

# Public Attitudes About Restructuring the St. Louis County Schools

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# About the Survey

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- Conducted from August 5-17, 2009 by Decision Resources Ltd.
- Scientifically valid sample of 467 District adults
  - *Represents known demographics of all adults*
  - *Over-sampled Tower-Soudan, Cotton to reach 100 in each area*
- Margin of error is  $\pm 5.0\%$
- A survey is a snapshot in time

# Public is Following Discussions About Restructuring St. Louis County Schools

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- 75 percent of respondents state they are following the issue **very** or **somewhat** closely
  - *Only 7 percent not following*
  - *Half depend on newspapers or TV as primary source of information*
  
- 64 percent state they will “definitely” vote in November
  - *17 percent will “probably” vote*

# Public Has Confidence in the St. Louis County School District

- District receives high marks in many areas
  - *Quality of education*
  - *Value for their investment*
  - *Informing residents*
  
- Satisfactory grade for financial management
  - *50 percent rate as excellent/good*
  - *41 percent rate as fair/poor*

# Public Confidence in the St. Louis County School Board

	Agree	Disagree
Our community receives a good value from its investment in its public schools.	75%	20%
The St. Louis County School District does a good job informing residents about the decisions they make.	72%	24%
I would recommend St. Louis County Public Schools to friends.	65%	25%
The St. Louis County School Board makes decisions that are in the best interests of our students and their families.	62%	29%

# Job Performance Ratings

	Excellent/Good	Fair/Poor
Quality of Education	66%	28%
Teachers	73%	16%
Superintendent/Administration	55%	33%
School Board	54%	38%

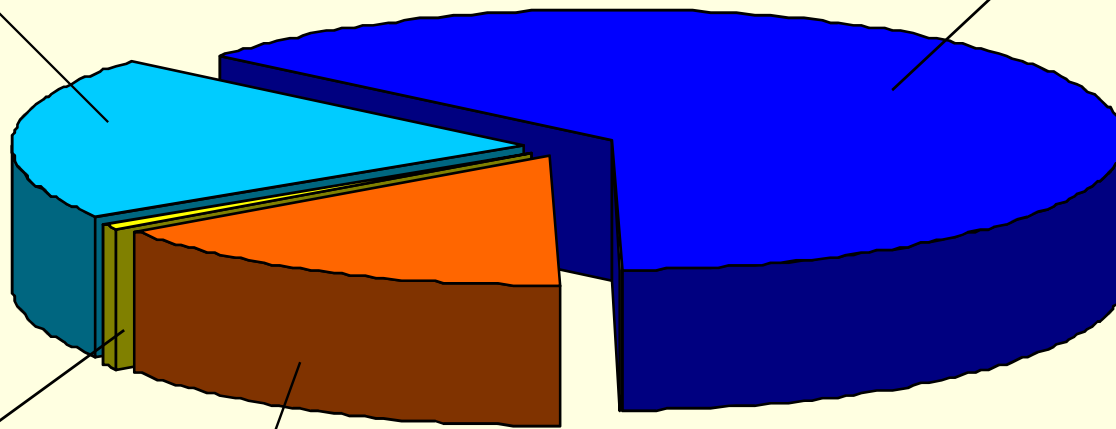
# Public Open to New Taxes for Education, Expect Others to Pay Their Fair Share

- 78 percent of residents open to tax increase for education
- 81 percent agree that cabin and recreational property owners need to pay their fair share
  - *51 percent strongly agree*
- However, less certainty about paying for buildings vs. operations
  - *48 percent agree we should build modern schools*
  - *41 percent pick fund operations in older ones*

# Personal Views on Tax Increases for Education

20% — I would vote against almost any property tax increases for the schools

63% — I would vote for a property tax increase under some conditions, but against it under other conditions

