



Mequon-Thiensville School District

Mequon, Wisconsin

**SURVEY REPORT
December 2019**

INTRODUCTION

The Mequon-Thiensville School District and Board of Education are committed to engaging the entire district community in addressing the district's facility needs. To help accomplish its engagement goals, the district enlisted the assistance of the Donovan Group in conducting a community-wide survey. The purpose of the survey was to gather community members' feedback related to the needs of the district and some initial proposed solutions.

The survey follows the work of a community task force, which was launched to review and consider facility challenges, establish priorities, and make recommendations to the administration regarding facilities issues. Joe Donovan of the Donovan Group worked with district administration to develop the survey questions.

The survey was open from November 19 to December 4, 2019. District residents were informed of and invited to take the survey through a postcard mailer, which was sent to all residential mailboxes within the district's attendance area. In addition, community members were notified about the survey through articles in the local newspaper, social media, and various other methods, including through personal invitations. Community members were asked to take the survey online by following a custom website address or to request a paper survey.

The total number of survey respondents was 1,167, which provided a good response pool for the board. Because the Donovan Group also assisted with a facilities survey for the Mequon-Thiensville School District in 2014, some of the analysis outlined below compares this survey's results to the information gathered five years ago.

The following section of the report presents a review of the process and methodology involved in the survey, followed by details on its results. Additional context information is provided under each question. The report concludes with a review of themes within the comment data provided by respondents.

As a whole, the data collected through this survey should provide district leaders with sound information that will assist them as they move forward in finding a solution to the district's facility needs.

PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted for the Mequon-Thiensville School District by the Donovan Group in November and December 2019. The Donovan Group has worked with dozens of school districts throughout the United States, and many of the questions included in this survey have been asked of community members many times before.

The survey was administered using the Donovan Group's survey engine. Efforts were made to ensure that all eligible respondents had the opportunity to take the survey, but that no respondents took it multiple times. In accordance with best practices in online research and to protect the security of the survey, internet protocol (IP) addresses were logged and each survey was time-stamped.

When considering survey respondents, three important characteristics need to be analyzed—the total number of respondents, the sizes of the various subgroups, and the completeness of the data provided.

The total number of respondents to this survey was acceptable. It is important to note that, for most items, there was a high level of clarity in terms of the preferences of survey takers. As such, it is very unlikely that more responses would have dramatically changed the survey's results.

In addition, for most subgroups, the respondent numbers were also acceptable. As for the completeness of the data, respondents provided a good amount of information, providing the district with a cohesive sense of where community members stand.

Similarly, it is worth noting that, by design, these data are not based on a scientific sample. As such, they should be treated as qualitative data, which is similar to data from a large number of focus groups. Because we used a convenience sample, it would be methodologically inappropriate to carry out a regression analysis or attempt to calculate error.

SURVEY RESULTS

A total of 1,167 community members completed the survey. To do so, respondents must have clicked "submit" at the end of the survey and answered all the required questions.

Below are the questions and their corresponding responses. The first set of data (in black) reflect the responses of all completed surveys. The second set of data (in blue) indicate responses from a comparison group of district residents who are not current parents of preschool or school-aged students, employees, or students. The comparison group does include parents of former district students.

We typically find the comparison group to be a more accurate representation of the general population. There were 261 completed results in the comparison group. The responses of this comparison group differed from the overall response pool for some questions, as noted in the analysis of those questions.

Below each question and results is some brief analysis from the Donovan Group team.

1) What is your age?*

18 or under	3.7%	0.0%
19–25	1.3%	1.1%
26–34	8.9%	2.7%
35–44	29.2%	3.1%
45–54	31.0%	9.2%
55–64	13.9%	35.2%
65 or over	12.0%	48.7%

Analysis: *When considering the respondent pool, we are particularly interested in the distribution of respondents in terms of their age. Those who are 65 and over tend to be the group that is least represented in a survey such as this. We are pleased, therefore, that nearly 12% of the survey respondents indicated being 65 or over.*

2) Where do you reside?*

Mequon	75.1%	84.3%
Thiensville	11.6%	15.7%
Other	13.4%	0.0%

Analysis: *Based on conversations with district administration, this distribution of community members reflects the nature of the district. It is important to note that when we disaggregated the data, there did*

not seem to be any noteworthy differences in the responses of participants from the communities.

