN A RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

By

Leigh Barrett Mobley

Approved:

Jerry Mathews
Associate Professor
Instructional Systems, Leadership,
and Workforce Development
(Director of Dissertation)
(Graduate Coordinator)

Ed Davis
Assistant Professor
Instructional Systems, Leadership
and Workforce Development
(Committee Member)

Anthony A. Olinzock
Professor
Instructional Systems, Leadership,
and Workforce Development
(Committee Member)

Clyde Lindley
Lecturer
Instructional Systems, Leadership,
and Workforce Development
(Committee Member)

Richard Blackburn
Professor/Dean
College of Education

Name: Leigh Barrett Mobley
Date of Degree: December 14, 2007
Institution: Mississippi State University
Major Field: Educational Administration
Major Professor: Dr. Jerry Mathews
Title of Study: AN ANATOMY OF AN UNSUCCESSFUL SCHOOL
BOND ELECTION IN A RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
Pages in Study: 97
Candidate for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The purpose of the study was to examine the failed bond attempt of the Community School District and investigate reasons for the failure. Specifically, the role of the superintendent, the opposition, the media, and the school board during the bond election process were examined to determine how their roles influenced the outcome of the election.

This qualitative case study employed purposeful sampling. Data collection techniques included document analysis, audiovisual material analysis, and personal interviews. Participants included media representatives, community members who were opposed to the bond election, members of the bond election committee, members of the board of trustees at the time of the election, and the district superintendent. Findings of the study included a description of how the superintendent's work prior to the election

and his role as spokesperson during the election contributed to its failure. In addition, the efforts of organized opposition had a significantly negative impact on the outcome of the election. The bond opposition used the media to create controversy strong enough to overpower what proved to be positive media relations. Finally, school board support must be unanimous and strong enough that board members are willing to work publicly in support of the bond election.

Recommendations include: (a) The superintendent must conduct a needs assessment that includes the opinions of the community, (b) committee membership must be representative of the community, (c) the superintendent must not be the primary spokesperson for the bond election, (d) the community must be involved in the formulation and support of the bond proposal, (e) key members of the community must be willing to publicly support the bond election, (f) committees created to support and promote the election must be publicly active, (g) exercise caution as controversy can be created in the media that will overpower positive support, (h) respond positively to negative media as failure to respond to negative publicity can leave voters in a cloud of doubt, (i) members of the school board must publicly support a bond election, and (j) efforts by bond election supporters must be stronger than those opposing it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Statement of the Purpose.....	7
	Significance of the Study	7
	Research Questions	8
	Limitations	9
	Definition of Terms	9
II.	REVIEW OF LITERATURE	12
	The Business of School in a Rural Community	13
	The Need for Bond Elections	14
	Community Support of Bond Elections	15
	Strategies for Successful Bond Elections	18
	Reasons for Failed Bond Elections	19
	The Role of the Superintendent during the Bond Election Process	20
	The Role of the Opposition during the Bond Election Process	23
	The Role of the Media during the Bond Election Process	24
	The Role of the Local School Board during the Bond Election Process.....	26
III.	METHODS AND MATERIALS.....	29
	Introduction	29
	Research Design	29
	Participants	30
	Instrumentation.....	33
	Materials.....	34
	Procedures	34
	Analysis.....	39
IV.	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	42
	Introduction.....	42
	February 15, 2005	43
	From Good to Great	44

Question #1: What Was the Role of the Superintendent during the Bond Election Process?	46
Question #2: What Was the Role of the Opposition during the Bond Election Process?	51
Property Tax Increase	51
Too Much Money; We Must Prioritize.....	53
Fiscal Responsibility.....	57
Trust	58
Question #3: What Was the Role of the Media during the Bond Election Process?.....	61
Question #4: What Was the Role of the School Board during the Bond Election Process?	66
Discussion of Related Literature.....	69
Question #1: What Was the Role of the Superintendent during the Bond Election Process?	70
Question #2: What Was the Role of the Opposition during the Bond Election Process?	72
Question #3: What Was the Role of the Media during the Bond Election Process?.....	74
Question #4: What Was the Role of the School Board during the Bond Election Process?	75
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	77
Summary	77
Conclusions.....	80
Recommendations.....	83
Suggestions for Additional Research.....	84
REFERENCES	86
APPENDIX	
A. Interview Protocols	90
Interview Protocol – Superintendent	91
Interview Protocol – School Board Member	92
Interview Protocol – Community Member	93
Interview Protocol – Bond Election Committee Member	94
Interview Protocol – Member of the Media.....	95
B. Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research Approval	96

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to Howley (1988), mass education, or the expectation that all the children of all a nation's citizens will attend school, developed roots in the rural communities of the United States. Since the nineteenth century, steady economic growth leading to the development of cities has allowed larger more populated areas to provide the financial base needed to support public schools. However, rural, less populated areas, while spending as high a proportion of their income on schools as larger areas, simply can not adequately support public schools. These circumstances have led superintendents in rural areas across the United States to consistently report difficulties in obtaining adequate financial support for their districts. Mississippi's rural school districts are no exception.

The Constitution of the United States dictates that the responsibility for public schools rests squarely on the shoulders of the state. This responsibility includes funding for education. According to the United States Department of Education (2005), "States and localities are the primary sources of K-12 education funding and always have been" (p. 2). While federal funds for education currently exceed \$37 billion, federal monies allocated equal only around 8.3% of the total monies spent on K-12 education in

this country, indicating the overwhelming majority of financial responsibilities do indeed rest with state governments (United States Department of Education, 2005).

The 1930's brought the first significant increase in the role of state governments in financing local public schools. By the 1950's, the special needs of smaller rural schools were taken into consideration when state governments began setting up funding formulas to determine school funding (Howley, 1988).

In 1982, then Mississippi Governor William Winter successfully pushed one of the nation's first comprehensive school-reform measures through Mississippi's State Legislature. This historic reform act mandated public kindergarten, initiated compulsory school attendance, increased teacher salaries, began the development of teacher certification requirements, and brought unprecedented money and attention to public education in Mississippi (Miller, 1997). With the initiation of Mississippi's current funding program, the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP) in 1997, state funding for education was again dramatically altered. MAEP allows for funds to be distributed to Mississippi schools based on student enrollment as well as the number of students in a district who qualify for free or reduced-priced school lunches. Eligibility for the school lunch program is a common indicator of poverty as it is based on household income (White, 1997). The family income of over half of Mississippi's students make them eligible for the school lunch program (Miller, 1997).

Since its inception, MAEP has provided increases in state funding for Mississippi schools. However, while there was an overall increase in funding, monies needed for these increases came from cutting supplemental education programs. In 2005, the

primary education funding for Mississippi's K-12 schools, or MAEP, was increased by \$77 million. However, teacher classroom supply money was cut drastically from \$15.9 million to \$3.5 million. Also, districts had to absorb \$30 million in increased health-care costs and about \$45 million to fund the teacher pay raise mandated by the state (Richard, 2004). This negated the increase in MAEP funds leaving districts in dire straits financially. The proposed budget for Mississippi school funding in 2006 proved comparable to that of 2005. Mississippi's legislature did approve a \$145 million increase in general state funding for Mississippi K-12 schools. This increase equaled only a 7% raise in state aid compared with 2005. The mandated teacher pay raise of 8% and increased costs for health insurance had to again be absorbed by the local district (Richard, 2005).

With school funding a constant point of contention with educators, especially those in rural areas, spending priorities must be set. Mississippi's education system typically ranks among the lowest in student achievement as well as in school spending (White, 1997). With the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 setting the stage with significant requirements for academic accountability, all available resources must be allocated to academic programs. Increases in MAEP and federal funding just aren't enough to cover the needs of K-12 schools, especially those in rural areas. The contributions of state governments as well as funds allocated to school districts by the federal government are also often tied to specific programs and cannot be used to fund already existing programs or other critical needs faced by rural school districts (Howley, 1988). One of the most critical areas of need is school facilities.

Argon (2005) predicted that \$150 billion would be spent on new, upgraded, and school addition construction from 2004 to 2006. School districts are facing increasing facility needs due to increased enrollment and basic deterioration of current facilities. This very expensive problem exists nationwide. With the lowest median family income, a child-poverty rate of 33%, and a significant number of poor families concentrated in rural areas that are often described as highly distressed and primitive, Mississippi is one of the poorest states in the nation. More than half of Mississippi school children qualify for free or reduced-priced school lunches. In the lowest academic performing districts, more than 80% of students qualify (Miller, 1997). How do rural school districts struggling to obtain the academic standards mandated by No Child Left Behind possibly meet not only the academic needs but also the basic facility needs of their students? The burden falls on the local taxpayer.

“Public school facilities in Mississippi have not kept pace with changing demographics and technology. Facilities are in desperate need of repair, replacement, or enlargement” (Weathersby, 2002, p. 5). Traditionally, the local school district has shouldered the financial responsibility of renovating or replacing aging school facilities (Henderson, 1997). The issuance of general obligation bonds, or school bonds, has been the most prevalent way to raise monies for these desperately needed facility repairs and upgrades (Weathersby, 2002). School bonds are long term indebtedness signifying that money has been borrowed at a specific rate of interest on the total debt (Henderson, 1997). School district property tax revenues repay these bonds. Property owners are assessed to pay the principal and interest of bonds issued. In Mississippi, a public election

resulting in a 60% favorable vote must be held before general obligation bonds can be issued (Mississippi Code, §37-59-17, 1972). Primarily, the opposition to a school bond election has been based on this rise in property tax, no matter how small (Henderson, 1997).

The United States, with its inalienable right to free speech and secret ballot, allows citizens to have a dramatic impact on political decisions. From local elections to national campaigns, voters discuss issues and exercise influence. A school district bond election is a perfect example. School district facility needs are certainly obvious to school administrators. They are often bewildered when a bond election fails to get the required 60 % favorable vote. According to Carter (1995):

Judging from the national media, getting negative results on bond and levy votes has become a growth industry. The successes are there, but they are fewer each year. Much paper is used analyzing why a given district can keep getting voter approval year after year, so it may be useful to look at the majority-the failures. What happened to that obviously needed bond issue? Why did the community vote against their children's future? How can we lose when we're so sincere?
(p. 289)

While the number of educators across the country asking themselves how and why their bond elections have failed is large, no district remains any more bewildered than the Community School District (a pseudonym).

The Community School District is situated in a rural area in Northeast Mississippi. In 2005, the district had shown significant academic growth over that

previous few years. State mandated test data indicated the academic performance of Community students was well above state average. The district had also proven financially able to withstand state budget cuts without any significant interruption to current programs. The district had not exercised its right to ask local taxpayers for the 4% increase in tax revenues in several years.

With the increase in academic progress in Community, students from surrounding rural districts as well as private schools began enrolling in the Community School District. The band program and class sizes increased dramatically, initiating the need for a new band hall and classroom space. A Community Theatre Program providing top quality Broadway musicals needed a larger and upgraded facility for performances. No Community School District facilities had seen major facility upgrades in years. Leaking roofs, broken windows, faulty plumbing, and 30 year old carpet were prevalent in a district with some of the highest academically achieving students in the area. Although past experience with bond elections in Community had seen almost all elections failing to receive the required 60% approval rate on the first try, the time seemed perfect for a bond election to raise the needed revenue to provide Community School District students with the facilities they deserved. Community support of the district seemed high; academic achievement was higher than it had ever been; school district administration appeared well respected. With what seemed to be all the pieces in place, why did the 2005 bond election attempted by the Community School District fail miserably?

Statement of the Purpose

School bond elections are and will continue to be the main vehicle used by most school districts to obtain funds for school renovation and construction. Blackwell (1997), Bohrer (2000), Curtin (1993), and Lode (1999) all contribute to the plethora of literature that exists on strategies related to successful bond elections. However, an examination of current literature revealed that studies focusing on reasons for failed elections are few. The strategies outlined in most literature related to successful bond attempts are similar. Initial review of the 2005 bond election attempted by a rural school district in the state of Mississippi (referred to as Community School District) indicated that a large majority of these strategies were employed in their failed attempt. If school officials are to become successful in gaining the 60% favorable vote required in typically unpopular bond elections, they must be equipped with a knowledge base that will assist them in that end. The purpose of this study was to examine the failed bond attempt of the Community School District and investigate reasons for the failure. Specifically, the role of the superintendent, the opposition, the media, and the school board during the bond election process were examined to determine how their roles influenced the outcome of the bond election.

Significance of the Study

Davis and Tyson (2003) state,

Today, the failure of school district construction referenda - at least on the first try - appears to be the rule rather than the exception. It's useful, then, for school

board members and administration to find out why voters support - or fail to support - school construction projects. (p. 34)

Studies exist illustrating the difficulty of winning voter support. In addition, studies outlining strategies that have led to successful results have been completed in many states. However, little research has been published on successful or unsuccessful bond elections in Mississippi. This study investigated the failed bond attempt of Community School District. Specifically, the role of the superintendent, the opposition, the media, and the school board were examined to determine their influence on the election outcome. This study will allow school rural school districts in Mississippi, whose only option for facility improvements and construction are bond elections, to make more informed decisions concerning what strategies to employ.

