

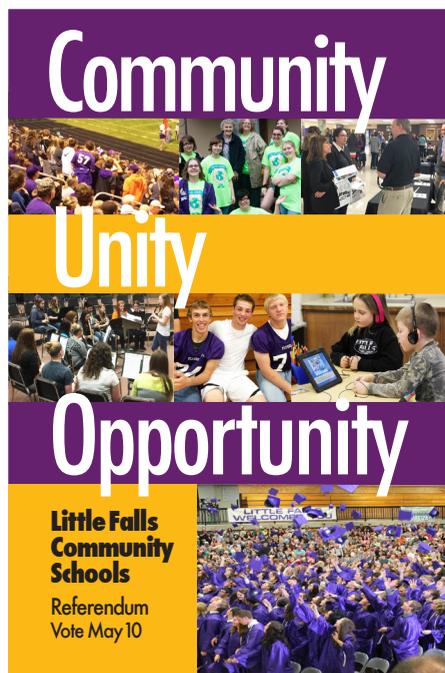
## Case Study Little Falls Community Schools

# Unity. Community. Opportunity.

*How MP+G and DehlerPR helped pass the first building bond in Little Falls in almost 25 years*

### THE OPPORTUNITY

The 2016 referendum reflected a request from the community to break the amount into 2 ballot questions – separating the maintenance needs from the ill-fated gym. New LTMFR state funding helped to offset deferred facility maintenance and reduce the total ask by **\$5.4 million**. Adjusted for inflation, the new total bond requested amount was **\$32 vs \$36 million**.



### *A Successful Bond Referendum for Little Falls Community Schools*

*"MP+G Marketing and DehlerPR created a distinctive, custom campaign for our referendum, they helped us better understand our audience and developed a sound informational campaign strategy to reach our goals. We added 1,200 total voters since last May...and a staggering 1,000 of them were Yes voters. Statistically, that is impressive no matter how you look at it... Regardless of the margin, (this) is a huge win! The district's relationship with the community is stronger now than before the election and our community is better informed and better prepared to meet the needs of our students."*

– Stephen Jones, Superintendent

### THE PROBLEM

In May 19, the district failed to pass a **\$36 million** bond referendum that included major long-term maintenance needs along with a new gym, ill-advisedly named a "field house." Although the community showed some support for maintenance and repairs, the so-called "field house" became a large bone of contention. A covert but strong Vote No coalition formed to block the passage, dividing the community. The referendum failed **2,197 to 1,471**.

### THE GOAL

Provide compelling information about the new bond referendum, and differentiate it from the last bond referendum, to as many residents as possible, so that most residents report awareness and ability to make an informed decision by Election Day.

### CLIENT

**Little Falls Community Schools** are located in Morrison County just north of St. Cloud and south of Brainerd. A large portion of the downtown area is located in the "Little Falls Commercial Historic District," which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The area's economy is growing, heavily reliant on construction, manufacturing, retail and the financial services industry. The **2,539-student body** with **45.5%** Free and Reduced Lunch, **14.2%** Special Education, and **.2%** English Learner populations is not racially diverse. District finances and academics are strong with a positive fund balance, a high credit rating, competitive test scores, and a solid **88.4%** graduation rate.



### CLIENT SITUATION

The district failed to pass a bond question in 2015 to help with long-term maintenance and space needs including a 4-station gym. (In fact, the community hadn't approved a bond referendum since 1993.) Meanwhile, the maintenance and space needs were not going to go away and would continue to increase with the cost of inflation.

### DELIVERABLES

- Campaign management
- Communications strategy
- Tactical implementation plan + timeline
- Key messages
- Campaign theme graphic + tagline
- Marketing materials: print + digital
- Email Marketing campaign
- Social media campaign
- Referendum Website content
- News releases + newspaper guest columns

# Case Study Little Falls Community Schools

How MP+G and DehlerPR helped pass the first building bond in Little Falls in almost 25 years

**Community. UNITY. Opportunity.**

**Fast Facts**  
Little Falls Community Schools  
2016 Bond Referendum Informational Guide

**VOTE Tuesday May 10**  
Polls Open 7am-8pm

**Coming together for our kids. Coming together for our community. A great opportunity for everyone!**

**What is the Plan?**  
A balanced approach to maintaining and building our facilities.

**What is Proposed?**  
The Little Falls Community Schools Board of Education unanimously approved two building bond referendum questions.

