STPPS Success Election 2021

RESEARCH

The St. Tammany Parish Public School System relies on four existing property tax millages to fund essential operations and critical staffing. These local tax dollars are 25% of our General Fund operating budget and must be renewed every ten years. Without this money, our school system would have faced lay-offs, which would have affected class size, teaching and learning, and our ability to prepare our students for success. The timing of this election fell in the middle of controversy within our district. At our school board meetings and on social media parents and stakeholders were passionately protesting COVID mask requirements in schools. We knew it was going to be difficult to cut through the noise and gain widespread approval for the measure.

PLANNING

Previous elections have shown that as the largest employer in our parish, if we can convince our 5,600 employees and their families to go to the polls to vote, we can win elections. Working with our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, we conducted a survey at the beginning of the school year to gauge employee satisfaction levels with their jobs, our schools, and our district. Based on survey feedback we found that 67.9% of our employees felt supported and recognized for their efforts and 72.1% felt respected in the workplace. Employees felt that teamwork and great co-workers were positives in our district but that low salaries and low morale were holding us back. We created a strategy to empower our employees to be STPPS election ambassadors while also harnessing the power of all our channels to spread the word about the importance of the election.

IMPLEMENTATION

Using our yearly theme of One Team. One Goal. One Mission. Student Success as inspiration, we created the Successful Schools, Successful St. Tammany School Funding Renewal communications plan focused around our employees and loyal stakeholders. Due to COVID restrictions, the Superintendent went on a virtual election tour, presenting a Zoom Election PowerPoint to employees at our 55 schools and 15 sites and community groups such as the Kiwanis and the Chamber of Commerce. Hurricane Ida interrupted our election timeline but we quickly revised and regrouped when the election was pushed from October to November. The Superintendent shared election information in his weekly Friday emails to employees and created Team Up to Vote Spirit Days when employees could wear jeans. Election information always drove people back to our election website, which explained the benefits and provided a place for stakeholder engagement through our Talk to Us feature. Due to the mask debate raging online, we made the difficult decision not to engage on social media and instead only posted once on Facebook. As we got closer to the election, flyers and letters were sent to employees and parents and robocalls reminded them of the date and times the polls were open.

EVALUATION

The four propositions passed by 53% and 54% and voter turnout was higher than expected. While we won by a small margin, it was apparent our employees shared the message of the election with others and voted for the measure. We are working to improve employee morale. We are thankful because we know with this funding in place for the next ten years we will be able to continue to reach towards our one goal and one mission of student success.