



Bergen
K-6

River Edge School District

Referendum Date: September 27, 2005

Total Referendum: \$18,800,000

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Residents in the River Edge Elementary School District were skittish when it came to passing a referendum. Two previous attempts had failed and a third passed only when it was scaled back by 11.5 percent. However, as enrollment continued to rise at both district schools, the board of education knew it would have to ask the community to support another referendum to increase instructional space. **Zander Consulting was contracted to ensure the public was engaged in the process of developing a solution** to the enrollment issue, as well as to create and implement an information campaign for the upcoming referendum.

Working closely with district staff and other project professionals, the team at Zander Consulting developed a comprehensive plan that included public forums and community meetings during which residents had the chance to provide input and discuss their concerns. A volunteer citizens group was also formed to gather feedback from the community. In addition, a variety of methods were used to educate residents about the issues the district faced, the available options to address those needs, and the impact a referendum would have on taxpayers. Open house events and building tours were scheduled so residents could see the effect increased enrollment had on the operation of the schools.

Ultimately, the district developed an expansion and improvement plan that combined new construction and renovations to accommodate an extended-day kindergarten program and improvements for greater handicapped accessibility.

The challenges on this project were numerous. There were issues of neighborhood parity to contend with since some residents thought the additional space would benefit only part of the community. There had also been a recent tax reevaluation that caused community-wide confusion about the true cost of the referendum plan. However, the most important obstacle Zander Consulting faced was to convince the public that another referendum was the best approach to solve the district's current and future needs.

Based on its thorough approach that combined community engagement with a well-executed information campaign, Zander Consulting helped the district pass a three-part referendum proposal with a convincing margin.



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Q&A flyer



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