In September 2021, the state Education Department ordered the closure of the Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School for lack of a certificate of occupancy. At the time the school was under partial renovation. The closure forced students into remote learning and was extremely unpopular. Community members questioned the decision making of district leaders. The superintendent soon after stepped down and an interim was appointed. The school reopened in a few weeks, but community goodwill had been tested. At this time, the Board of Education proposed a bond issue to cover cost overruns on the capital project and bring it to fruition. Asking for voter support would be a challenge given the emotions of the moment.

I was brought in to provide crisis communications support at the time of the school’s closure and began leveraging Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to develop steady, open lines of communication with the community. All three platforms were stagnant at the time. Project updates, district announcements and upcoming meetings were shared along with lighter, student-based posts about programs and achievements. The community responded positively and enthusiastically. In the first two weeks, page likes on Facebook increased 23% and followers by 28 percent. Twitter and Instagram saw similar spikes.

For the bond campaign, social media would be a key tool, along with community forums, website updates and an informational newsletter. Bond information was chunked into factoids and shared along with graphic elements for social media. The linchpin was to be short informational videos designed to be socially shareable and shot on site with school and district leaders. Putting capable, informed faces to the argument for the bond issue would put that argument in voters' hands via their mobile devices. Tours of the facilities to show off finished classrooms and reimagined spaces still under construction brought the community inside to see the impact of the bond issue firsthand.

The superintendent, principal and assistant principal all went on camera and made the case for unique aspects of the bond issue. Their testimony was cut into five videos and mixed with background imagery of the ongoing work. These videos were shared on all platforms over the final two weeks of the bond campaign and were well received. In the end, the bond issue passed by a more than 6-to-1 margin, and the project work is on schedule to be completed by June.

Dec. 8, 2021: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3124775821137053 - Watch as Interim Superintendent, Dr. Colin Byrne, talks about some of the many reasons to be excited about the planned improvements to B.M.P. Ridge Street School. The Bond Vote is Dec. 21, 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., at Blind Brook High School.

Dec. 10, 2021: https://www.instagram.com/tv/CXTu0ssPtir/ - Principal Tracy Taylor with a Bond Project Update. B.M.P. Ridge Street School Principal Tracy Taylor is so excited to see the big improvements coming to the school. "To walk the hallways now and see the K-1 Wing completed and starting to fill up with our Bluebirds is just amazing," Mrs. Taylor says. The Bond Vote is Dec. 21, 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., at Blind Brook High School. For voter information or absentee ballots, go to www.blindbrook.org.

Dec. 12, 2021: https://twitter.com/BlindBrookUFSD/status/1470015585761181698 - Assistant Principal Teresa Letizia details all the reasons the new instructional spaces at B.M.P. Ridge Street School are worth getting excited about. The Bond Vote is Dec. 21, 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., at Blind Brook High School. For voter information, go to blindbrook.org.