

Case Study **St. James Public Schools**

Many Voices, One Community!

How MP+G and DehlerPR helped pass an operating levy and building bond in the face of vocal opposition

THE OPPORTUNITY

The \$24 million November 2015 bond proposal differed from the \$29 million February 2015 failed referendum by emphasizing academics, safety, and efficiency, and removing an auditorium and other projects objectionable to the community.



THE GOAL

Provide information about the 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.



A Winning Bond Referendum for St. James Public Schools

"DehlerPR/MP+G were a true asset in our referendum process. Mary Pat and Jeff helped with website information, communications, and the design of a perfect logo for our scenario. St. James had 6 failed attempts at a building bond (without a consultant). With the help of Jeff and Mary Pat, we got it passed on the 7th attempt! We are very appreciative of the work that they did."

— Becky Cselovszki, Superintendent

CLIENT

St. James is a close-knit community located just 38 miles from Mankato on Highway 60. St. James is the Watonwan County Seat, with a population of nearly 5,000 people. The district includes diverse economic drivers, from a robust agricultural community to residents working in a local processing plant to residents commuting to jobs in Mankato. The community is significantly racially diverse with Hispanic or Latino ethnicity making up over 35% of its population.

CLIENT SITUATION

Voters did not pass a bond referendum in February 2015. The district spent considerable time engaging voters to help identify the most critical needs and solutions. In August 2015, St. James Public Schools posed a two-question operating and bond referendum. The district had failed in six previous attempts to pass a bond referendum. Deferred maintenance needs were nearing crisis, and budget cuts were reducing programming. There was strong, **professional vocal opposition**.

DELIVERABLES

- Campaign management
- Communications strategy
- Tactical implementation plan + timeline
- Key messages
- Campaign theme graphic + tagline
- Marketing materials: print + digital
- Email Marketing campaign
- Slide show
- District referendum website content + maintenance
- News releases + newspaper guest columns

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THE PROBLEM

St. James School District was comprised of three aging buildings and other facilities. Concerns were identified in the area of lack of academic space, safety/security, outdated technology, and inefficient systems and facilities that have aged beyond their life span. In addition, the district reduced its operating budget for the 15-16 school year by **\$800,000**. Without additional revenue, further cuts would have been necessary. Additional revenue would allow St. James to maintain successful programs.

MANY VOICES, ONE COMMUNITY

Research results were used to develop a unique strategic communications plan tailored to each audience, and an implementation timeline. In the face of vocal opposition, a key strategy in St. James was to amplify supporters' voices. The unique campaign theme captured the situation in St. James. Due to opposition, the community felt divided. The theme "**Many voices, one community**" demonstrated how the district's community engagement process allowed all community members to have input into the solution, and that community members had common goals.

STRONG RESULTS

Both questions passed! Operating levy with **62% Yes votes**, Bond with **69% Yes votes. First time in 7 tries!**

ABOUT THE TEAM



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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