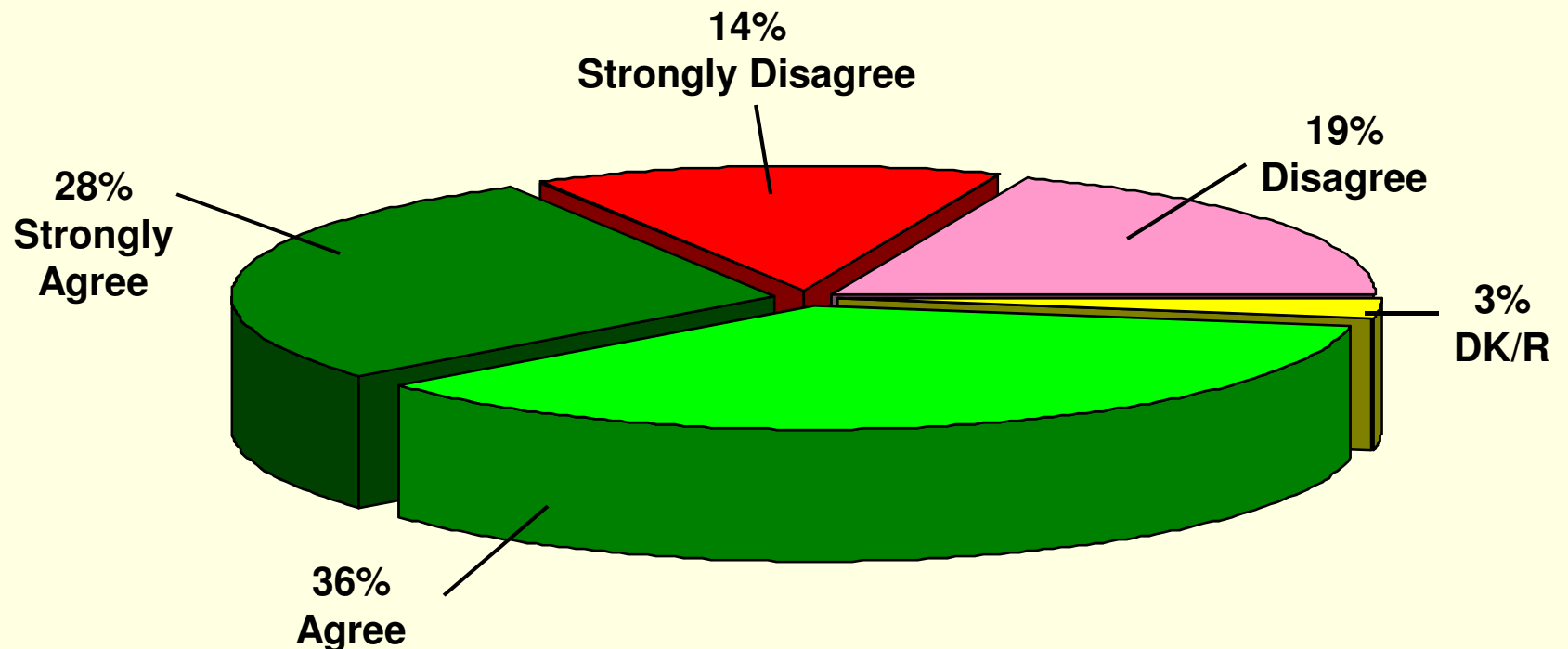


1% — DK/R

15% — I would vote for almost any property tax increases for the schools

# Concern Expressed About the Effect of Taxes on Others

*“With this recession, I don’t think people in this area can afford higher property taxes, even if the increases go towards helping the schools.”*



# Public Understands the Urgency the Issues Facing the District

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- 89 percent agree major changes are needed
- 75 percent agree rural taxpayers need to find ways to increase education funding
- 73 percent convinced the District needs to act sooner rather than later

# Support for Different Strategies

	Good Idea	Bad Idea
Consolidate to 5 Schools	64%	25%
Close 3-5 Schools	37%	52%
New \$3 Million Operating Levy	10%	81%
Dissolution of the District	10%	83%

