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### **Building A Bond: Community Outreach**

While the TSD 401 School Board works to finalize the details of the proposed bond slated for the November ballot, outreach has been in the works since last fall. The school board put together a survey and a series of facilitated small group meetings with staff and community members to solicit input, collect attitudes and opinions, and lay the foundation for the next steps of the bond, while further demonstrating the board's commitment to include the public and staff in such a pivotal decision making process. The results? Keep the conversation going.

Some 487 people participated in the survey, while another 150 attended 26 different meetings held at locations throughout the valley, from Victor to Tetonia, and led by facilitator Bob Gammelin. Participants were invited from a committee of volunteers charged with gathering a diverse range of perspectives, with a focus on diversity. Participants included large land owners, those who voted "no" or "yes" for bonds in previous elections, parents with children in the district, adults without children in the district, retirees, second homeowners, and more. Although an effort was made to reach the Hispanic/Latino community, the responses were lacking from this segment of the community.

The results are not from a random sampling of the community and are not meant to represent the majority opinions of the community, but serve as groundwork for discussions as the bond moves forward in the upcoming months.

TSD 401 is now left with a collection of valuable information that will be used as they move into the next phase of presenting a bond.

The findings: The more communication, the better. Hearing from as many different voices in the community as possible has been an anchoring effort of the board when approaching the bond. Thanks to the survey and meeting discussions, the board is now committed to hosting meetings solely focused on bond discussions to be held the third Monday of every month. The first will be held May 15 at 6 p.m. at the District Office.

The meetings will not be a typical board-meeting format. They will focus on sharing input and opinions, and will be an opportunity to review the information and data that the district is working to gather, in order to formulate the bond proposal: how many schools, which schools, building versus renovating?



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Overall, the survey results showed 65 percent of participants are very likely to vote for the bond, with another 10 percent somewhat likely; 15 percent said they were very unlikely to somewhat unlikely to vote for a bond, with another 10 percent unsure. Of the voters who have voted against the bonds in the past, the biggest concerns were: the district's fiscal responsibility, an increase in taxes, and transparency on how exactly the money will be used.

There was a majority consensus that the Victor and Driggs school buildings need to be rebuilt and an understanding of the school's conditions. A majority of survey responses also indicated feeling "positive" or "somewhat positive" toward the school district's safety and academic quality. There was also a consensus regarding keeping an elementary school in each town, rather than having one centralized school, with over 50 percent "strongly more likely to support" a bond that kept an elementary school in each town.

### **Recommendations: Turning Outreach Into Action**

The survey and meeting recommendations were summarized into four action items necessary to help the school board succeed in floating the bond:

1. Improve levels of trust with staff and community;
2. Conduct a comprehensive cost analysis for improving elementary schools,  
This includes a comparison of the three options that were most frequently discussed: renovations of existing facilities, rebuilding Driggs and Victor schools (with possible renovations to the Tetonia facility), and/or building a centralized elementary school;
3. Present a clear recommendation including general design, timeline, means for including public comment, and estimated tax bill impacts; and
4. Include advice on how to make the bond successful.

The school district is responding to the concerns of communication, transparency, and trust by increasing their presence on social media, with more frequent posts, launching a school bond website—[tsd401bond.org](http://tsd401bond.org)—writing this series of bi-weekly articles, and currently redesigning the district website to a more user-friendly format. In addition, the school board is creating staff newsletters following each board meeting and increasing emails to staff when new information is available.



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Board members are working to attend staff meetings more often and are continuing to encourage reaching out to any board member with questions or concerns.

At the May 15 meeting, the school board will address the cost analysis of the three options listed in the report: renovating facilities, building new facilities, or building one centralized school. They are also looking at the option of an auxiliary gym space and possible additions to Teton Middle School and Teton High School, to analyze how this option could impact costs—Respondents indicated interest in addressing future growth the entire district as opposed to just the elementary facilities, including the community's need for additional gym space.

Following a complete analysis of the data and research, the board will present a clear recommendation at the end of the summer.

To see the report from the survey and focus groups go to: [tsd401bond.org/the-survey.html](https://tsd401bond.org/the-survey.html).