3) How long have you lived in the school district?*

Fewer than 2 years	7.7%	1.1%
Between 2 and 5 years	14.6%	5.0%
Between 5 and 10 years	19.3%	3.8%
Between 10 and 20 years	30.1%	18.4%
Between 20 and 30 years	13.2%	26.1%
More than 30 years	15.1%	45.6%

Analysis: While there was a correlation between respondents' number of years in the district and their answers to key survey questions, this was not as significant as whether or not the respondent was a parent.

4) Please check all of the following that apply to you.*

I have school-aged children (ages 4+)	55.3%	0.00%
I have preschool-aged children (ages 0-3)	14.9%	0.00%
I have children who currently attend a Mequon-Thiensville School District school	57.4%	0.00%
I have children who graduated from or previously attended a Mequon-Thiensville School District school	30.1%	65.9%
I have grandchildren who currently attend or have attended a Mequon-Thiensville School District school	3.6%	10.7%
I have attended a Mequon-Thiensville School District school	13.9%	10.7%
I am a community member who has never had children attending a Mequon-Thiensville School District school	9.3%	25.7%
I am currently a student at a Mequon-Thiensville School District school	3.9%	0.0%
I am currently employed by the Mequon-Thiensville School District	21.1%	0.0%
Other	3.0%	7.3%

Analysis: As noted, there was a strong correlation between parent and non-parent status and specific answers to key survey questions. In fact, this status was the most important determinant for how respondents answered the survey, surpassing age or number of years in the district. This is explained in more detail later in this report.

5) If you have school-aged children as of fall 2019, which schools do your children attend? (Select all that apply. If you do not have school-aged children, you may skip this question.)

Homestead High School	28.4%
Lake Shore Middle School	11.9%
Steffen Middle School	14.0%

Donges Bay Elementary	14.8%
Oriole Lane Elementary	10.1%
Wilson Elementary	14.9%
Public school outside the district	3.5%
Private school	5.9%
I do not have school-aged children	20.0%
My children are home-schooled	0.3%
Other	3.2%

Analysis: Because this is a “respond all” question, the total percentages exceed 100%.

6) How would you describe the Mequon-Thiensville School District to someone who is new to the community?

Overwhelmingly, responses to this question were positive. Terms like "excellent," "great," "strong," "challenging," and "amazing" peppered the length of the comments. Below are a sample of unedited responses:

- *A community that holds high standards for parents, students, teachers, and community members.*
- *A comprehensive, wholistic education program--emphasis on post secondary education. A district that values the arts as well as sports and academics.*
- *Welcoming. We are new ourselves. Our children adjusted beautifully and we have been very happy with the staff.*
- *Excellent schooling system that is in the midst of growth and change. A district who actively trying to accommodate a large and growing amount of students by searching for ways to better accommodate students and families.*
- *High-achieving schools. Small district. Involved parents. Wonderful teachers.*

7) On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely would you be to recommend the Mequon-Thiensville School District to a friend, colleague or family member? (A score of zero indicates you would not recommend the district, while a score of 10 indicates you would be extremely likely to recommend the district.)

0	1.1%	1.1%
1	0.4%	0.8%
2	1.0%	1.9%
3	1.1%	0.4%
4	0.8%	0.8%
5	4.3%	3.4%
6	2.9%	2.7%
7	9.9%	7.7%
8	23.5%	19.2%
9	25.9%	14.9%
10	44.6%	47.1%

8) Where do you get most of your information about the district and its schools? (Select all that apply.)

District/school social media	45.4%	21.1%
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District/school websites	55.0%	21.1%
School e-newsletters	62.9%	6.1%
District e-newsletters	47.4%	17.6%
Mequon-Thiensville Today community magazine	31.7%	57.5%
Friends or neighbors	42.3%	44.8%
My children and their friends	38.5%	11.9%
District mailings	34.5%	40.2%
School board meetings	5.5%	5.7%
Teachers and staff	46.5%	16.1%
Parent organizations	21.9%	3.1%
Ozaukee County News Graphic	24.3%	49.0%
Local television	5.5%	12.6%
Local radio	3.9%	8.0%
Other	5.8%	11.1%

Analysis: *These numbers reflect a familiar theme in suggesting that parents and community members are receiving increasing amounts of their information about their schools from social media. In 2014, 35.9% of all respondents indicated getting school news from the Ozaukee County News Graphic, compared with 23.6% today.*

9) How familiar are you with the district's facility needs and the process being used to find a solution to those needs?