Additionally, this research was timely. Increasing populations, deteriorating older structures, and modern technology have created an immediate need for new and renovated facilities in many districts (Crader, Holloway, & Stauffacher, 2002). Budget cuts and the unprecedented need for new and updated facilities, especially in the wake of our nation's most horrific natural disaster, Hurricane Katrina, have made bond elections an even more predominant avenue for raising construction revenue, increasing the need for timely data.

Research Questions

This study investigated the 2005 bond election of the Community School District.

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What was role of the superintendent during the bond election process?

2. What was the role of opposition during the bond election process?
3. What was the role of the media during the bond election process?
4. What was the role of the school board during the bond election process?

Limitations

This study was limited to one bond election in a rural Mississippi school district. While this district represents a rural educational environment found in Mississippi, it may not be representative of all rural school districts across the state. Data obtained in this study were dependent on the memory of key informants to be interviewed. Some critical information may have been forgotten or lost. Another possible limitation was the researcher's association with the district being studied. The researcher holds an administrative position in the district and will be studying the current work environment.

Definition of Terms

Bond Election Committee: A committee comprised of key community members working toward voter approval of the bond referendum. The members are volunteers and are not paid from any school monies (Lode, 1999).

Bond Election Process: The steps taken from initial conception to the final vote of a school bond election.

Issuance of Bonds: Selling bonds to the public in order to provide funds for building and renovation projects (Lode, 1999).

Media: Agencies of communication whose aim is to provide information concerning current affairs to the public.

Mississippi Code: A set of statutes governing entities and individuals, including school districts, under the jurisdiction of the State of Mississippi.

Opposition: Those offering resistance to a proposal, in this study, the proposed bond election.

Role: The function or part performed in a particular process, in this study, a bond election process.

Rural Community: Communities having a population density of less than 1,000 people per square mile with surrounding areas containing an overall density of less than 500 people per square mile (United States Census Bureau).

Rural School District: A school district located within a rural community.

School Board: A five member panel, partially publicly elected and partially appointed by the city Board of Alderman, convened to be the governing body of a public school district.

School Bond: A certificate issued by a school district for sale to the public. Accrued interest and the principal are paid to the holder of the bond. Monies for these payments are raised through property taxes.

School Bond Elections: Also known as school bond referendums. An election asking for approval to issue bonds for sale to the public. The revenue from the sale of bonds is used for major building repair, renovation, or purchase.

School Bond Referendums: Also known as school bond elections. An election asking for approval to issue bonds for sale to the public. The revenue from the sale of bonds is used for major building repair, renovation, or purchase.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The future of our nation rests in the hands of children. These children are in school six hours a day, 180 days each year over a period of 13 years. How can citizens make sure that their children not only have access to a quality education but that it is received in a safe, clean, and upgraded school facility with adequate classroom space? In his 1999 study, Lode maintained that using the regular budgets of most school districts to make extensive repairs or upgrades to school facilities is nearly impossible. Successful bond elections are one of very few avenues for raising needed funds for these building and renovation projects. This review of literature contains the following sections: (a) the business of school in a rural community (b) the need for bond elections, (c) community support of bond elections, (d) strategies for successful bond elections, (e) reasons for failed bond elections, (f) the role of the superintendent during the bond election process, (g) the role of the opposition during the bond election process, (h) the role of the media during the bond election process, and (i) the role of the local school board during the bond election process.

The Business of School in a Rural Community

The setting for this research was couched in a rural community. In Hull's 2003 study of the status of rural education in the South, the Southern part of the United States had the second largest rural population in the country. Mississippi had the second largest rural population in the region with 51%. The percentage of school districts in Mississippi that were classified as rural was 88%. According to Dexter, McCarthy, Berube, and Surface (2005), a common perception of rural residents is that the school is the lifeblood of the community. Hull (2003) concurred, reporting that schools in rural areas have commonly been used as community centers, continuing education facilities, and auditoriums for public meetings. Rural schools have generally been the only facility large enough for public meetings or to serve as shelters in cases of natural disasters. These same schools have often been considered the central component of local pride providing the cement for rural communities. Many of these rural communities have fostered strong educational outcomes and exhibited fierce loyalty to their schools. However, this loyalty has not been a sufficient means of sustaining and expanding educational excellence.

The business of operating a rural school district has resulted in many obstacles, most related to finance. Rural school systems studied were generally property poor and had difficulties raising funds to cover rising costs. The financial realities of rural schools have created large discrepancies in teacher salary, access to new technologies, appropriate staff training, and in the physical condition of schools. Half of rural schools studied had at least one inadequate building. Leaking roofs, outdated wiring, broken air conditioning, sagging floors, and poor ventilation affected more than 4.5 million students

in rural areas (Hull, 2003). The overwhelming challenge of repairing, replacing, or adding additional school facilities has been complicated by local tax bases that are stagnant, resulting in inadequate funding for the majority of rural school districts. The best option to raise revenue for facilities in most of these rural school districts was a school bond election.

The Need for Bond Elections

“All public decisions involving taxpayers’ dollars are political in nature. The passage of a bond issue [bond election] in support of school building construction or renovation can often be one of the most difficult activities for a rural school district” (Bohrer, 2000, p. 71). However, research indicated that there are many factors that facilitate the increased need for successful bond elections. These include the decreasing of student/teacher ratios. Consideration was also given to the need for handicapped classrooms and those dedicated to elective classes such as art or music. Replacing aging and crumbling facilities as well as outdated and broken down equipment has been cited as another important need for bond elections (Curtin, 1993).

In a 1997 study, Henderson states,

Lewis (1995) cited Bureau of Statistics figures from 1990 which indicated that the school-age population will grow by 5% between 2005 and 2025. However, Lewis predicted the number of school-age children increasing 19% by 2005 and

33% by 2025 due to increasing changes in fertility rates and the number of immigrants, thereby increasing the need for more space in the public schools.

(p. 2)

This overwhelming need for classroom space remains evident in schools across the country. In 1998, American School and University cited the average cost of a new elementary school at \$7.2 million, a middle school at \$10.5 million, and a high school at \$15.2 million. Weathersby (2002) predicted that the cost of constructing new schools would exceed \$60 billion in the early 2000's. Local and state bond elections remain the largest source of funds to finance these projects (Colgan, 2003).

Community Support of Bond Elections

Hicks (1996) presented the following questions that voters should ask themselves in relation to bond elections:

1. How will the community benefit?
2. What provisions are being planned for our children and grandchildren?
3. What do we want to become as a community?
4. How do we want others to perceive our community?
5. If we don't make the investment, who will, and when?

These questions are valid and have often been the basis for bond election promotion. In many cases, communities rose to the challenge and supported bond elections wholeheartedly. Argon (2005) stated that the success rate and total-dollar amount of successful bond elections is a good barometer of the public's support of education

infrastructure issues. According to Argon, the \$34,489 billion in bond election monies approved in 2004 is an impressive figure indicating that communities will continue to be supportive of spending that works to create best possible learning environments.

A study conducted by The Institute for Educational and Social Policy at New York University examined the work of community groups organized for improving public education. One of the three research partners for the study was a group called Southern Echo located in Jackson, MS. Between 1999 and 2001, the research partners surveyed 66 community groups at eight different sites. One of these sites was a rural community in the Mississippi Delta. The authors of the study found in their research that the aim of these community organizations was to hold school systems accountable for public education. They indicated that one chronic problem existing in public education was crumbling and overcrowded facilities. Further findings in the Institute's study indicated that community groups comprised of members outside the education realm helped spotlight inadequate school funding, overcrowded classrooms, and dilapidated school buildings. More importantly, they helped create public will to improve those conditions (Mediratta, Fruchter, & Lewis, 2002).

Why then are so many bond elections rejected by communities? As Kolleeny (2004) so aptly stated, "with taxes and enrollments increasing and politicians pontificating about the importance of education in this election year, positive action would seem guaranteed" (p. 127). However, case studies from around the country have illustrated the difficulty of winning voter support (Davis & Tyson, 2003). Some states, in response to the daunting task of achieving a successful bond election, have even tried to

pass legislation proposing other finance plans for raising school construction and renovation funds. Schnaiberg (1998) outlined a plan in Arizona that would have done away with passing bonds to build schools. The bill would have shifted the burden of building new schools from local districts to the state. The proposed legislation came under heated attack as opposition stated that it would only allow for *Honda* schools, if you wanted a Cadillac, you would have to go back to the voters. Proposition 39, passed in California lowered the voter approval threshold for school bonds in that state from two-thirds to 55% (Kadi, 2000). Currently, in Mississippi, because the issuance of bonds requires the repayment of funds over a number of years, 60% of voters must cast ballots in favor of issuing bonds for an election to be successful (Mississippi Code, § 37-59-17, 1972). Weathersby maintained in a 2002 study, that because the debt repayment is achieved by increased property taxes, securing a 60 % favorable vote is often difficult. While non-education based community committees have been formed across the country with a mission to improve education, they have not generated enough support for successful bond elections. Communities have often let one issue defeat common sense (Davis & Tyson, 2003). Communities have resisted the increased tax burden, let dissatisfaction with the current school district administration or misconceptions about how the money will be spent keep them from offering support in a bond election (Bohrer, 2000). This was especially true in rural areas where poverty is high and property valuations are low (Hull, 2003). Curtin (1993) cited that negative publicity in regard to public education received from the 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education entitled, *A Nation at Risk*, and from President Bush's *America*

2000 has left citizens dissatisfied with the quality of education their children are receiving. This dissatisfaction was another reason for voter apathy in regard to school bond elections.

Strategies for Successful Bond Elections

A plethora of research exists on strategies that lead to a successful bond election. The majority of the findings from these studies describe very similar strategies for success. The most common strategies for success included: conducting a needs assessment, gaining school board support, gaining the support of key community members by forming an election committee, and having an organized campaign. Blackwell (1997) stated that a thorough and comprehensive needs assessment was the first step to a successful bond election. Blackwell added that not only will this provide a road map for districts in their facility planning but it will be an excellent method for involving the community and district staff members. Schanuel (1999) concurred, indicating that a project team was the best way to begin the bond election process. Schanuel also emphasized that including an architectural firm representative would further expand the district's resources and the credibility of their findings. Bohrer (2000), in a description of experiences as a superintendent, indicated that identifying facility needs through a voter survey sent to all registered voters proved to be a successful strategy.

Research conducted by Crader et al. (2002) contains the finding that using influential community members to promote the bond issue was an effective strategy for

successful bond elections. Curtin (1993) also cited early support from key leaders as important. Findings by Lode (1999) also indicated that community members must lead the effort, not only in planning but for promoting the bond election. Lode continued by stating that in order to involve these key community members, an election committee should be formed that represents a good cross section of the community. Weathersby (2001) concurred stating that parent teacher organizations should also be utilized in forming election committees.

Running a well- organized campaign was also discussed in several studies as imperative to a successful bond election. Lode (1999) stated, “Voter approval of bond referendums [bond elections] are more likely to happen when campaign workers are highly organized and have the desire to do what it takes to achieve success” (Henry, 1994, p. 1). Bohrer (2000) also cited the importance of a well-orchestrated public relations campaign run by a hard working group of organized volunteers. Bohrer listed several key elements in a successful public relations campaign. They included speaking to the public, including talking to local civic clubs, the media, local political groups, ministerial associations, and senior citizens.

Reasons for Failed Bond Elections

Strategies that have almost always led to the defeat of a school bond election were outlined by Carter (1995), a consultant for organization enhancement and leadership development. The first misconception described by Carter was the assumption by campaign committees that parents would support most any proposal. The reality was that

unless they can see exactly how the bond issue benefits children, parents would not support it. School districts often carefully outline to voters in a specific facilities plan how the monies raised by bond elections would be used. Carter maintained that including upgrades or facility improvements for all facets of the school community in the plan seemed like a good idea but this *let's please everyone* approach took the focus away from improving the quality of education for children and often resulted in defeat. Sharing as much information as possible was another misunderstood concept that has led to failed elections according to Carter. Brief, well-written flyers with graphics often appealed to voters much more than long, detailed reports. Carter added that shorter documents also allow any opposition less opportunity to draw side issues.

Curtin's 1993 study indicated the two main reasons for unsuccessful bond elections were resentment toward higher property tax and displeasure with the quality of education their children were receiving. Other reasons for failure cited by Curtin include: low voter turn-out, failure to obtain teacher support, oversell of bad school conditions, well- organized opposition, and divided boards of education.

