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Lake Orion Community Schools

Community Assessment Survey December 2013

Key Findings
and
Executive Summary

January 27, 2013

- Educational
- Political
- Industrial
- Consumer
- Market
- Research
- Analysis

METHODOLOGY

EPIC • MRA administered live telephone interviews with 400 registered voters who reside in the Lake Orion Community School District and also said they voted in the 2012 general election, the 2010 general election, or both, or were too young to have voted in either election. The interviews were conducted from December 3rd through December 7th, 2013.

As is the case with all EPIC-MRA school district surveys, respondents were NOT informed that it was a school district survey or that it was commissioned by Lake Orion Schools unless asked by the respondent and only after the survey was completed. This was done to prevent the bias that often occurs when voters supportive of the school district will tell interviewers what they think they want to hear.

Respondents for the interviews were selected utilizing an interval method of randomly selecting records of households of people who are registered to vote, participate in elections and have commercially-listed telephone numbers, as well as randomly generated phone numbers between listed numbers and a list of cell phone numbers from the area. The sample was stratified so every area of the district is represented in the sample according to its contribution to the average of the general elections for governor, since that is the election that will be held in 2014.

Questions were also included to determine how frequently respondents vote in August primary elections or local public school elections to be able to compare the results among general election voters and those who vote in August primaries or school elections.

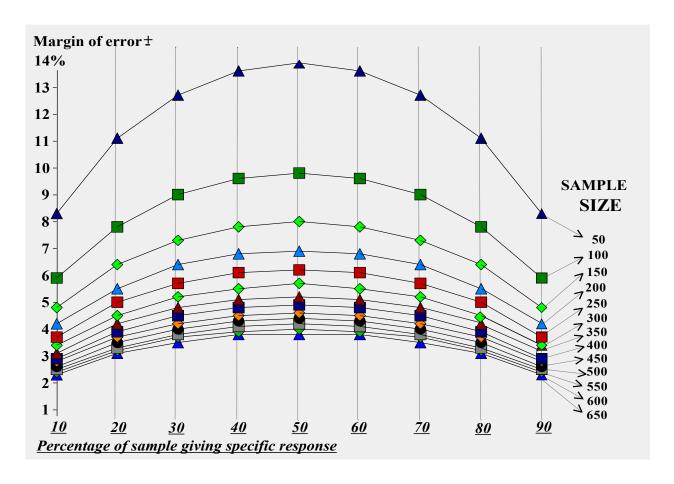
Generally, in interpreting survey results, all surveys are subject to error; that is, the results of the survey may differ from that which would have been obtained if the entire population were interviewed. The size of the sampling error depends on the total number of respondents asked a specific question. The table on the next page represents the estimated sampling error for different percentage distributions of responses based on sample size.

For example, when asked to rate the job done by Lake Orion Schools in managing finances, a 50 percent bare majority of all 400 respondents offered a positive rating for the job done by Lake Orion Schools in managing finances (Question #19). As indicated in the chart below, this percentage would have a sampling error of plus or minus 4.9 percent. That means that with repeated sampling, it is very likely (95 out of every 100 times), that the percentage for the entire population would fall between 45.1 percent and 54.9 percent, hence 50 percent ±4.9 percent.

EPIC • MRA SAMPLING ERROR BY PERCENTAGE (AT 95 IN 100 CONFIDENCE LEVEL)

Percentage of sample giving specific response

	<u>10</u>	20	30	40	<u>50</u>	60	<u>70</u>	80	90
SAMPLE SIZE	% margin of error ±								
700	2.2	3.0	3.3	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.3	3.0	2.2
650	2.3	3.1	3.5	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.5	3.1	2.3
600	2.4	3.2	3.7	3.9	4	3.9	3.7	3.2	2.4
550	2.5	3.3	3.8	4.1	4.2	4.1	3.8	3.3	2.5
500	2.6	3.5	4	4.3	4.4	4.3	4	3.5	2.6
450	2.8	3.7	4.2	4.5	4.6	4.5	4.2	3.7	2.8
400	2.9	3.9	4.5	4.8	4.9	4.8	4.5	3.9	2.9
350	3.1	4.2	4.8	5.1	5.2	5.1	4.8	4.2	3.1
300	3.4	4.5	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.5	5.2	4.5	3.4
250	3.7	5	5.7	6.1	6.2	6.1	5.7	5	3.7
200	4.2	5.5	6.4	6.8	6.9	6.8	6.4	5.5	4.2
150	4.8	6.4	7.3	7.8	8	7.8	7.3	6.4	4.8
100	5.9	7.8	9	9.6	9.8	9.6	9	7.8	5.9
50	8.3	11.1	12.7	13.6	13.9	13.6	12.7	11.1	8.3