I feel I am very well informed	30.0%	21.5%
I have some familiarity	50.0%	59.8%
I have no understanding of the needs and processes	20.0%	18.8%

Analysis: *Here, we find that a large majority of respondents (80%) have at least some familiarity with the district's facility needs. It is worth noting that an even larger percentage of the comparison group (81.3%) had familiarity with these needs.*

10) I believe the district's facility needs must be addressed now.

Strongly agree	46.7%	22.2%
Agree	38.5%	47.9%
Disagree	9.0%	18.7%
Strongly disagree	5.9%	11.3%

Analysis: *This level of agreement is much higher than we typically see for this type of question. A full 85.2% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed to this statement, compared to 71.6% of our comparison group. For comparison, the all-respondent group in 2014 had an agree/strongly agree percentage of 93%.*

11) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question to address Enrollment and Growth in the district based on the task force's recommendation. *

Strongly agree	45.9%	21.1%
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Agree	34.7%	40.6%
Disagree	10.1%	20.7%
Strongly disagree	9.3%	17.6%

12) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question to address Safety and Security based on the task force's recommendation.*

Strongly agree	48.7%	29.1%
Agree	35.8%	39.5%
Disagree	8.2%	18.0%
Strongly disagree	7.3%	13.4%

13) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question to address Outdated Instructional Environments based on the task force's recommendation.*

Strongly agree	39.8%	22.2%
Agree	34.5%	33.0%
Disagree	15.6%	26.4%
Strongly disagree	10.0%	18.4%

Analysis: For the three questions above, both the "all-respondent" group and the comparison group had a very high percentage of those who agreed or strongly agreed. As we often see in districts across the country, Safety and Security appears to be the top priority, with Enrollment and Growth following closely behind.

14) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question if I felt it were the correct solution and it had a tax impact of \$21 per year on a \$300,000 home (\$7 per year for every \$100,000 of property value).*

Strongly agree	55.5%	34.9%
Agree	29.5%	37.5%
Disagree	6.4%	12.6%
Strongly disagree	8.6%	14.9%

Analysis: There is clear support for a referendum at this level of impact in both the all-respondent group and comparison group.

15) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question if I felt it were the correct solution and it had a tax impact of \$117 per year on a \$300,000 home (\$39 per year for every \$100,000 of property value).*

Strongly agree	37.9%	17.6%
Agree	32.1%	31.0%
Disagree	14.7%	23.4%
Strongly disagree	15.3%	28.0%

Analysis: Support for this level of impact falls significantly for both groups. There is not majority support for this level among our comparison group.

16) I would vote "yes" on a referendum question if I felt it were the correct solution and it had a tax impact of \$165 per year on a \$300,000 home (\$55 per year for every \$100,000 of property value).*

Strongly agree	30.8%	12.3%
Agree	25.4%	17.6%
Disagree	23.3%	34.9%
Strongly disagree	20.5%	35.2%

Analysis: As the tax impact increases, support continues to fall for both groups. At this level, there is support for the all-respondent group, but very low levels of support in the comparison group.

17) I would vote "yes" on Option #1, a \$35 million referendum question having a tax impact of \$21 per year on a \$300,000 home (\$7 per year for every \$100,000 of property value).*

Strongly agree	53.0%	32.2%
Agree	30.2%	37.2%
Disagree	7.4%	13.0%
Strongly disagree	9.4%	17.6%

Analysis: There is clear support for a referendum at this level of impact in both the all-respondent group and the comparison group

18) I would vote "yes" on Option #2, a \$60 million referendum question based on the option outlined above, having a tax impact of \$117 per year on a \$300,000 home (\$39 per year for every \$100,000 of property value).*

Strongly agree	39.4%	18.0%
Agree	30.8%	31.4%
Disagree	15.1%	24.5%
Strongly disagree	14.7%	26.1%

Analysis: Support for this option falls quite significantly. There is majority support for our all-respondent group, but there is not majority support in the comparison group.