The Role of the Superintendent during the Bond Election Process

McCurdy (1992), in a report written for the American Association of School Administrators, outlines the creation of the position of school superintendent. The first school superintendent was hired in 1851 to oversee the schools in Boston. From the start the lines of authority were extremely blurred between the superintendent and the local school board, who had been handling all school governance for the first fifty years of

their existence. McCurdy (1992) continues that as early as 1891, William Bruce, the founder of the *School Board Journal* in that same year, agreed that the superintendent should be regarded as the educational expert, but he was not willing to yield to the school of thought that the board's function was simply to legislate. According to McCurdy's (1992) work, the superintendency was created by school boards who felt their expertise was more than adequate to govern all school activities but needed someone in charge to get things done.

In contrast, Berg and Barnett (1998), in their paper presented to the American Educational Research Association, describe the evolution of the superintendent's role in school district administration as that born of the school board's inability to manage flourishing school enrollments and ending with their more current description of the superintendent's role as being defined by the political mandates of state, federal, and most importantly, community stakeholders. According to Berg and Barnett (1998), "The political role, manifested in multiple arenas, involves the skills of negotiation, persuasion and the art of compromise" (p.2). In addition, Berg and Barnett (1998) continue, "Images of the superintendent as protector of community values, the steward of public resources, set atop a hierarchical administration, is an image from the past. In its place is the political player" (p.6).

Aside from these differing opinions of the origins of the role of superintendent both McCurdy (1992) and Berg and Barnett (1998) agree that the superintendent and the local school board must reach common ground, especially in instances concerning issues that affect the community and school in a very visible way. Modern day superintendents

are charged with the task of becoming mediators capable of providing appropriate services to schools by interacting with all the different elements of a community's social system. This mediation requires superintendents to take a negotiator role to mold policies and mobilize resources. A perfect example is a school bond election.

The political nature of school bond elections requires school superintendents to bring forth their very best in political negotiations and community and public relations. However, the political aspects of the superintendency are often overlooked in university preparation programs across the country. Studies conclude that few preparation programs acknowledge the political process or foster the involvement of prospective administrators in the political arena (Berg & Barnett, 1998). Only a brief overview of bond elections has been included in school finance classes at the four major universities in Mississippi that offer doctoral degrees in Educational Leadership (Henderson, 1997). The results leave most school administrators without the training to manage a successful school district bond election. Henderson continued the description of the superintendent's role in a bond election by stating that the superintendent should serve as the predominant advisor to the board and the campaign committee. Lode (1999) expanded the description by stating that the primary responsibilities of the superintendent should include conducting research for board members, gathering information about property tax assessments, tax rates, building costs, community demographics, student data, and academic goals all the while maintaining a low enough profile so as not to give voters the impression that the proposal is simply the superintendent's plan. Bohrer (2000) concurred, "The superintendent must be sure that his or her actions are not viewed as self serving, but rather as serving the

overall good of the school” (p. 81). Credible, trusted leadership from within the system has proven to be very important. Lode (1999) agrees that, "The superintendent would need to make a significant personal sacrifice to provide leadership and direction necessary for effective committee work. In addition, the superintendent would need to assert leadership in the face of obstacles with an unshakable spirit of „students first“ (Greig, 1990)” (p. 34).

The Role of the Opposition during the Bond Election Process

A study done by Curtin (1993) suggested that districts beware of outside interest groups that might oppose the bond election. The groups discussed included private interest groups, farmers, groups comprised of local taxpayers, and large landowners. According to Curtin, 70% of districts with failed bond elections had major opposition during their campaigns and 100% of losing districts had organized opposition.

Curtin’s (1993) study further states that side issues often are the basis for the creation of organized opposition that has proven to have a tremendous impact on the outcome of the elections investigated for prior studies. These side issues included: poor versus rich, board of trustee elections, poor farming economy, credibility of school administration and board, too much money requested, and reassessment of property. Based on these side issues, groups of opposing community members have often rallied together creating significant doubt and insecurities in the community. These doubts have proven to either sway voters negatively or cause them to stay away from the poles altogether.

Carter (1995) describes interviewing a small business owner whose business had survived many years and the arrival of several department and outlet stores in the area. According to Carter (1995) the store owner's explanation of his business success and longevity give great insight to a strategy than can also be used to deflate special interest groups who might threaten to create organized opposition to a bond election. First, find out what irritates your customer's and then stop doing it. Carter continues that this seemingly simple and common sense approach to business can also be a very successful in dealing with issues that could lead to bond election opposition. In short, remember who does the voting and consider their interests.

The Role of the Media during the Bond Election Process

The media has a significant impact on public perception of a school district. "The tremendous advantage to news coverage, especially print, is its portability. We can clip articles and reproduce them for a scrapbook or portfolio we can use to impress people with the value of our programs" (Murray, 1997, p. 24). The volume of people reached by the media makes relations with them crucial in the attempt to foster positive public perceptions of the school district. However, St Pierre (1996) raises the flag of caution where the media is concerned:

The news media is also a major factor we must fit into our equation as we reach out to our customers. Reporters can be perceived as advocates or adversaries, but what they really do is report the news...It is important to create a win/win relationship with the media. But remember, do not depend on them to promote

your schools or publicize events. The media are not your public relations department (p.30)

Murray (1997) concurs, “They are not interested in covering events just for community relations. At the highest levels they are interested in making money” (p. 24).

Horowitz (1996) also suggests caution concerning the media,

Reporters are not advocates for education, nor any other cause. They report news. News by definition is anything that will capture the interest of readers. If it happens to promote a positive image about education, so be it. If not, not. (p.18)

Despite wariness where the media is concerned, research has supported the role of the local media as a key aspect of a successful bond election. According to Curtin (1993), local media support must be considered before pursuing a bond election. Lode (1999) cited poor media relations as a factor that resulted in unsuccessful bond elections. Lode continued that expensive advertising sent the wrong message to voters and that small scale but intensive advertising produced more positive results. Also important was inviting news media to every event related to the bond election so that they too could hear information and ask questions. To make the most use of the media, Lode also suggested ignoring opposition editorials and advertisements until just before the election; having the last word was more effective than primacy. Bohrer (2000) successfully used the media to assist in a district bond election. Members of the media were asked to take part in committees and meetings making them a part of the process. Bohrer noted that this led to positive and accurate media coverage rather than the non-supportive writings aimed at stirring up controversy among citizens that readers had previously found more interesting

than new buildings. According to Henderson (1997), legitimate newspaper articles, television spots, and radio coverage seemed to sway voters more than school district bond election advertisements and pamphlets. Public relations efforts generated by the school district were considered to be an essential part of successful bond elections.

The Role of the Local School Board during the Bond Election Process

In 1789, the Massachusetts legislature passed the first state school law and authorized towns to employ special committees elected by the people to oversee schools, commonly known today as local school boards. This is an important even in history as it marked the beginning of constituency control of American schools. In respect to school governance, this bit of history clearly indicates that school boards came first in the development of school governance in this country (McCurdy, 1992). For the next fifty years, school boards served as the only school authority.

By the 1840's, the city of Boston began the arduous eleven year process of creating the position of superintendent. The new position of superintendent was not created with authority equal to that of the school board. Also important to note is that the reason for the creation of the position was not because the school board thought themselves lacking in the expertise needed to run the schools, but rather that they saw the limitations of the group action requirement that left them powerless when not acting together as a board. The need for someone to be accountable for getting things done became evident. However, in these early days, the lines of authority were very vague and

in most instances the school board continued to oversee many administrative details and make most fiscal decisions (McCurdy, 1992).

By 1892, local school boards favoritism to the constituents that elected them had resulted in politics that were very destructive to schools. This began a power struggle between school boards and superintendents that still wages on today. However, “Throughout the 20th century, board-superintendent roles have continued to evolve within the traditional framework of boards as policy makers and superintendents as implementers of those policies” (McCurdy, 1992, p.12). McCurdy (1992) also contends that local school boards are often likely to let initiatives proposed by the superintendent predominate when internal policy issues are involved, but when there is an issue that involves the potential for visible and tangible effects on the community or the school system, school boards will usually assert their authority. One such issue is a school bond election.

The impact of the local board of education in a school bond election has been mentioned in the work of several researchers. Weathersby (2001) cited unanimous school board support as important for a successful bond election. Lode (1999) stated, “The board must have a unanimous vision to which the members are committed. The vision for the school facilities is no less important than any other aspect of school functions. The building is the envelope surrounding the educational program” (p. 6). Curtin (1993) also concurred, arguing that total commitment by each and every school board member and member of the administrative staff are needed for successful bond elections.

Weathersby (2001) expanded his emphasis on the importance of local school board support of bond elections. He stated that with unanimous support of a bond election, the school board is demonstrating to the public that school leadership is strong and committed to a common goal. A divided school board represents a deathblow to any bond election making the value of a unified school board almost priceless.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Introduction

This chapter describes the methods and materials used in conducting this study. The chapter is presented in six sections: (a) Research Design, (b) Participants, (c) Instrumentation, (d) materials, (e) procedures, and (f) Data analysis.

Research Design

This case study describes the 2005 school bond election of the Community School District. According to Yin (2003), a case study format is the preferred method for investigating contemporary events when *how* or *why* questions are being presented and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon with some real-life context. A case study offers close examination of one incident of interest in a common, though possibly complex situation, in this study, a bond election. Obtaining direction for dealing with the same type situation or setting in the future is described by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (2003) as an application of case studies. Erlandson et al. (1993) also indicate that the best predictor of an organization's or community's behavior in the future is the behavior exhibited today.

The appropriate procedures for a successful bond election appeared to have been employed by the Community School District. An in-depth study of this single-case was required to properly understand the phenomenon. A holistic description of the events, actions, and participants involved with the case being studied were needed to formulate accurate findings that will be useful for other Mississippi school district administrators.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used for this study. Erlandson et. al. (2003) describe purposive sampling as governed by emerging insights about what is relevant to the study and that researchers should seek both the typical and divergent data to maximize the range of information obtained about the context. In the case of the Community School District, the researcher's initial review of bond election studies did indicate the existence of divergent data in this particular district. Erlandson et al. also state that detailing the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor should be the objective rather than focusing on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations.

According to Yin (2003) and Merriam (1988), case study research involves inquiry into one unit of analysis that must be defined and understood for the research to be focused and meaningful. This unit of analysis is determined primarily on the research questions to be answered. In this study, the research questions are directly related to a bond election that took place in the Community School District. In addition, researchers often want to compare their results with those from prior studies. This indicates that units of analysis from prior studies should be similar to the one being defined. The units of

analysis in all literature initially reviewed were school districts. This study focuses on the role of specific groups during a bond election in one rural Mississippi School District, the Community School District.

In the late 1850's a common school was established in Community, Mississippi (a pseudonym) and was governed by a five-member board. Prior to 1969, the Community School District was comprised of students in thirteen square miles in and around the city limits of Community, MS. Today the Community School District serves approximately 2,000 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade living across 280 square miles. The populace of the Community School District includes approximately 7,800 registered voters and encompasses several smaller populations around the town of Community. It is governed by a five-member Board of Trustees. Three of the members are appointed by the city Board of Alderman while two are elected by county residents living outside the city limits. The district has two elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and one vocational center. The district employs approximately 150 licensed staff members and 100 non-licensed staff. The annual budget for the district exceeds \$13 million. District revenue is derived from 19.61% local sources, 65.41% state sources, and 14.98% federal sources.

The town of Community, MS, and home to Community School District is a rural picturesque community located in Northeast Mississippi. Community is home to approximately 4,000 residents inside its city limits that offer traditional southern hospitality while its historical features add to its unique charm. The first Carnegie Library in the state of Mississippi was constructed in Community in 1909 and is still a vital part

of the community. Community is ranked 25th in the state of Mississippi in manufacturing jobs. The Community School District is the second largest employer in the county.

The Mississippi Department of Education reports 10 bond elections in the state of Mississippi during the 2004-2005 school year. Of the 10 districts, 50% had successful bond elections resulting in over \$126 million in revenues for facility upgrade and expansion. The remaining 50% had failed bond attempts in excess of \$87 million. According to these same records, the last attempted bond election by the Community School district was over 15 years ago. While, the bond election was successful with 66% of voters marking their ballots favorably leaving 34% against, only a small margin separated victory from defeat (A. Nunez, personal communication, March 14, 2006). Revenue raised from the bond election was used to build a new Junior High School.

In the early 1970's Community High School was completely destroyed by fire. The only means available to rebuild was a bond election. Due to opposition to new taxes and discontent with school district administration at the time, the election was not successful until the fifth attempt. By this time, the building project had been scaled down to the bare minimum making the new Community High School inferior and inadequate from the start (L. Grimes, personal communication, March 15, 2006).