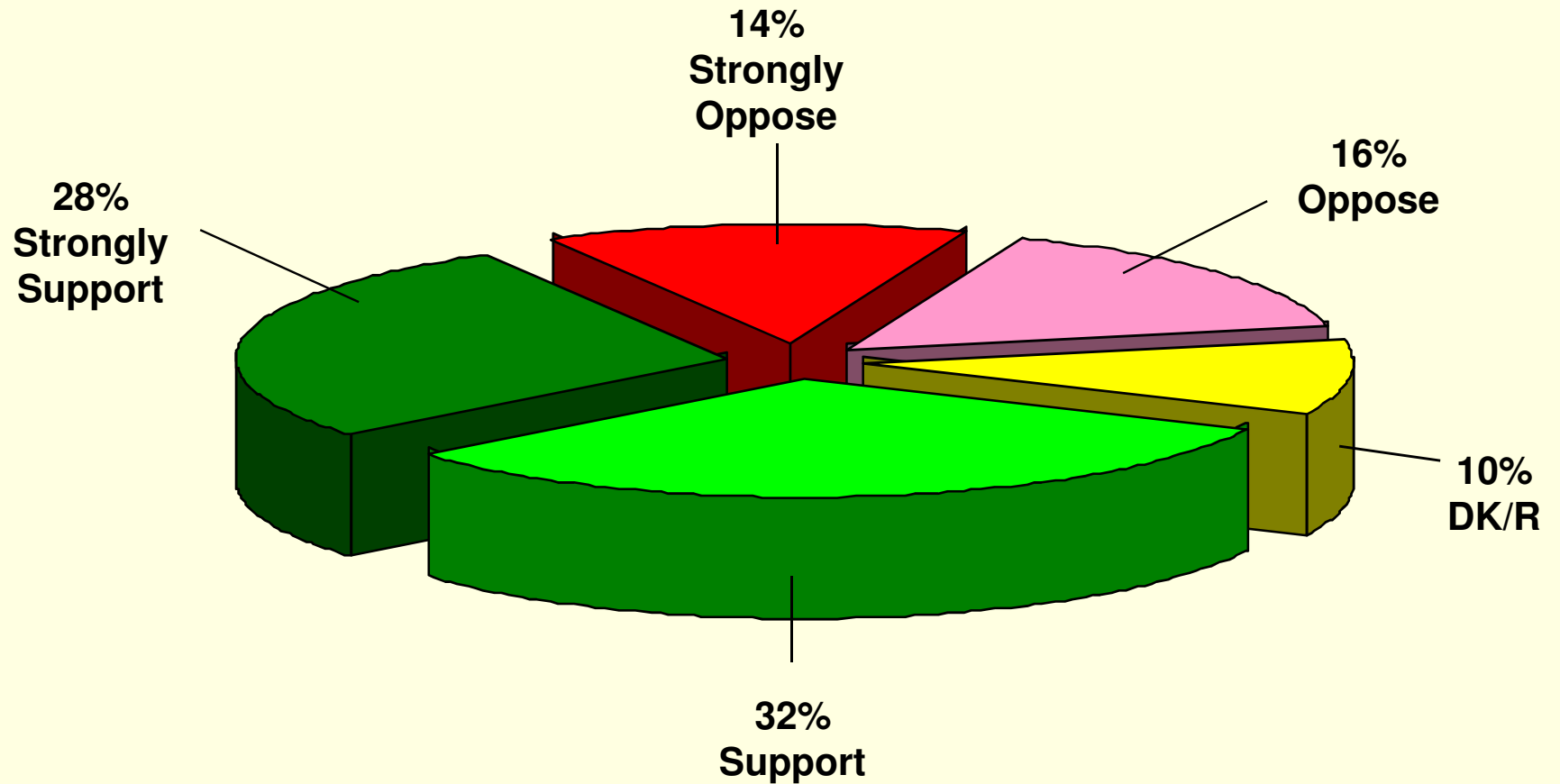
# Intensity of Opinion on Each Strategy

	Good Idea Strongly	Bad Idea Strongly	Best Choice	Worst Choice
Consolidate to 5 Schools	26%	10%	62%	6%
Close 3-5 Schools	4%	27%	14%	1%
New \$3 Million Operating Levy	2%	40%	7%	6%
Dissolution of the District	2%	55%	6%	80%

# As of Today, Residents Support the Referendum

- 60 percent would vote in favor
  - *30 percent oppose*
  - *Strong support is twice as high as strong opposition (28% - 14%)*
- Leading reasons for support
  - *Cost-effective*
  - *Support schools*
  - *Save the District*
- Leading reason to oppose is taxes

# Support for Bond Referendum



# Greatest Agreement on Issues

	Agree	Disagree
It is too expensive to keep operating seven schools when we only have 2,000 students in the District.	93%	4%
I would rather the school district choose the right plan, not the cheapest or the fastest plan.	88%	8%
Since enrollment continues to drop, it makes sense to close some schools and invest our money in improving the remaining ones.	84%	12%
With any plan, we need to make sure we have enough schools to serve the families who will move here when the economy improves.	82%	15%
It is important to keep the St. Louis County School District together, instead of allowing it to be broken apart.	81%	16%

# Greatest Uncertainty on Issues

	Agree	Disagree
We need to improve our academic programs first — we can invest money in new or remodeled buildings later	43%	41%
If the school district had been managing its money better, we wouldn't be in this financial mess.	49%	43%
Increasing time spent on buses, even if it is only 5 or 10 minutes a day, is not good for our children.	51%	45%
\$78 million is just too big of a plan — we need to shrink the cost of this plan and make it fit our District's needs better.	53%	41%
I understand the need to reduce the number of schools, but it seems like we don't need to build two new schools	52%	37%

# Tower-Soudan, Cotton Residents Express Some Concerns About Referendum

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- Residents agree sacrifices are needed to save the District and improve the quality of schools
  - *54 percent in Tower-Soudan*
  - *65 percent in Cotton*