19) I would vote "yes" on Option #3, a \$75 million referendum question based on the option outlined above, having a tax impact of \$165 per year on a \$300,000 home (\$55 per year for every \$100,000 of property value).*

Strongly agree	30.0%	11.5%
Agree	25.0%	18.0%
Disagree	25.4%	35.2%
Strongly disagree	19.6%	35.2%

Analysis: For this option, support continues to fall. As before, while there is majority support for the all-respondent group, there is not majority support in the comparison group.

20) Please use the space below to provide any additional information to district leaders as they consider solutions to address the district's facility needs.

A variety of themes emerged in the responses to this question. Respondents asked why, if the district needs space, it closed Range Line several years ago. Others spoke to a trend toward declining birth rates and the recent passage of a referendum in 2014. Despite some negative feelings, there was also a good deal of support for investing in and expanding offerings in the district. Below is a sample of unedited responses:

Seeking more information:

- *1. Ongoing maintenance such as HVAC repairs and upgrades should ALWAYS be in the budget and should never be an additional charge. 2. It is disingenuous to refer to Improvement of traffic flow as a "Security Issue". In fact, I don't see any item in this wish list that could be classified as "security". If funds are required for improved security then there should be a list of actual security enhancing objectives.*
- *Before voting on this referendum issue, I would like to know why re-re-purposing the Recreation building on Range Line to its original purpose of elementary education is not viable.*
- *Explain to voters what "outdated" instructional spaces are. If you do not have children in middle or high school, you do not know what is "outdated" about them, or what the benefits to the improvements would be. Solid statistics about how updating these spaces and how that affects learning would also be appreciated.*
- *I would want more information before I committed to this option so, at this time, I would disagree but if the School district made a good case for the need to do this option for the educational benefit and safety of our students I would change my opinion to an agree vote.*

Enrollment, Range Line closure:

- *A few years ago the district sold property because of declining enrollment. Where did that money go? Secondly, the increase in class sizes are mainly created by all the new housing projects in Mequon. Why was there no significant impact fees charged to all these builders who are the root causes of the increased enrollments?*
- *What about using Range Line Elementary School, the school that was shuttered when enrollment went down, to address the future growth needs?*
- *Capacity issues should be dealt with in another way, as this will be a temporary situation (maybe 10 years, but that is still temporary), as birth rates are steadily declining, and the larger spaces will not be necessary in the longer term. I'm supportive of the security measures only, but I don't see an option for a much smaller referendum that would only address those, so I'm not supportive of any of the proposals.*
- *Had you not closed an elementary school we may not be in this predicament now. Please consider re opening it.*
- *As of right now, enrollment at Donges Bay is down compared to the other two elementary schools. I think there is a strong need to redraw district lines due to the growth in housing in west Mequon. Has this been considered an option to begin the process prior to a call for a referendum?*
- *What happened to the money asked for five years ago? At the time enrollment was down and we were told that the district was struggling financially because of lower state aid due in part to this decline. Now enrollment is trending up, but I question the ability of the district to make accurate projections. My children attend the most crowded elementary school in the district, but I strongly oppose a referendum to increase the tax levey beyond what is allowed without a referendum and coming so close on the heels of the last one makes me question the ability of the board to manage the funds they have been entrusted with.*

Support for making investments:

- *Although I support the tax increase, I would like to see alternate approaches explored first. The options do not indicate for how many years this tax increase would be implemented? That would be an important consideration for me as well.*
- *I feel that investing in MTSD education is what is best for everyone. Our children deserve a quality education. The value of the school districts impacts the housing market and value of our homes. And what better way to invest than in our children and their future. We need to continue to move MTSD forward.*
- *I think addressing facilities needs is critical if Mequon-Thiensville is to maintain its current level of excellence. However, there is a tendency to forget things like teacher compensation, class sizes, etc., as one focuses on bricks and mortar. I would not want to see these issues overshadowed, as they are as critical to our children's education as facilities. Thank you for asking for input.*