Community School District Superintendent, Dr. John Word (a pseudonym), agreed to have this study conducted in Community School District. He also agreed to be a participant in the study. Dr. Word's current position as Superintendent of Community School District, as well as the fact that he was the district superintendent during the 2005 bond election, are the reasons he was included as a participant for this study. Dr. Word

holds a Master's Degree in Superintendency and Principalship and an Educational Specialist and Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership. In his over 30 years as an educator, Dr. Word first served as a classroom teacher. Since, he has served 19 years as a school administrator, 16 of which were as a school superintendent including three terms as an elected official.

Other participants in the study included members of the bond election committee, members of the media who covered the bond election, and members of the Community School District Board of Trustees at the time of the election. The members of the bond election committee were key community members who worked to promote the bond election being studied. They were all residents of Community, MS and registered voters at the time of the election. All participants gave prior consent before being included in the study.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation used for this study included interview protocols. The interview protocols are included in Appendix A and involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants that aid the researcher in discovering the role of the selected participants during the bond election process. Neither the exact wording nor order of questions was determined ahead of time (Merriam, 1988). Interview protocols included components described by Creswell (2003). The format was a single page with spaces indicated for descriptive notes on the demographics of the interview and for reflective notes on the

participant responses. Interview protocols also included a heading and the key research questions/topics to be discussed.

Documents such as newspapers, minutes of meetings, as well as publicity flyers and materials were studied to determine community, board and administration sentiment regarding the bond election. Audio and visual material including presentations presented in promoting the election were studied to uncover their role in the outcome.

Materials

Materials used in this study included: (a) minutes of meetings of the Community School District Board of Trustees, (b) newspaper articles from local newspapers covering the bond election, (c) documents circulated in the community in support and in opposition to the election, (d) video presentation prepared by school district administration to announce and promote the bond election, (e) a written flyer prepared by district administration to describe components and promote the election, (f) personal interviews conducted with participants which were tape recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions will be analyzed, and (g) notes taken by the researcher during the bond election process.

Procedures

To conduct this case study, several data collection techniques were utilized. Prior to any data collection, the participating school district superintendent granted permission to have research conducted in the school district. He has also agreed to be interviewed as

a participant. In addition, the Institution Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) of Mississippi State University approved the researcher's application for this study to be conducted (see Appendix B). Data collection techniques utilized in the study included document analysis, audiovisual material analysis, personal interviews, and participant observer notes analysis.

Research began with the collection of documents for analysis. Document analysis was used to uncover details that were not gleaned from the personal interviews that were conducted for this study. Minutes of the district's Board of Trustee meetings where the bond election was discussed were obtained from the office of the superintendent. Minutes were taken by the superintendent's administrative assistant. Meetings were tape recorded and then prepared for board approval at the next board meeting. Written minutes are available for public viewing in the superintendent's office.

Several local newspapers covered the bond election process from its first announcement to the actual election. Numerous informational articles were written, letters to the editor submitted, and paid spots placed in local papers in support of and in opposition to the election. The researcher collected all possible documents for analysis. These documents were obtained from newspaper offices, and the internet. These documents were numbered and then analyzed for information relating to each research question being studied. Information pertaining to each question was highlighted using a different color. The highlighted information was then studied and categorized into patterns to assist in formulating conclusions.

Several documents were circulated within the school district and community in opposition to the election. The researcher collected these documents from teachers, community members, and the superintendent's office and analyzed them for use in this study. Pertinent information pertaining to the research questions being studied was highlighted with colors corresponding to those used for newspaper articles. Data gathered from these documents was correlated to that collected from the newspaper articles and sorted into the same recurring patterns.

District administrators created a PowerPoint presentation used to provide information to the public and outline expenditures that would be made with monies raised from a successful bond election. This presentation was shown to over 30 community, civic, and school groups during the course of the election period. Permission to view this presentation was obtained from school district administration. A written flyer was distributed to the community in conjunction with the video presentation. This document was also analyzed for this study and was obtained from the superintendent's office. Pertinent data gathered from this presentation and the written flyer was also correlated into recurring patterns.

This study sought to uncover the role of the superintendent, the media, the school board, and the opposition in the defeat of the 2005 Community School District bond election. To do this, personal interviews were conducted by the researcher. An interview protocol was used as the framework for guiding questions (see Appendix A). Specifically, the role of the media, the school board, and the superintendent were addressed in the interviews as well as feelings on opposition to the bond election. Four

members of the Bond Election Committee, called the Good to Great Committee, were interviewed to gather information on the sentiment of these committee members in relation to the research questions being studied. Three media representatives who covered the bond process from its initial announcement to the actual election were interviewed. These included one representative from the local newspaper, one representative from a regional newspaper, and one representative of a regional radio station. Three community members who were known to oppose the issue were also interviewed by the researcher. These three community members represented the outspoken opposition as well as opposition that did not actively campaign against the bond election. Three members of the Community School District Board of Trustees at the time of the election were also interviewed as well as the school superintendent. In all, 14 interviews were conducted to obtain varying perspectives on the research questions to be studied. Findings also represent information gathered by the researcher from conversations with community members, parents, school personnel, and local business people who preferred not to record a formal interview.

All interviews were conducted separately, digitally recorded, and transcribed. Transcribed data was typed and numbered by line for reference. When the transcription process began each participant was assigned a pseudonym to be used in this document if necessary. The transcriptions were printed and saved on a computer hard drive, network server, and on a removable data storage device. Member-checking was utilized to determine the accuracy of sentiments portrayed by participants. Creswell (2003) described member-checking as returning the final report or specific descriptions, in this

study, transcribed interviews, back to the participants to determine whether the participants feel that they are accurate. Transcribed interviews were returned to each participant via mail. Participants then initialed each page and signed off on the transcription if they deemed it accurate in its portrayal of their sentiments. If changes were needed the researcher was contacted by phone or email. Corrections were then completed and the transcriptions returned to the participant for approval. Reactions, comments, and possible emerging patterns were recorded as each transcription was finalized. Pertinent data was color coded with colors corresponding to those used for document analysis.

From the approval by the Community School District Board of Trustees to hold a bond election to the actual day of the election, over 30 community based meetings were scheduled to provide information and promote its passing. The researcher was in attendance at every meeting and acted as a participant-observer. According to L. R. Gay (1996), "In participant observation, the observer actually becomes a part of, a participant in, the situation to be observed" (p. 221). Gay further states that the rationale for such observation is that the inside view is often somewhat different than the view from the outside looking in. The researcher's participant role in the meetings was to set up and start the promotional presentation created by the district. After that, the researcher was able to completely observe the question and answer sessions that followed. Notes taken by the researcher during this process were also analyzed for this study. These notes provided details of the bond election process undertaken by the Community School District and were indicative of the time line of events. The reactions of the researcher to

the question and answer sessions during these meetings also contributed to the findings of this study. All of these meetings were scheduled in advance and were publicized through flyers and word of mouth.

Analysis

According to Erlandson et al. (1993), “The analysis of qualitative data is best described as a progression, not a stage; an ongoing process, not a one-time event” (p. 111). “The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data” (Creswell, 2003, p. 190).

The process used to analyze data included the following steps developed according to methods described by Creswell (2003), Erlandson et al. (1993) and Merriam (1998):

1. Review collected data and prepare it for analysis
2. Read through all data to obtain a general sense of the information in order to reflect its overall meaning
3. Begin detailed analysis using a coding process
4. Developing categories that can be sorted into recurring patterns
5. Use the categories and recurring patterns to make inferences, and
6. Develop conclusions

The first step in data analysis involved transcribing interviews, and sorting and arranging data. Reading through the prepared data and beginning to record general thoughts about

the data and its content followed. Next, detailed analysis began using a coding process.

Creswell (2003) describes coding as,

The process of organizing the material into “chunks” before bringing meaning to those “chunks” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 171). It involves taking text data or pictures, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant. (p.192)

The patterns that emerged from the coding process were then used to make inferences and develop conclusions that were verified through further triangulation.

Creswell (2003) notes that in data analysis a primary strategy used to verify accuracy of findings is to “triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes” (p. 196). Triangulation involves seeking out several different types of sources that can provide insight about the same event (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Since data triangulation requires a researcher to use a variety of data sources (in this study, document analysis, audiovisual material analysis, personal interviews, and observation) validity and reliability of findings were enhanced.

According to Creswell (2003), qualitative research is interpretive research typically requiring the researcher to be involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants. In this study, the researcher’s current work setting was studied; therefore, the researcher was a *backyard* observer. This raises concern as researchers must identify their biases, values, and personal interests about the subject of their study.

The use of triangulation helped allay the possibility of researcher bias. Also important to convey is the fact that the researcher has not lived in the community being studied and does not have personal connections with participants outside the scope of the study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The vast majority of rural Mississippi school districts experience budgetary restraints prohibiting them from building or renovating school facilities that would assist in providing students with a safe orderly environment. Overcrowding and deterioration are prominent problems with few solutions. School bond elections are one of these solutions. Successful bond elections require a favorable vote from a 60% majority of voters. Convincing citizens, especially in a rural community, to cast a vote that would increase their own property taxes is a daunting task. This study included an examination of the unsuccessful 2005 bond election of Community School District to ascertain reasons for its failure therefore providing other school administrators with data to make more informed decisions about how to conduct their own bond elections. The study also sought to investigate how the role of the superintendent, the opposition, the media, and the school board influenced the outcome of the bond election.

Based on data collected using the research methods outlined previously, this chapter includes the following sections: (a) February 15, 2005, which includes a description of the voting climate on the actual election day including the results of the election, (b) From Good to Great which includes a description of the steps taken by the

district in the bond election process, (c) detailed findings guided by the following research questions each presented individually:

1. What was role of the superintendent during the bond election process?
2. What was the role of opposition to the bond election during the bond election process?
3. What was the role of the media during the bond election process?
4. What was the role of the school board during the bond election process?

In addition, this chapter will conclude with a section that relates the findings of the study to the literature reviewed previously in Chapter 2.

February 15, 2005

After months of preparation the school bond election for the Community School District was held on February 15, 2005. The weather was unseasonably warm, temperatures in the 70's, with a bright blue sky. A 43% turnout of eligible voters for the 6.25 million dollar bond issue provided a steady stream of people at the local high school where the election was held from 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. According to election commissioners who worked hard to ensure that the voting process was a good experience for all voters, the day ran very smoothly.

For months prior to election day, debates ensued concerning issues surrounding the bond proposal. These debates culminated with the defeat in the Community School District bond election. Of the approximately 7,800 registered voters representing 12 different precincts in and around the town of Community who were eligible to participate

in the school bond election, 3,338 cast votes. By a 2,437 to 901 count, the school bond was defeated in all 12 precincts.

From Good to Great

On November 8, 2004, the Community School District Board of Trustees voted to approve the authorization of a resolution to call and hold a special bond election. Four of five board members voted in favor, one member voted against. School district superintendent, Dr. John Word, had begun laying the groundwork for the election years before this authorization.

Since first coming to the Community School District in 2001, Dr. Word reported that he was painfully aware of the deteriorated condition of school campuses and the need for more classroom space. Academics being of foremost importance to Dr. Word, his first order of business as the leader of the district was to improve the instruction the students were receiving. This process began by hiring a curriculum and assessment director for the district and working with school administrators to provide all teachers in the district with the academic support they needed to better educate their students. Dr. Word's efforts were fruitful as state mandated test data soon indicated that academic achievement had reached the highest level in district history.

When asked what he considered being the first step in attempting a bond issue, Dr. Word replied that his first order of business was to conduct a needs assessment. According to literature reviewed for this study conducting a needs assessment is a common strategy that leads to a successful bond election. His description of the steps in

this needs assessment outlined a study of district facilities by his staff that included consideration for specific facility needs like roofs and heating and cooling systems along with an assessment of district academic programs and enrollment to determine the need for more classroom space. The results of this dissection of district needs were used by Dr. Word as the basis for a long range strategic plan that was presented to the local Board of Trustees in May 2002, three years prior to the 2005 bond election. This plan was organized into several sections including a section entitled *Financial*. This section made specific reference to a bond election to finance long term facility needs.

During the 2002-2003 school year, with academics clearly on track, Dr. Word's creation of a group of hand-picked community members marked the beginning of the journey that culminated with the February 2005 bond election. He entitled the group the Superintendent's Advisory Committee (SAC). This committee's purpose was to allow its members to bring current issues concerning the school district to the attention of school administration while at the same time becoming educated themselves on the inner workings of a rural Mississippi school district. One of the most prominent topics at meetings of the SAC was facility and maintenance needs in the district. While these meetings began more than two years prior to the authorization by the Board of Trustees to hold a bond election, it became clear when discussing this committee with Dr. Word that this is where the groundwork for the bond election began. Monthly SAC meetings included tours of district facilities and presentations prepared by each school principal outlining what they considered to be their facility needs. Principals also provided presentations celebrating the academic progress made in the district.

