



Winchester CUSD #1

Community Survey Executive Summary

July 15, 2024

In June-July 2024, Creative Entourage conducted an online survey of residents in Winchester CUSD #1. The purpose of the survey was to better understand area residents' perceptions of and priorities for the District. Eight hundred forty (840) respondents completed the survey. Results are weighted by gender and parent/non-parent households.

Perceptions of the District

About a quarter (23.2%) of respondents gave public schools in Illinois an "A" (1.9%) or "B" (21.3%) grade, while fewer than one in five (18.6%) rated Illinois schools a grade of "D" or "Fail."

Half (50.5%) also graded Winchester CUSD #1 an "A" (8.9%) or "B" (41.6%), and about one in eight (13.5%) rated the District "D" or "Fail."

Statements about the District

Respondents were presented with several statements "people might make about their local school district" and asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each. Respondents were most likely to agree with statements about the difficulty of affording a tax increase, as well as statements about the value received for taxes and the importance of supporting local schools.

- People like me can't afford higher taxes, no matter how good the cause. (73.3%, strongly/somewhat agree)
- We get excellent value in education for the taxes we pay to Winchester CUSD #1. (59.1%)
- Supporting our schools is one of the best things we can do to protect our property values and the investment we've made in our home. (56.3%)
- We are falling behind neighboring school districts in making needed improvements in our school facilities. (56.0%)

Fewer than half agreed with statements about their willingness to support a tax increase, as well as District leadership and a negative statement about the need for facilities improvements.

- I'm willing to support an increase in taxes to make sure our kids get the quality of education they need and deserve. (42.7%, strongly/somewhat agree)
- I trust the Winchester CUSD #1 leadership to make the right decisions about improving our school district. (31.4%)
- Our school facilities are fine just the way they are. Nothing needs to be done to improve them. (26.2%)

Possible bond proposal

Near the start of the survey, respondents were told that “while no decision has been made, Winchester CUSD #1 is considering the option to build a new high school for grades 9-12 south of the grade school” and that “the cost of this bond proposal is \$36 million.” After being asked how strongly they would favor or oppose such a proposal, fewer than a quarter (24.1%) said they would favor such a proposal, while two thirds (68.6%) were opposed.

A follow up question indicated that “this proposal would increase taxes for the owner of a \$100,000 market value house about \$1,000 per year or about \$83 per month,” and in response, fewer than one in five (19.4%) favored the proposal, and three quarters (76.6%) were opposed.

Respondents were also presented with a second option “to build a new building for grades 7-12 south of the grade school, removing grades 7-8 from the elementary school” and that “the cost of this bond proposal is also \$36 million and would increase taxes for the owner of a \$100,000 market value house about \$1,000 per year or about \$83 per month.” Fewer than one in five (17.3%) favored this option, while almost four in five (78.4%) were opposed.

Near the end of the survey, respondents were asked about both bond proposals. A quarter (23.5%) favored the first option (9-12 building), and almost three quarters (73.6%) were opposed. The response to the second option (7-12 building) was similar, with 18.2% favoring the proposal and 78.4% opposed.

Reasons for supporting a proposal

Respondents were presented with several positive statements about a proposal for a new high school or a new 7-12 building and asked to indicate how close each was to the way they felt, using a 10-point scale. ADA compliance and other high school improvements were most likely to resonate with respondents.

- The current high school is not ADA compliant. Steps must be taken to address that. (40.3%, 9-10 on a ten-point scale)
- We must take steps to improve our high school. (31.9%)
- No one wants to pay higher taxes. But it is important to our children and community to provide a good high school. (27.6%)
- A high school, where everything is under one roof, would be safer and more secure for students. (26.2%)
- To keep up with other area high schools, we need better high school classes and learning spaces. (21.8%)
- Our high school is past the point where it can be cost-effectively renovated. (18.0%)

Reasons for opposing a proposal

Respondents also saw several negative statements about a proposal for a new high school or a new 7-12 building and asked to indicate how close each was to the way they felt, again using a 10-point scale. This group of statements resonated more strongly with respondents, especially statements about the size of the proposal and the associated tax increase.

- This is just too big of a tax increase. (68.4%, 9-10 on a ten-point scale)
- Borrowing this much money is just a bad business decision. (60.6%)
- I don't think we should remove grades 7-8 from the elementary school. (50.9%)
- We can renovate our high school. New construction is just not needed. (45.8%)
- Our high school has been good enough for generations of students. It just needs some basic repair and renovation. (44.4%)
- We should consolidate with the Bluffs School District before talking about facility renovation. (41.4%)

Statements about a bond proposal

Respondents were presented with several statements “people might make about a bond proposal to support school facility improvements” and asked how much more or less hearing each made them to support a bond proposal. In only one case did a majority of respondents say a statement made them more likely to support a proposal: “We need to make improvements in our high school. But this is just too much” (55.4%, much/somewhat more likely). More than two in five (47.2%) said that “investing in improved school buildings now will benefit many future generations of students and homeowners” made them more likely to support a proposal.

By contrast, majorities said that several statements made them *less* likely to support a proposal.

- Our kids need the same quality of education that kids in other communities receive. It is time to step up and pass a proposal. (62.8%, much/somewhat less likely)
- In the long term, a new school will save taxpayers millions of dollars by not wasting money trying to maintain a worn-out building. (62.5%)
- I will support any building improvement proposal that improves the educational environment for our kids. (61.3%)
- Our kids are doing just fine when they graduate. Spending this money is just not necessary. (56.4%)