KEY FINDINGS

- Lake Orion Schools received very positive grades and job ratings for the work it does in a variety of areas, including providing a quality education for students, communicating with district residents, and improving education quality over the past few years.
- While nearly half of respondents said education quality remained about the same over the past few years, the percentage saying education quality has "improved" more than "gotten worse" is just over a 3-to-1 ratio. Most school districts are doing very well to have a 2 to 1 ratio, so Lake Orion Schools is performing better than average.
- A 79 percent majority offered a combined grade of A&B for the quality of education provided by Lake Orion Schools, including 35 percent offering an "A" grade.
- A 68 percent majority offered an A&B grade for the work done by the Lake Orion support staff, 61 percent offered an A&B grade for school principals, 52 percent for the Board of Education, 45 percent for the Superintendent, and 43 percent for assistant superintendents, directors and staff. When the survey was conducted, there was significant media coverage of discussions about expanding schools of choice. Indeed, grades were much lower for the Superintendent and Administration among parents directly affected by the Schools of Choice policy than among parents of older students, which largely explains their overall lower grades.
- A grade for teachers was not included due to an oversight, but there has seldom been an EPIC-MRA survey conducted where teachers did not rank at the top of all groups tested, or as a close second to support staff.
- A 78 percent majority offered a positive rating for the job Lake Orion Schools does communicating with district residents, with 23 percent offering an "excellent" rating.
- A 52 percent majority said Lake Orion Schools are "better" than surrounding school districts, 40 percent said "about the same," with only 3 percent saying "worse."
- A 35 percent plurality said Lake Orion Schools are "about the same" as private, religious schools in the area in providing a quality education, with 22 percent saying "better" and 20 percent saying "worse."
- A bare 50 to 39 percent majority gave the district a positive rating for the job it does managing district finances. While this is positive, it is still well below the A&B grade for the district (29 points lower), and slightly lower than the A&B grade for the Board of Education (2 points).
- A 56 percent majority said school taxes are "about right," 32 percent said they are "too high" (13 percent much too high), and 7 percent said "too low." The "too high" percentage is high enough to make it difficult to garner voter support for a tax increase.
- Nearly 9-in-10 respondents (87 percent) offered a positive rating for the condition of the school buildings and facilities. Obviously, this is a very positive indication of the job done by the district in maintaining buildings, facilities and grounds. However, such high ratings can also make it very difficult to convince voters that a bond proposal or building and site fund is needed to improve schools that they believe are in great condition.
- The "quality of education" (26 percent), "teachers" (10 percent), and "curriculum-choices" (7 percent) were the top items respondents said they like about Lake Orion Schools.