In September 2004, Dr. Word and the school board members held a weekend work session where Dr. Word presented an updated long range strategic plan to the board. This plan contained an extensive amount of facility renovation and construction and firmly planted the seed in the minds of board members that district facility needs outweighed the budget. With the SAC and the school board seemingly on board, Dr. Word began moving fervently in the direction of a bond election, planning, gathering data, contacting an architect for cost information, and prioritizing needs. His activities culminated with the November 8, 2004 authorization by the board to hold a bond election. This vote embarked the school district on a campaign they entitled *From Good to Great*.

Question #1: What Was the Role of The Superintendent during the Bond Election Process?

The basic hierarchy of Mississippi school districts places the superintendent, whether elected or appointed by the school board, as responsible for all aspects of school district operations. Although many tasks are delegated to other personnel, the superintendent is ultimately responsible for everyone from district office staff to custodians. It is often a thankless job that places blame on the superintendent when things go wrong and gives credit to others when things go right. The design of the superintendent's office in school district operations makes it the job of that office to be the instigator of all school business, including bond elections. While the local school board is the governing body in Mississippi school districts it is the job of the

superintendent to make recommendations to the board concerning all school business, as well as to administer the policies and procedures set forth by the board. The superintendent is also the visionary for the district and is charged with the task of planning for the future to ensure the needs of students. These needs most certainly include facility construction and building renovations.

In the case of the 2005 bond election in Community School District, local school superintendent, Dr. John Word had done his homework. Months of preparation had been spent studying school facility needs, gathering data on construction and renovation costs, presenting needs and cost analysis to community committees and the school board. This hard work led the local school board to authorize the 6.25 million dollar bond issue attempted by the Community School District.

A 60% favorable vote from eligible voters residing inside the Community School District would have authorized the sale of general obligation bonds bringing \$6.25 million to the district for facility construction and renovation. The prospect of obtaining this substantial amount of much needed funding proved exciting to district administration. Therefore, the superintendent's office began immediately compiling a PowerPoint presentation to be used to provide information to the public concerning the bond election. The presentation aptly called *From Good to Great* and nicknamed in the district, *the dog and pony show* was a 30 minute PowerPoint presentation that, through the use of photographs, outlined the facility needs of the district, the community and economic implications of an exemplary school system, what the tax increase resulting from the issue of the bonds would mean to local taxpayers , and details about where the

\$6.25 million generated from the issuance of the general obligation bonds would be spent. The presentation, while not professionally done, did contain narration by school district administrators and included background music. In addition, although created only to provide pertinent information to voters, the presentation was obviously supportive of issuing bonds for facility improvements and ended with Dr. Word's narrative from Proverbs 29:18, where there is no vision, the people perish. In addition to the PowerPoint presentation, a two-sided color flyer was prepared for distribution to community members also outlining where the \$6.25 million would be spent and an explanation of how community members could calculate for themselves the tax increase that would be brought about by a successful bond election.

In addition to spearheading the creation of the From Good to Great presentation, Dr. Word also began choosing members for a From Good to Great committee. Dr. Word reported that the people for the committee were chosen based on their prowess in the community and their ability to make things happen. One participant in this study, who was a board member at the time of the bond election, reported participating in the creation of this committee by making a list of possible names to be included in its membership. Led by Dr. Word, the carefully chosen committee immediately began holding periodic meetings to discuss promotion of the bond election and to raise funds for advertisements and other expenses. However, when asked, a majority of study participants indicated they never knew this committee existed. Their comments included this one from one study participant, "I'm just going to be upfront and honest with you. Most of the people I saw were from the school. I never really saw a committee that was

made up of community people.” In addition, all study participants indicated that the superintendent was the primary spokesperson in support of the bond election. Several even indicated that he was the only advocate.

The sentiment that the plan outlined in the From Good to Great presentation was simply the plan of the superintendent and did not consider the wants and needs felt by the townspeople of Community was expressed by the majority of people interviewed for this study. Even one study participant, who was a member of the From Good to Great Committee and reports working diligently to support the bond election, admits that while he admired Dr. Word for standing up for what was right and best for the school children his role in the bond promotion could have appeared to be grandstanding. Several other study participants who were for and against the bond election corroborate this sentiment with comments like “I took it as something he wanted to build himself up” and “it came across as this is the superintendent’s idea and he presented it and I think for one, he was perceived as an outsider who came in and tried to tell us what we were going to do with our schools.”

The first showing of the From Good to Great presentation was on November 11, 2004, only three days after the school board’s authorization of a bond election. The first to view the completed product were the faculties of each school in the district. With the help of the researcher whose task it was to set up and run the presentation, Dr. Word visited every school in the district. For a large majority of personnel this was the first they had heard that the district would be holding a bond election. While response during and immediately after each presentation at the schools was very low key, Dr. Word’s

request during that presentation that every faculty member begin compiling a list of parent names they would be willing to contact to enlist support for the election, raised many an eyebrow in the days to come. Teachers reported that they felt pressured into supporting a plan that had not included any input from them. One community member and participant in this study who was known to oppose the bond election stated that he knew teachers who felt pressured by Dr. Word to support the bond issue or their jobs would be in jeopardy. He also reported that others he knew who opposed the election felt that community sentiments were completely ignored by the district administration during the formulation of the spending plan for the \$6.25 million in revenue that would be raised should the election prove successful.

Documentation exists verifying that the From Good to Great presentation was shown over 30 times during the three month period between board authorization of the bond election and election day. In attendance were community organizations including Rotary, church groups, volunteer fire departments, parent teacher organizations, booster clubs, the media, the local community development foundation, bank employees, and, if requested, even to individual citizens. However, there is evidence that in actuality the presentation was shown more than 50 times during that three month time period. For all of these presentations, Dr. Word was the only spokesperson and was accompanied by the researcher.

Question #2: What Was the Role of The Opposition during the Bond Election Process?

Data gathered for this study indicate the existence of opposition to the Community School District bond election almost immediately after the school board's authorization on November 8, 2004. Dr. Word reported that his initial concern over this opposition was not strong as it did not appear to be organized or large in scale. However, by election day, the efforts of the opposition had become not only well organized but had strong financial backing from community members whose opposition to the election eventually led to mudslinging and bitterness. This section will be organized by topics that emerged during the research for this study and represent the main issues addressed by the opposition.

Property Tax Increase

Research supports the fact that the most prominent reason a community opposes a school bond election is the increase in property taxes that a successful elections brings. Data collected for this study suggests that the proposed tax increase of the 2005 election of the Community School District was a factor in its defeat. The From Good to Great presentation explained the amount of tax increase by breaking it down into a per day amount. Tax increase calculations obtained from the county tax collector's office indicated that a tax payer owning a house with a market value of \$100,000 would pay about \$.35 a day in additional property taxes should the bond election be successful. This calculated to about 128 dollars a year. Dr. Word's narration in the From Good to Great presentation simplified it even further by explaining to voters that the increase in taxes

would cost no more than a candy bar per day. One study participant and a member of the opposition stated:

You have big land owners...and if you and I or the whole community sat down with them and worked out a bond issue they are not going to be for it, if their taxes go up just \$5 a year they are not going to be for it, you just have to write those people off.

Only three names were ever publicly associated with the negative campaign launched by the opposition. Of these three, only one was a land owner who might have seen a significant tax increase should the bond election be successful. The other two did not appear to be in positions that would be greatly affected by a tax increase. The results of this study overwhelmingly indicate that a significant amount of funding would have been necessary to initiate the opposition's campaign against the bond election, much more funding than could likely be generated by these three community members. In reference to one of these outspoken opponents, a participant in this study representing the media indicated, "He paid more in the ads than he would have for taxes in a year." Members of the opposition who served as participants in this study also indicated that the opposition was very organized and held regular meetings to determine strategy, meetings that were attended by a much larger number than three. Information gleaned from these interviews also indicated that the monetary force behind the opposition included large land owners opposed to a tax increase who chose to remain anonymous.

Too Much Money; We Must Prioritize

While a tax increase was mentioned numerous times in the media and in documents circulated by the opposition it almost always seemed to be a secondary concern to study participants and was almost always mentioned in conjunction with another of the opposition's points of contention; that the amount being requested in the bond election was just too much.

A Community School District Board member and participant in this study who voted against the authorization of a bond election at the November 8, 2004 board meeting reported that the amount of the bond proposal was the primary motivation for his opposition. He described a building plan that had been discussed with the board over a period of time that would cost approximately \$2.0 million. On the night of the November 8, 2004 board meeting he reports being handed a proposal for approximately \$8.0 million. His comments included:

It was like right at \$8.0 million and it came to a vote that night and I hadn't seen it for 15 minutes that was the first time I had seen it. There was no way I was going to vote on an \$8.0 million project as far as giving a yeah go ahead on it when I hadn't had time to conceive it whatsoever.

The bond election proposal presented to the public stated that the estimated costs for proposed renovations and construction in the district would total \$7.75 million. The district already had in its coffers \$1.5 million making it necessary for the Community School District bond election to provide \$6.25 million. The proposed expenditures

included renovations and/or construction at each of the five campuses in the district and to its athletic facilities. The expenditures proposed included:

- Campus A: New parking lot, 6 additional classrooms and extensive renovations to the current building for an estimated total of \$1.02 million
 - Campus B: New roof and windows; complete renovation of existing facility; replacing all heating and cooling systems; relocating the principal's office to a more centralized location for an estimated total cost of \$1.2 million
 - Campus C: New roof; painting and new floors for the entire interior for an estimated total cost of \$340,000 thousand
 - Campus D: Complete interior renovation; convert current auditorium into new classrooms and a new principal's office; replace heating and cooling units; add a serving line to the cafeteria; repair floor and bleachers in the gym; construct a new band hall and new auditorium for an estimated total cost of \$3.9 million
 - Campus E: Remedy drainage problem; new roof; renovate restrooms; replace heating and cooling systems; paint entire interior for an estimated cost of \$525,000 thousand
 - Athletics facilities: New concession stand and restrooms; renovate field house; add a paved track at football field; repair drainage around football field, add softball facilities, add fences for facilities for an estimated cost of \$605,000 thousand
- These costs in addition to architect and attorneys fees equaled the approximate \$7.75 million in the bond proposal.

In the bond proposal, two items surfaced as the main reasons the community thought the bond proposal was too extravagant. First, there was the construction of a new theatre/auditorium at an estimated cost of \$1.6 million. Next, the construction of a new band hall was proposed at an estimated cost of \$765,000 thousand. In documents circulated in the community by the opposition, it was brought to the attention of taxpayers that these two items represented approximately 36% of the total amount of the bond proposal. At several community meetings attended by the researcher where the From Good to Great presentation was shown, participants often asked which of the proposed construction and renovation projects would be completed first. Dr. Word explained often that the order of construction would be dependent upon the architect's recommendations and the availability of contractors. In addition, the projects requiring the most time would be started first as well as those that did not displace any students, this meant that the construction of the new theatre/auditorium and band hall would be started first. His explanations also included the fact that the new auditorium and band hall needed to be complete and in use so that the current ones could be converted into desperately needed classroom space. Members of the opposition seemed to ignore Dr. Word's explanations indicated by the fact that in opposition documents reviewed for this study including paid media spots, misplaced priorities by the district was given large credence.

The opposition contended that the auditorium and band hall should not be top priorities, but instead the deplorable conditions in student restrooms, the leaking roofs and windows, and poor lighting should be addressed first. To exacerbate this point of

contention, in 2003, the district received a sizable grant that allowed for a community theatre program to be implemented in the district. This program became very successful, providing the community with Broadway style productions. The district personnel overseeing the community theatre included Dr. Word's wife. The opposition repeatedly concluded in documents presented in the media and circulated by hand in the community that Dr. Word simply wanted to build this auditorium for his wife.

The research conducted for this study also indicated an overwhelming feeling by the community that the proposed additions and renovations that would be made possible by the monies generated from a successful bond election were too extravagant. One participant stated:

I don't give a rip about what the schools look like, I mean I do, I don't want them falling down around our ears, but glass atriums don't mean a lot to me. Kids having driver's education classes means a lot more to me. I think we got into aesthetics a little more.

Another participant explained:

I compared it to the fact that I would love to own a 1500 acre ranch, but if I go to the banker... he is going to laugh in my face. Even if we could afford it at the time, there was enough anxiety about the future....I am afraid we are going to be saddled with this and we can't pay for it.

Fiscal Responsibility

Fiscal responsibility by the school district was another issue the opposition used to sway voters away from voting favorably in the bond election. Documents circulated by the opposition that were reviewed for this study were full of supposed examples of the district's inability to handle finances. Cost overruns on recently completed district projects were presented as examples of misappropriations with no explanations for these overruns or discussion of their merit. Explanations by the district for the cost overruns were ignored as the opposition maintained its position that money had been wasted. Members of the opposition spent large sums of money paying to have district financial records copied for their perusal. Dr. Word reported daily occurrences of requests for hundreds of pages of financial and other records from the now organized opposition calling themselves *A Group of Concerned Citizens*. Many items pulled from these district records were used in the opposition's campaign to discredit district administration and defeat the bond election. According to Dr. Word, many of the opposition's claims were based on findings from these records that were taken out of context. Ironically, in support of Dr. Word's claim that the district was indeed fiscally responsible, the school district business officer was presented with a plaque for outstanding achievement in reporting district finances along with a certificate for the same achievement from the state auditor's office. These commendations were presented at the same board meeting where the board voted to authorize the bond election.