**How Question #1 Money will be Spent**

- 57% Long-Term Maintenance & Repair
- 2% Finance Cost
- 16% Academics
- 12% ECPE/School Readiness
- 12% Security & Accessibility

**Coming Together to Maintain Our Facilities**  
**Question #1: \$19.67 million bond**

Long-term maintenance needs must be addressed now to prolong our buildings' usefulness for years to come and to bring them up to current learning environment, safety, and accessibility standards.

- Security and Accessibility: Improvements to the school site and facilities district-wide
- Academics: Remodeling and renovation of classrooms, labs, meeting rooms, lockers and physical education rooms district-wide
- Long-Term Maintenance and Repair: HVAC, roofs, boilers, ventilation, lighting and electrical, site work, irrigation, drainage, and paving improvements
- Early Childhood Family Education and School Readiness: Building and equipping a new addition to Lincoln Elementary School for our growing community

**Coming Together to Support Students and a Thriving Community**  
**Question #2: \$12.65 million bond**

Addresses the construction and equipping of a gymnasium/ community recreation addition to the high school facility. Question #2 can only pass if Question #1 passes.

- Supporting students: Physical education class space is tight. Students don't have the gym space they need to participate in classes and extra-curricular activities which results in early and late practices and missed opportunities for hosting tournaments and competitions.
- Building a thriving community: Schools are for the whole community. In addition to physical education classes, gym space is used for many youth and adult recreation programs and activities. Research shows that investment in public schools can lead to better resale value of your home. According to a 2012 Brookings Institute report, housing costs an average of 2.4 times as much near a high-scoring public school than near a low scoring public school. Residents in other areas, like Pillager, Pierz, and Royaltown understood this relationship when they approved bond referendums.

**Gym Space Comparison Vs. 9-12 High School Enrollment**

| 2015-16 High School Enrollment (Source: Minnesota Department of Education) | Number of Practice Courts |
|--|---------------------------|
| Brainard 1,674   | 11                        |
| Sauk Rapids-Rice 1,196   | 13                        |
| Sartell-St. Stephen 1,062  | 14                        |
| Little Falls 846   | 7                         |
| Becker 844   | 11                        |
| Foley 544  | 3                         |
| Albany 520   | 8                         |
| Melrose 517  | 10                        |
| Pierz 366  | 3                         |
| Long Prairie-Gray Eagle 306  | 7                         |
| Royaltown 246  | 5                         |
| Pillager 224   | 4                         |

\*Albany and Royaltown gyms approved in referendums  
\*\*Sartell-St. Stephen and Melrose referendum elections in May  
\*\*\*Sauk Rapids passed a half cent city sales tax, setting on other revenue parts to fill into place.

## LISTENING AND WORKING TOGETHER: FOR KIDS. FOR COMMUNITY.

Little Falls Community Schools holds the proud tradition of emphasizing the word **“Community”** in their name. There was something for every school written into the new bond request. But their divided community was still reeling from the failed 2015 referendum and all the false information and ill-will disseminated by the Vote No Coalition. A unifying campaign strategy was needed to pull together diverse groups of supporters throughout the district. The **“Unity. Community. Opportunity.”** campaign theme called the community to come together to support their schools and emphasized the fact that schools provide opportunities that benefit everyone.

## RESULTS

**Question 1:** \$20 million Bond for Long-Term Maintenance passed with **51% YES +100 votes** while **Question 2:** \$13 million bond for a new Gym failed by 59% NO votes. After the election, the superintendent says the community commitment to the schools is **stronger now than ever before**. In fact, the city is proposing a city-owned recreation facility that could be leased by the school district.

## Finally a Successful Bond Referendum for Little Falls Community Schools

*“MP+G Marketing and DehlerPR helped our district craft key messages that gave our referendum campaign a clear identity. The results of their work created a more informed and engaged community. This amounted to 1,200 more voters going to the polls - and the first bond passed in our district in almost 25 years.”*

– Aaron Sinclair, Assistant Superintendent

## ABOUT THE TEAM

**mp+g** MP+G Marketing Solutions, LLC  
*“Bringing Your Brand to Life!”*

MP+G Marketing Solutions provides cost-effective marketing solutions for public school districts. Known for her creative voice and vision, **Mary Pat McNeil** helps school districts tell their unique story and engage their communities by delivering compelling brand strategy and marketing campaigns. MP+G’s work has been on the receiving end of several industry awards at the state and national levels. MP+G is a certified, woman-owned business and a Constant Contact Solution Provider.

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Educate. Communicate. Motivate.

DehlerPR helps public school districts maintain and improve their reputation by telling their story and building relationships. As a virtual agency, our group brings clients more value by providing years of experience with high-quality expertise and low overhead. We communicate to educate audiences and motivate them to take action.

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