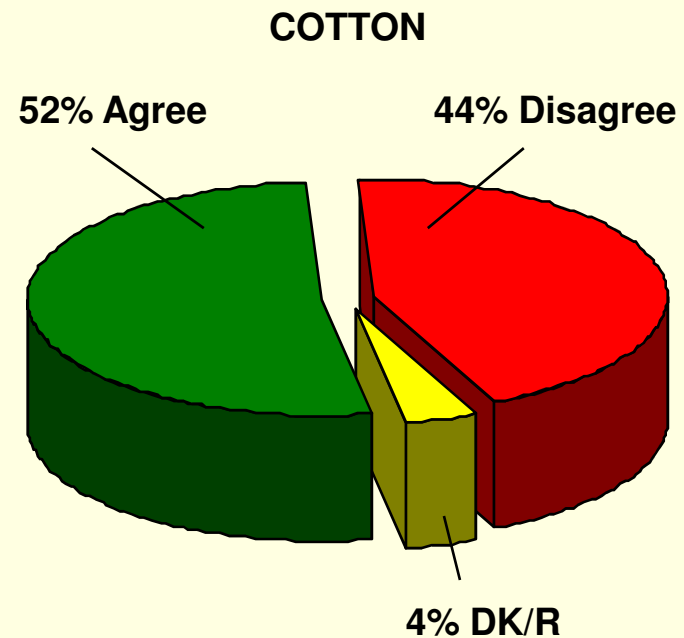
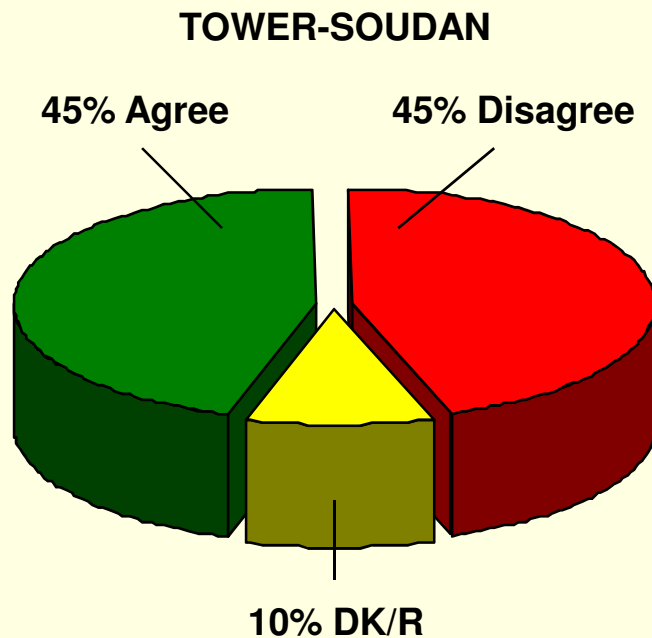
# Tower-Soudan, Cotton Residents Express Some Concerns About Referendum

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- However, 70 percent of these residents believe families will leave ISD 2142 rather than go to another school in the district
- Concern raised about voting for a tax increase if their local school is downsized or closed

# Concern About Tax Increase Under Option D

*“It will be hard for me to support a tax increase unless the Tower-Soudan School continues to be a pre K-12 school (Cotton School remains open).”*



## Public Believes the School Board Has Done a Good Job With the Restructuring Plan

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- 64 percent state the School Board has worked to find a good compromise
  - *Only 28 percent disagree*
- 68 percent agree School Board did a good job involving the community
  - *Only 25 percent disagree*

# Conclusions

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- Residents understand the seriousness of the issues facing the District
- Looking for the best plan that keeps the District together
- Balancing need for significant restructuring with impact of higher taxes, change
- Instinct is to support the Board's plan, but opinions will evolve

# Communication Role During a Levy

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## District

### Responsibility to:

- *Explain why this plan was adopted*
- *Explain what happens if referendum fails*
- *Answer residents' questions and concerns*

## Board Members

- *More flexibility — can provide information **and** advocate*

# Recommendations: ISD 2142

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- 1) Board members need to lead the public discussion
  - *Trusted*
  - *Credible*
  - *Informed*

# Recommendations: ISD 2142

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## 2) Communicate the thinking behind the strategy

- *We need to preserve our district, but seven schools are too many*
- *Best choice is to close some schools and improve the remaining ones*
- *This plan invests in better classroom performance, stabilizing the budget*

*Explain the improvements in their local school*

# Recommendations: ISD 2142

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- 3) Explain the consequences of inaction
  - *Need to increase operating levy*
  - *Possible dissolution*
    - Tax impact

# Recommendations: ISD 2142

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## 4) Address the residents' questions

- *How did we reach this point?*
- *Why invest in buildings, not programs?*
- *What is the benefit of the two new schools?*
- *How is travel time affected?*
- *Why is this plan the best value?*