Aside from the cost overruns on current projects and analysis of district financial information, data gathered for this study indicated the main reason for the claim of fiscal

irresponsibility lay in the contention that the district had not maintained their current facilities adequately. In the From Good to Great presentation many photos of dilapidated bathroom facilities, leaking roofs and windows, and carpet held together with duct tape were presented to voters with the intention of showing the district's need for upgrades. The presentation talked about maintenance that had been deferred for years and the fact that no facility upgrades had been completed on some campuses in over 30 years. In the same presentation, voters were informed of the \$1.5 million that the district was holding in reserve to be combined with revenue from the bond election to make these much needed repairs. The opposition claimed that the district was not fiscally responsible because it had not made the best use of those reserve funds to adequately correct some of these dilapidated conditions already. Coupled with the reports of cost overruns by the district on past projects, voters were easily swayed by the opposition's contention that monies from the bond would run out from building the new theatre/auditorium and band hall, leaving these critical repairs undone. Also spotlighted by the opposition was the claim that if the district could not adequately maintain its current facilities, then likely it wouldn't be fiscally responsible enough to manage the upkeep of a new \$1.6 million theatre/auditorium and a \$765,000 thousand band hall in addition to those current facilities.

Trust

Community members in support of and opposed to the bond election continually reiterated one point that the opposition used to its advantage: the district superintendent at

the time of the bond election, Dr. John Word, was not from Community, MS. Dr. Word moved to Community from out of state two years prior to the bond election. This point in and of itself seemed to create great distrust among voters. Comments from study participants alluded to their fear that Dr. Word would get the district deeply in debt and then pack up and move away, leaving them to pay back the bond debt. This, in conjunction with the other concerns of the opposition, left Dr. Word the target of what can, in hindsight, only be described as a personal character assassination.

This attack began when questions arose concerning \$1.5 million that Dr. Word reported to the public had been saved for district facility upgrades. Media spots paid for by the Group of Concerned Citizens reported that in 2003, two years before the election, the district issued two separate three Mill bonds totaling \$1.7 million, the proceeds of which were to be used for repairs and renovations in the district. Since the issuance of those bonds, the only project that had been completed was a new parking lot. This parking lot project was the subject of intense scrutiny by the opposition and was the focus of the allegations of cost overruns and fiscal mismanagement discussed previously. Members of the Group of Concerned Citizens wanted to know if these were the funds Dr. Word claimed to have *saved*, or were they indeed borrowed adding to the debt already encumbering the district. Dr. Word's response in a paid media spot indicated that his realization that the funds from the 2003 bond issuance would not be enough to cover all of the facility needs in the district made it necessary for the district to *save* the funds remaining after the parking lot construction to be used in addition to those provided by a successful 2005 bond election. Dr. Word's attempt to simplify for the public a

complicated bond issuance and construction project erred in its assumption that the community would simply accept his explanation. That did not prove to be the case. Instead, the opposition circulated flyers calling Dr. Word a liar and continued allegations that his dishonesty and lack of ability to be a good steward of district funds could be nothing but detrimental to the district. By election day, the situation between the district, more specifically, the superintendent, and the leaders of the Group of Concerned Citizens had deteriorated to the point that an outspoken member of the From Good to Great committee reported that he had been called at home and threatened with bodily harm.

Important to note at this point is the fact that the discourse between the opposition and the supporters of the bond election included only one person on the side of the support, Dr. Word. No evidence exists indicating that the From Good to Great Committee ever addressed any of the allegations made by the opposition. While the committee did provide funding for some paid media spots, for the most part their content included only comments from the superintendent. In addition, only one member of the local school board ever made any public statements concerning the bond election. Those statements were in support of the bond election but made no mention of the allegations against the superintendent or the school district.

The extent to which the opposition became organized was evident from comments made by participants in this study. One participant who was a member of the From Good to Great Committee explained that any time a general or positive statement was made, it seemed 10 people were there to hiss and boo and make it something it wasn't.

Participants interviewed who were opposed described regular meetings to discuss the

progress of the election and plan next steps. The role they played in the election process clearly was one aimed at creating an atmosphere of distrust and discontent in the minds of voters. As one study participant so aptly stated, “the vocal minority turned into the voting majority.”

Question #3: What Was the Role of the Media during the Bond Election Process?

The local newspaper in Community, MS, is distributed once a week to subscribers primarily located in the county that encompasses the town. The town of Community also boasts a radio station. Several local television stations are also headquartered in larger towns nearby. However, study participants indicated that although television and radio stations are located in the area, their audience is more regional rather than local, and information presented in those venues is often less pertinent to the residents of Community, MS. For this reason, study participants overwhelmingly indicated that the local newspaper was their primary source of information concerning the 2005 bond election, second only to word of mouth. In addition, very little coverage from radio or television exists concerning the bond election.

Upon reflection by study participants, local newspaper coverage appeared to be overwhelmingly negative. The number and scope of the paid spots, Letters to the Editor, and media coverage by reporters in the local newspaper in opposition to the bond election seemed to significantly outweigh coverage in support of it. The opposition placed full page spots in the local paper that were directly aimed at discrediting school district administration, primarily the superintendent, and raised doubt about all aspects of the

bond proposal. The From Good to Great Committee also placed paid spots in the local paper, some to discredit the allegations of the opposition, but most were simply in support of the bond election.

The most interesting information concerning local newspaper coverage came in its analysis. What seemed upon reflection by study participants to be overwhelmingly negative, in actuality was not. In total, there were 40 paid spots, Letters to the Editor, and stories written by local reporters in the local newspaper. Of these 40, twenty-two were in support of the bond election while only 10 were against. There were 8 that remained neutral, simply providing information concerning the bond proposal itself.

When asked about the role the media should play in a bond election, study participants who are members of the media overwhelmingly agreed that the role of the media is to inform the public in a fair and ethical manner while remaining neutral on the issues. They also stressed the media's responsibility to print factual information, a responsibility that also extends to information presented in paid spots. However, it was the conclusion of the media representatives interviewed for this study that some of the media coverage during the 2005 bond election certainly could be considered to have crossed the line ethically. One study participant stated, "Many of the things that were advertised were probably at least iffy. Objectively, tastefully, iffy in any number of ways." Interestingly, 7 of the 8 newspaper artifacts analyzed for this study found to be neutral in content were all written by members of the media and were factual in nature, indicating ethical coverage of the bond election by the local media. The 10 artifacts analyzed and deemed against the bond election were all paid spots placed by the

opposition or were Letters to the Editor. These included full page advertisements aimed at discrediting, primarily, the superintendent. Their content could certainly be considered questionable in regard to its factuality and is likely the basis for the impression of study participants that the media coverage was unethical and overwhelmingly negative.

In regard to how these 40 artifacts affected the outcome of the election, one study participant and member of the bond opposition stated:

I think it changed who came out and voted, not the way anybody voted. All it did was bring out the ones who were going to vote against it. Look, there were a fixed number of people who were going to vote for the bond issue and we knew that. If we do no advertising and they do no advertising, the number of people that voted for the bond issue wouldn't change 5%. We were the ones that would change the amount of people that came out. That was the difference.... If they are for it, I mean traditionally, and you can look back, they are going to come out and vote. If they are against it, they have to be really against it. That is what we did; we changed the amount of people that came out to vote.

This point is corroborated by the comments of another study participant and member of the From Good to Great Committee, "I think to an educated person a negative campaign shows weakness, to an uneducated person it says truth." In rural Mississippi, and especially for residents of the Community School District, which at present has an approximately 28% high school dropout rate, this statement rang true.

The opposition's contention that their negative media campaign changed the number of voters who turned out to vote against the bond issue, and not the way they

voted, can also be corroborated from another standpoint. Several study participants stated that the circulation of the local newspaper does not reach a large number of voters. In addition, participants noted that the voters who do subscribe to the paper are those that would have been in favor of the bond election and would likely not be swayed by the material printed in the media. One study participant stated, “If you find out what the reader poll is; its middle to upper class”. The people who buy it off the stands buy it because their child is in it or there has been a big drug raid, and don’t take it and read it throughout.” Through their exceptionally strong allegations against the school district and the superintendent, the opposition provided the general population of non-subscribers the one motivator that sells papers, controversy. The controversy created by the negative media campaign waged by the opposition did just what they proposed; it placed a huge spotlight on an issue that might have gone completely unnoticed by the majority of voters fueling their feelings of opposition and bringing them to the poles.

In addition to the assertion by study participants that the scope and negativity of the campaign launched by the opposition changed the number of people that voted, there is also a strong contention that the lack of retaliation on the part of the district and the superintendent was equally as harmful to the success of the bond election. While the number of artifacts in the media in favor of the bond election was more than double that of the opposition, the content was not comparable. One study participant described the opposition, “Overall it was just a better organized group of people that didn’t mind telling whatever somebody wanted to hear.” A majority of study participants also believed that the proponents of the bond election, more specifically the superintendent, should have

retaliated against the opposition’s media blitz. The allegations in the media were directly aimed at discrediting the superintendent; however, he responded little to the allegations and when he did, it was done in a professional manner. One study participant stated concerning the position of the superintendent, “He always focused on the positive side and some of those negative articles in the paper he should have at least counteracted or accepted and said here’s the problem and here’s what we are going to do to deal with it.” However, members of the opposition had no expectation of professionalism and in essence nothing to lose, giving them the ability to conduct themselves in a much more aggressive manner than did the school district superintendent charged with being a role model and leader for the entire district and the community. When questioned about his response or lack of response to the allegations, Dr. Word responded, “When you get in the mud with pigs, you begin to smell like them and they love it.” The district administration’s ability to maintain professionalism did not go unnoticed. One study participant stated, “They were very brave and courageous. That was not a fight for the faint of heart....I admire them for going through what they did.”

Since the 2005 bond election, the ownership and editor at the local newspaper have changed. More than one study participant indicated that they believe the ownership and editor at the time of the bond election had a significant effect on how the local paper handled the bond election coverage. This comment was made by one study participant and member of the media, “I don’t believe the paper was locally owned...at the time they were not local people. All they probably thought about was oh, good, an advertisement.” Important to note as well is the fact that the local paper is a for profit business, the

majority of whose money is made through advertising. Study participants answered negatively when asked if they felt the local media took a positive editorial stance on the bond election. One week before the election, the local paper did publish a small editorial in support of the bond election. In addition, during that same week a regional newspaper in the area also wrote an editorial in support of Community's bond election. But as one study participant stated, "it was too little too late."

Question #4: What Was The Role of The School Board during the Bond Election Process?

More than two years before the Community bond election was held, the local school district Board of Trustees was presented with a long-term strategic plan that included provisions for a bond election. Over the course of the next two years, the district superintendent worked diligently putting all the pieces in place for a bond election. In March 2004, a school board election was held and the current board president was unseated. This meant that at the November 8, 2004 board meeting, when the superintendent asked for the board's authorization to hold a bond election, this new member had not been privy to the majority of planning that had led to the superintendent's recommendation; in fact, he had only been a board member for a few months. This coupled with the new member's concerns over the amount of the bond proposal presented him led him to vote no in regard to the authorization. When asked if this lack of unanimous board support for the bond election concerned him, the superintendent at the time of the bond election, Dr. John Word, responded:

It bothered me that we could not have 100%...to say well we can't do this because this one board member is going to vote against it is like he controls all the votes... but yeah, I was concerned even though his words, when we asked him about it, were that he would not work against it, he just couldn't support it and he would take a neutral position...

In addition, although the other members of the board did vote in favor of authorizing a bond election, study participants indicated that their feelings on the bond election were not as positive as their vote indicated. Two other board members interviewed for this study both indicated that, although the other members voted favorably, they knew of at least one of the yeah votes did not truly support the election at all and one that had serious doubts about whether or not to support the election. When asked if he was aware that two other board members were wavering in their support of the election in addition to the one who publicly indicated his lack of support, the superintendent responded:

I asked them specifically before the vote, if they were not going to work for this if they were not wholeheartedly for this, not to give me the authority to go for it because it was going to be tough regardless and they still voted for it. In hindsight, their heart was not in it; they just didn't want to say no.

All participants in this study were asked how they thought this lack of unanimous board support affected the outcome of the election. Overwhelmingly the participants agreed that this lack of a united front seriously hurt the chances of a successful election. One participant commented, "It was the straw that broke the camel's back". Another concurred, "If you have a divided house it is likely to fall. If people in the community are

looking at it and see that they [the board] can't even agree themselves. That's grounds for doubt."

In addition, the one board member who was openly in opposition to the bond issue did become a more vocal adversary during the three months between the board authorization and election day. By his own admission, he did circulate a document expressing his lack of support and his reasons for it. The document indicated his concerns over the amount of the bond proposal and the spending plan associated with it. These concerns included the amount of tax increase a favorable election would place on taxpayers and the priority of expenditures, primarily that the new construction of a band hall and auditorium would be done before much needed renovations to other facilities. The figures associated with the bond proposal were also shared in the document as well as a rendering of the proposed new auditorium. The document was in no way antagonistic in nature and did not specifically discredit the superintendent or the district. The effect of this one board member's open opposition was evident in the comments of one study participant:

I don't want you to think that the one that was against it persuaded me all the way to be against it, because he didn't, but a lot of things I would not have known about if it wasn't for him digging around and doing some research and things. I, along with a lot of other people, would have been left alone in the dark.

These comments indicate that this one board member had the trust of his constituency. It was this trust that allowed him to influence people's perceptions of the bond proposal and convince them that the tax increase was too high and the proposal too extravagant. If the

constituency of the one negative board member trusted him, then it stands to reason that the two board members who were decidedly in favor of the election could have had the same effect on their constituencies. However, these two board members by their own admission did not adequately support the election in the community. One of these board members interviewed for this study stated, “There was no one on the board willing to step up and be the spokesperson.” When describing the role of the superintendent in promoting the election, this same participant stated, “When he stepped up to the plate, we all just sat there.” Only one board member publicly supported the election in the community and was featured in the media as taking a pro stance on the issue. However, the efforts of the opposing board member far outweighed the efforts of the supporting one. In regard to board member support, one participant aptly stated, “With 3 members not thinking it would pass, I hate to say it was doomed to fail.”

Discussion of Related Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine the failed bond attempt of the Community School District and investigate reasons for this failure. Specifically, the role of the superintendent, the opposition, the media, and the school board during the bond election process were examined to determine how their roles influenced the outcome of the bond election. This discussion of related literature will be organized according to the research questions guiding this study.

Question #1: What Was the Role of the Superintendent during the Bond Election Process?

The role of the superintendent during a bond election as described by Lode (1999) should include conducting research for board members, gathering tax rate information, and constructing cost analysis while maintaining a low enough profile to avoid giving voters the impression that the proposal is simply the plan of the superintendent. Findings of this study indicate overwhelmingly that a majority of community members did indeed see the plan outlined in the 2005 bond election as that of the superintendent. Blackwell (1997) stated that a thorough and comprehensive needs assessment was the first step to a successful bond election. In the case of the 2005 bond election conducted in the Community School District, findings indicate that a thorough needs assessment was conducted by the superintendent and his staff. This needs assessment resulted in the formulation of a detailed long range strategic plan that included holding a bond election to raise needed revenue for facility upgrades and construction. This plan was presented to the local Board of Trustees and guided their decision to authorize district administration to hold the 2005 bond election. However, while this needs assessment was thorough and appropriate, it failed to include one critical element described by Blackwell (1997); it did not result in a feeling of ownership and buy in from the community and the school district staff. In fact, most study participants were unaware that any needs assessment was conducted. This finding supports the contention of Blackwell (1997) that a well orchestrated needs assessment can act as the catalyst for building community support and ownership of the bond proposal.

Beginning with the needs assessment conducted by the superintendent and his staff, through the careful creation of the SAC and From Good to Great Committees, the public perception was that the district superintendent was the only person publicly promoting the bond election in the community. In all of the community gatherings where the From Good to Great presentation was shown, the superintendent was the spokesperson. These findings, in conjunction with the failure of the bond election, support current literature which indicates that the role of the superintendent during a bond election should not be the one of primary spokesperson. Instead, enlisting the aid of a well-respected community member to serve as spokesperson for the bond election would indicate to voters that the plan was created to assist in the overall improvement of the district rather than self-serving for the superintendent. However, study findings indicate that no such community member seemed willing to serve in such a capacity. Therefore, the district superintendent took the leadership role described by Lode (1999) as necessary for a successful bond election which required him to make a significant personal sacrifice and provide leadership in the face of obstacles. Unfortunately, the findings of this study indicate that this role appeared to the community as self-serving and not for the good of the entire district, making it a significant contributing factor to the defeat of the 2005 bond election.

The role of the district superintendent as being primarily responsible for the bond promotion has been well established previously. In addition, the superintendent was also primarily responsible for the bond proposal that was presented to the community. The proposal was ambitious and did include a component that touched all facets of the school

community from academics to athletics. According to Carter (1995) an approach aimed at *pleasing everyone* will often move the focus away from improving education and result in defeat. Findings of this study indicate that this was the case in the 2005 bond election attempted by the Community School District. Focus was placed on the new auditorium and band hall, and many other needed facility upgrades that were also included in the proposal seemed forgotten. The 2,437 voters who voted against the bond election seemed oblivious to the fact that while the defeat of the bond election did stop the construction of what they considered to be a much too extravagant auditorium and band hall, it also halted renovations to other school facilities that were never disputed and desperately needed. This finding also supports the research of Davis and Tyson (2003), who state that communities often let one issue defeat common sense. In addition, Carter's (1995) contention that the assumption often exists that parents will support most any proposal when, in fact they will not, if they can't see exactly how the bond election benefits children is also supported.

Question #2: What Was the Role of The Opposition during the Bond Election Process?

A study completed by Curtin (1993) suggests that districts beware of outside interest groups that might oppose a bond election. In addition, Curtin states that 100% of districts with failed bond elections included in her study had organized opposition. Study findings do overwhelmingly indicate that organized opposition did exist during the 2005 bond election attempted by the Community School District. According to these findings, this opposition was the largest contributing factor in the defeat of the 2005 bond election

attempted by the Community School District.

Research reviewed for this study states that communities resist increased tax burdens, let dissatisfaction with current administration, and misconceptions about how monies raised from a successful bond election will be spent keep them from offering support in a bond election (Bohrer, 2000). These findings were supported by the emergence of the following topics as the major issues addressed by the opposition: property tax increase, the amount of the bond proposal and spending priorities, fiscal responsibility by the district, and trust of the district administration.

The research of Mediratta, Fruchter, and Lewis (2002) included the examination of community groups in rural Mississippi whose aim was to hold school systems accountable for public education. The researchers contend that these organizations helped create public will to improve the overcrowded, dilapidated conditions they found in rural school districts. During the 2005 bond election attempted by the Community School District, a community group was formed and called A Group of Concerned Citizens. However, unlike the community groups described in the research of Mediratta, Fruchter, and Lewis, this committee's goal was not to create public will to improve the schools but instead was aimed at discrediting the district administration and the bond proposal. The tactics of the opposition group included a character attack of the district superintendent accusing him of dishonesty and poor fiscal management. These attempts to discredit the superintendent made his role as primary promoter of the bond election even more detrimental to its outcome. The activities of this group uphold the findings of Curtin (1993) and Bohrer (2000) who both emphasize the detrimental effects that organized

opposition can have on a bond election. They also support the need for community leaders to act in support of the bond election. While the From Good to Great Committee was created for this purpose its lack of public support for the bond election was just as big a factor in its defeat as was the opposition.

Question #3: What Was The Role of the Media during the Bond Election Process?

According to Henderson (1997), public relations efforts generated by the school district are considered an essential part of successful bond elections. Henderson also contends that legitimate newspaper articles, television spots, and radio coverage seem to sway voters more than school district bond election advertisements and flyers. In the case of the From Good to Great presentation, Henderson's findings are supported. Study participants consistently reported that the quality of the presentation created by the school district and the accompanying flyer were of high quality and very informative. However, no evidence exists that the presentation or the flyer had any effect on how people voted.

Analysis of media artifacts for this study shows that over twice as many were in support of the bond election as were against. However, these artifacts were also unable to sway enough voters to result in a successful election. Analysis also determined that media representatives acted ethically in their reporting of events during the bond election although most study participants felt to the contrary. Lode (1999) cited that poor media relations often result in unsuccessful bond elections. The findings of this study do not indicate complete lack of media support; however, the relations could be considered poor

since what support existed was very minimal. Therefore, it can be stated that Lode's contention was supported.

The paid spots placed in the local media by the opposition were bolder and more controversial than any submitted by the supporters. Study participants also maintained that the media, more specifically the local newspaper, did not sway the voters one way or another but instead brought attention to the election by creating controversy that brought more opposed voters to the poles. Research by Curtin (1993), Lode (1999), Bohrer (2000), and Henderson (1997) all indicates that positive media coverage can result in a successful bond election. The outcome of the 2005 bond election does not support this research. The amount of positive media coverage far outweighed the negative but did not result in a successful election. What the findings of this study do support is the contention of study participants that controversy creates doubt.

Question #4: What was the Role of the Local School Board during the Bond Election Process?

Weathersby (2001) cited that a divided school board represents a death blow to any bond election. He went further to state that with unanimous support of a bond election, the school board is demonstrating to the public that school leadership is strong and committed to a common goal. The 2005 bond election in the Community School district was overwhelmingly defeated by a large margin. From the beginning, the community was well aware that the board did not unanimously support the bond election as one of its members did not vote favorably to authorize district administration to hold

the election. This immediately left doubt in the minds of voters that the bond election was the right thing to do. The findings of this study indicate that this lack of unanimous vision and support extended further than just the one member of the board that did not vote to authorize the bond election. Of the five members on the board only two truly supported the bond election fully. Only one board member actively participated in supporting the bond election. This only proved to be more evidence for the voters who believed the bond proposal was simply the plan of the superintendent and did indeed act as a death blow to the 2005 bond election of the Community School District.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter begins with a summary of the study's purpose, the research questions that guided the study, the related literature, and the study design. It will also provide conclusions derived from the study. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for practice and further study.

Summary

The Community School District, like most rural Mississippi school districts, experienced budgetary constraints preventing completion of needed facility renovation and construction. The facility needs of the district simply outweighed the budget. It is clearly documented in current literature that rural Mississippi districts, as well as those in other states, especially in the South, do not have the tax base needed to produce enough revenue to cover facility construction or upgrades. One of the very few avenues for raising the revenue for these projects is a bond election.

Prior to 2005, the Community School District superintendent had been preparing for a bond election that would provide funds to allow the facility upgrades identified in a needs assessment conducted by his staff. According to state mandated test data, academic

achievement was higher than it had ever been. The people of Community, MS, seemed supportive of the district and its administration. The time seemed ripe for a bond election that would have significantly improved the facilities available to the approximately 2000 Community School District students. However, this bond election was overwhelmingly defeated.

The purpose of the study was to examine the failed bond attempt of the Community School District and investigate reasons for the failure. Specifically, the role of the superintendent, the opposition, the media, and the school board during the bond election process were examined to determine how their roles influenced the outcome of the election. This study will allow school districts whose only option for facility improvements and construction are bond elections to make more informed decisions on what strategies to employ. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What was role of the superintendent during the bond election process?
2. What was the role of opposition during the bond election process?
3. What was the role of the media during the bond election process?
4. What was the role of the school board during the bond election process?

Increasing populations, deteriorating facilities and modern technology have created an unprecedented need by school districts to hold bond elections. However, Davis and Tyson (2003) state that bond election failures seem to be the rule rather than the exception. While much literature exists on strategies that result in successful bond elections, very little exists on reasons that bond elections fail. In addition, studies of bond elections in Mississippi, whether successful or not, are very few.

Included in the profusion of literature on successful elections are these suggested strategies: conducting a needs assessment, gaining school board support and gaining support of key community members. In contrast, literature states that resistance to higher property tax, the opposition of outside interest groups and lack of school board and media support can lead to defeat. Initial review of the 2005 bond election in Community, MS indicated that they employed a majority of the strategies needed to result in a successful election. However, the election was far from successful, indicating a need for an in-depth study of this single case to properly understand the phenomenon.

The research design employed was a case study. Data collection techniques included document analysis, audiovisual material analysis, and personal interviews. Participants were interviewed using interview protocols that involved unstructured and generally open-ended questions. Participant interviews were conducted separately, transcribed and numbered by line for reference. Participants were assigned pseudonyms for use in the research document. Member-checking was utilized to determine the accuracy of sentiments portrayed by participants. In all, 14 interviews were conducted. Participants included 3 media representatives, 3 community members who were opposed to the bond election, 4 members of the bond election committee, 3 members of the board of trustees at the time of the election, and the district superintendent. Data collected for this study were analyzed and categorized using a coding process. Triangulation was used to verify accuracy of findings.

Conclusions

This study examined the 2005 bond election of the Community School District. Specifically, it sought to uncover how the role of the superintendent, the opposition, the media, and the school board affected the outcome of the election. Research reviewed for this study indicates that these four specific groups do play a critical role in a bond election. The findings of this study concur.

Findings indicate two elements that attributed to the role of the superintendent that had a critical impact on the outcome of the 2005 bond election. The first was the superintendent's work prior to the election. More specifically, the creation of the SAC and From Good to Great Committee as well as the needs assessment failed to provide the community buy in that research indicates is needed for a successful election. Several years prior to the 2005 election, a very thorough and comprehensive needs assessment was conducted in the Community School District. It did include members of the community who were asked to be part of the committee the district superintendent created for this purpose and called the SAC. The wishes of committee members were considered as the superintendent updated his long term strategic plan and presented it to the school district Board of Trustees several months before the bond election. However, the committee did not represent the larger population of local community members who were not business owners or who were not involved in the schools. By the time of the election, most community members had no idea that the committee had existed and did not know anyone who had been a member. The same was the case for the From Good to Great Committee. The superintendent carefully and understandably chose members of the

community who were involved in civic activities and seemed to be well-respected. However, these carefully chosen members again did not represent the vast majority of the community. Lack of representation on both of these committees created a feeling in the community that their opinion was not considered resulting in a lack of inclination to support the bond election. The second element attributed to the role of the superintendent that had a significant impact on the election's outcome was the superintendent's role as the primary spokesperson in favor of the bond election. As previously discussed, a concerted effort must be made to avoid letting the bond proposal appear to be simply the superintendent's plan. Findings of this study indicate that this is exactly what happened in the case of the 2005 election. Almost immediately, opposition to the bond issue surfaced. This opposition became heated and being the spokesperson in favor of the bond quickly became an undesirable position. None of the four board members who voted to authorize the election stepped up as spokesperson, nor did any member of the From Good to Great committee. The superintendent found himself in the position of primary spokesperson and under direct fire from the opposition. Therefore, the plan did appear as that of the superintendent rather than that of the district and community. The opposition used this to their advantage with a character attack that brought into question the honesty and administrative abilities of the superintendent in turn clouding the bond proposal with doubt and suspicion. This certainly had an adverse effect on the outcome of the election.

The findings of this study are consistent with current research in relation to the role of the opposition during the bond election process which states in summary that organized opposition has a pernicious effect on its outcome (Carter, 1995; Curtin, 1993).

These issues raised by the opposition included: opposition to a proposed tax increase, the bond proposal was too ambitious, and the district administration was not fiscally responsible and could not be trusted. The issues raised by the opposition in this bond attempt were primarily devoted to discrediting district administration. Had several key members of the community taken a positive stance on the election and defended the district administration, the opposition's allegations of fiscal irresponsibility and dishonesty would not have had nearly as strong an impact on the outcome of the election. Increased property taxes received the least amount of attention by the opposition although study findings indicate that it was certainly an underlying cause for community opposition. This can be attributed to the fact that it was not necessary to place emphasis on the tax increase in order to defeat the bond issue; it was much easier and quite effective to attack the superintendent. The opposition used the fact that the community viewed the plan as simply that of the superintendent to their full advantage; they had a full understanding that discrediting the superintendent meant discrediting the bond proposal.

The findings of this study also uphold support of the media as a contributing factor in the outcome of a bond election. However, research reviewed for this study indicated that positive media coverage can sway voters in favor of a bond election. The media coverage during the 2005 bond election of the Community School District proved to be positive, reporters proved ethical in their reporting. However, the controversy introduced by the opposition's stand in the media proved much more powerful than the

positive media spots. In this case, the media was used as a vehicle to create a controversy big enough to bring more opposed voters to the poles.

In order to hold a bond election, a district must first get authorization from the local school board. This constitutes a majority vote of the board at an open board meeting. The Community Board of Trustees did authorize the bond election with a 4 to 1 vote. From the start, the community and district administration knew that one board member was not in favor of the bond election. What was not evident in the beginning was that the other members were also not willing to support the election completely. Had the other four board members taken an active role in supporting the election, less emphasis would have been on the superintendent making it more difficult for the opposition to create doubt.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the conclusions of the study:

1. The superintendent must conduct a thorough needs assessment making every effort to include opinions representing all facets of the community.
2. Committee membership must represent a complete cross section of the community.
3. The superintendent must not be the primary spokesperson in support of the bond election as it can lead to the assumption that the plan is that of the superintendent and not representative of the community.

4. The community must be involved in creating and supporting the bond proposal, the importance of community input should not be underestimated as that can have detrimental effects on the outcome of the bond election.
5. Key members of the community must be willing to publicly promote the bond election.
6. Any committee created to support the bond election must take an active role in their support of the election. They cannot simply act behind the scenes.
7. Media attention can be detrimental to a bond election. Exercise caution as controversy can be created in the media that will overpower positive support.
8. Respond positively to negative publicity, failure to respond can leave voters in a cloud of doubt.
9. Members of the school board must not only be willing to authorize a bond election, they must actively and publicly support it.
10. Efforts by bond election supporters must be stronger than those opposing it.

Suggestions for Additional Research

This study was limited to one bond election in a Mississippi school district. While this district does represent a rural educational environment found in Mississippi, it may not be representative of all rural school districts across the state. In addition, it is suggested that the study be replicated in an urban district to determine correlations with the findings of this study as well as to further determine causes of failed bond attempts to be avoided by districts considering a bond election.

This study focused on the role of the superintendent, the opposition, the media, and the school board in the failed bond attempt of the Community School District. Other factors exist that can affect the outcome of a bond election. These could include support of faculty and staff, past history of bond elections in the community, and how the educational level of the community influences their support of education initiatives such as a bond election.

REFERENCES

- Argon, J. (2005). Looking ahead. *American School and University*, 77(5), 6.
- Berg, J.H., & Barnett, G. (1998, April). *The school district superintendent: attention must be paid*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED422 644).
- Blackwell, J. D. (1997). Planning for the long haul. *American School and University*, 69(11), 16-21.
- Bohrer, S. D. (2000). *Gaining rural community support for a bond issue: a superintendent's experience*. Chapter 5 in: *Improving Rural School Facilities: Design, Construction, Finance, and Public Support*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 445 860)
- Carter, M. A. (1995). How to blow a bond issue-or not, if you'd prefer. *Clearing House*, 68(5), 289-292.
- Colgan, C. (2003). *Building boom*. American School Board Journal Special Report. Available from <http://www.asbj.com/specialreports/0603Special%20Reports/S1.html>
- Cost of a New School (1998). *American School and University*, 70(11), 3.
- Crader, A.B., Holloway, K., & Stauffacher, A. (2002). *Perceptions of successful strategies and passage of school bond issues*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Finance Association, Albuquerque, NM. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 472 937)
- Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Curtin, J.L. (1993). A study of selected Michigan school districts to determine strategies to increase voter approval of school bond referendums. Unpublished specialist thesis, Central Michigan University. (UMI No. 1355459)

- Davis, L., & Tyson, B. (2003). Strategic bonding. *American School Board Journal*, 190(7), 34-36.
- Dexter, R., McCarthy, R., Berube, W., & Surface, J. (2005, September). *Re-conceptualizing the rural school district superintendency*. Paper presented at the 16th annual conference-within-a-conference of the American Association of School Administrators, San Antonio, TX. Retrieved May 6, 2006 from [www.uwyo.edu/edleadership/research/AASARuralSupt\(6\).pdf](http://www.uwyo.edu/edleadership/research/AASARuralSupt(6).pdf)
- Erlandson, D.A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B.L., & Allen, S.D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gay, L.R. (1996). *Educational Research: Competencies for analysis and application* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Henderson, T.C. (1997). Factors associated with a highly successful, a minimally successful, and an unsuccessful school district bond election. *Pro-Quest Digital Dissertations*. (University Microfilms No. AAT 9801486)
- Hicks, T.A. (1996). What's at stake in bond issue debates. *Curriculum Review*, 35(6), 4.
- Horowitz, S. (1996). Be your own reporter. *Thrust for Educational Leadership*, 25(4), 18.
- Howley, C. (1988). Economic support for education in rural school districts. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED308059)
- Hull, Jonathan W. (2003). Status of rural education in the South: a survey of key indicators. *Regional Resource*. Retrieved May 6, 2006 from www.slcatlanta.org/Publications/Education/RuralEducation.pdf
- Kadi, B. (2000, November). Summary of Proposition 39 and Related Legislation. Retrieved January 20, 2006 from <http://www.joneshall.com/Prop39.html>
- Kolleeny, J.F. (2004). Environment counts. *Architectural Record*, 3, 127.
- Lode, M. D. (1999). *Factors affecting the outcomes of school bond elections in Iowa*. Doctor of Education Dissertation. University of South Dakota. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 463 643)
- McCurdy, J. (1992). Building better board administrator relations an AASA critical issues report. American Association of School Administrators Special Report. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED354 609).

- Mediratta, K., Fruchter, N., & Lewis, A.C. (2002). *Organizing for school reform: how communities are finding their voices and reclaiming their public schools*. New York Institute for Education and Social Policy. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 475 909)
- Merriam, S.B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, Julie A. (1997). Delta dawn. *Education Week*, 16(17), 143-145.
- Mississippi Code 1972, 10A MS Code 1972 Ann. § 39-59-17 (1972 & 2001).
- Murray, M. (1997). News not olds gets attention. *Techniques: Making Education and Career Connections*, 72(6), 24.
- Richard, A. (2004). Magnolia state sees retreat on school aid. *Education Week*, 23(40), 32.
- Richard, A. (2005). New Mississippi budget draws mixed reviews. *Education Week*, 24(39), 22.
- Schanuel, S.M. (1999). Building grant and bond issue work together. *School Planning and Management*, 38(6), 45-47.
- Schnaiberg, L. (1998). Arizona ponders making school bond issues history. *Education Week*, 17(28), 20-21.
- St. Pierre, J. (1996). Reach out and touch your community. *Thrust for Educational Leadership*, 26 (3), 30.
- United States Census Bureau. (n.d.). Census 2000 Urban and Rural Classifications. Retrieved May 6, 2006, from http://www.census.gov/geo/www/ua/ua_2k.html
- United States Department of Education (2005). *10 facts about K-12 education funding*. Retrieved August 11, 2006 from www.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/10facts/index.html
- Weathersby, C. L. (2002). Investigations of strategies used in passing bond issues in Mississippi school districts. *Pro-Quest Digital Dissertations*. (University Microfilms No. AAT 3043183)

White, K. (1997). Miss. lawmakers poised to pass overhaul of aid formula. *Education Week*, 16(25), 12.

Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol – Superintendent

Research question/topic to be discussed	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Role of the superintendent during the bond election		
Opposition to bond election		
Role of the media during the bond election		
Role of the school board during bond election process		

Interview Protocol – School Board Member

Research question/topic to be discussed	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Role of the superintendent during the bond election		
Opposition to bond election		
Role of the media during the bond election		
Role of the school board during bond election process		

Interview Protocol – Community Member

Research question/topic to be discussed	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Role of the superintendent during the bond election		
Opposition to bond election		
Role of the media during the bond election		
Role of the school board during bond election process		

Interview Protocol – Bond Election Committee Member

Research question/topic to be discussed	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Role of the superintendent during the bond election		
Opposition to bond election		
Role of the media during the bond election		
Role of the school board during bond election process		

Interview Protocol – Member of the Media

Research question/topic to be discussed	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Role of the superintendent during the bond election		
Opposition to bond election		
Role of the media during the bond election		
Role of the school board during bond election process		

APPENDIX B
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN
SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH APPROVAL



November 13, 2006

Leigh Barrett Mobley
20088 Old Hwy 8 West
Aberdeen, MS 39730

RE: IRB Study #06-248: An Anatomy of an Unsuccessful School Bond Election in a Rural School District

Dear Mrs. Mobley:

The above referenced project was reviewed and approved via expedited review for a period of 11/13/2006 through 10/15/2007 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.110 #7. Please note the expiration date for approval of this project is 10/15/2007. If additional time is needed to complete the project, you will need to submit a Continuing Review Request form 30 days prior to the date of expiration. Any modifications made to this project must be submitted for approval prior to implementation. Forms for both Continuing Review and Modifications are located on our website at <http://www.msstate.edu/dept/compliance>.

Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. Please note that the IRB reserves the right, at anytime, to observe you and any associated researchers as they conduct the project and audit research records associated with this project.

Please refer to your docket number (#06-248) when contacting our office regarding this project.

We wish you the very best of luck in your research and look forward to working with you again. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at cwilliams@research.msstate.edu or by phone at 662-325-5220.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christine Williams".

Christine Williams
IRB Administrator

cc: Jerry Mathews

Office of Regulatory Compliance

P. O. Box 6223 • 8A Morgan Street • Mailstop 9563 • Mississippi State, MS 39762 • (662) 325-3294 • FAX (662) 325-8776