- When respondents were asked what they disliked, there was no response that registered double-digits. The top response was "curriculum-choices" (cited by 5 percent); "lack of funding" (4 percent); and "wasteful spending" (4 percent).
- More than a third (35 percent) cited the "lack of funding" as the biggest problem facing the district, followed by "wasteful spending" in a distant second (6 percent), with "drugs" and "overcrowding" following (at 3 percent each).
- Sports and athletic programs (72 percent), community use of schools (67 percent), high academic standards (62 percent), and student safety (62 percent) were the areas where respondents said Lake Orion Schools is doing enough.
- Having small class size (39 percent), providing career training (37 percent), and offering classes and specialized programs for gifted and talented students (31 percent), were the top areas where respondents said more should be done.
- When respondents were asked whether they support or oppose eight specific cost cutting approaches that were read to them, two ideas were opposed by 90 percent or more, four were opposed by 81 to 88 percent, one by 71 percent, and one by a 48 to 43 percent plurality.
- Privatization of additional services (other than custodial which was already privatized), got the most support at 43 percent, but 48 percent opposed the idea, including 39 percent who strongly opposed the idea.
- A 79 percent majority favored (53 percent strongly) the decision to maintain at least a 10 percent fund balance.
- After hearing a description of the amount of bonded debt that Lake Orion Schools has (\$160 million), 60 percent said they thought it was about the "right amount," 21 percent said it is "too much," and 10 percent said it is "too little" bonded debt.
- A narrow 51 percent majority said they would vote "yes" on a 1 mill building and site sinking fund. However, only 46 percents said they would directly vote "yes," with 5 percent unsure at first, but when pressed said they lean toward voting "yes."
- "Improving facilities" (cited by 21 percent), "maintaining what we have" (18 percent), and "improving education" (12 percent), were the top reasons cited for voting "yes."
- "Taxes/increase" (cited by 32 percent), followed by "funds not needed" (25 percent), and "wasteful spending" (16 percent) were the top reasons cited for voting "no."
- Households with children and parents who send their children to Lake Orion Schools solidly favor a building and site fund, while households without children oppose it by a narrow majority.
- A 60 percent majority said they favor the current "schools of choice" program (41 percent strongly), with 32 percent opposing the program and 8 percent unsure.
- The top community concerns from a list (excluding the economy and jobs) that was read to survey respondents, shows that voters are most concerned about "the condition of the roads" (28 percent); followed by "the quality of education" (26 percent); "crime and drugs" (19 percent); and "high local taxes" (16 percent).
- The top sources of information about Lake Orion Schools comes from; "general word-of-mouth" (22 percent); "the Lake Orion Review" (15 percent) and "the district newsletter" (12 percent).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lake Orion Schools earn very high marks from district voters for the job it has done providing a quality education and communicating with district voters. Moreover, voters believe that the quality of education has improved much more than worsened over the past few years.

A majority of voters think Lake Orion Schools are providing a better quality of education than surrounding local public school districts, but only narrowly said the district is providing a better quality of education than private, religious schools in the area.

A bare majority gave a positive rating for the job being done by Lake Orion Schools in managing district finances, which is significantly lower than other grades and ratings offered about the job Lake Orion Schools is doing.

Just under a third of respondents said that school taxes are "too high" for what they get back in educational programs. While this level of voter concern about taxes is not at the ideal level in the teens or low 20's as a percentage, it is also not high enough (above 40 percent) to be an impediment by itself to passing a millage increase in the future. However, it is high enough (above 30 percent) to make it more difficult in garnering voter support for a millage increase.

The top community problems cited from a rotated list that were read to survey respondents was, "the condition of the roads," closely followed by "the quality of education," then "crime and drugs" and "high local taxes." When asked in an open-ended question what the single biggest problem is that is confronting Lake Orion Schools, the top response was "lack of funding," cited by just over a third of voters, with no other problem cited by double digits.

Nearly 9-in-10 respondents gave a positive rating for the condition of the school buildings and facilities of the District. While this shows Lake Orion Schools has done a great job maintaining school building and facilities, it also shows that voters may not be aware of many of the infrastructure problems with school buildings that prompted the district to recently place a bond proposal on the ballot, which failed to earn voter approval. If voters offer such an overwhelmingly positive rating for the condition of school buildings and facilities, they are less likely to support proposals to improve the schools.

More than 7-in-10 respondents said Lake Orion Schools is doing enough providing a comprehensive sports and athletic program for both boys and girls, with just over two-thirds saying enough is being done making schools available for community use, with just over 6-in-10 saying enough is being done requiring high academic standards and ensuring student safety.

Having small class size so teachers can spend enough time with students was the top area where nearly 4-in-10 respondents said more should be done, followed closely by providing career training, especially for students who may not go on to college, with just over 3-in-10 saying more should be done offering classes and specialized programs for gifted and talented students. The relatively low percentages saying that Lake Orion Schools needs to be doing more in a variety of areas, is further indication that voters believe that the district is doing enough in offering programs and services.

Nearly 8-in-10 survey respondents offered a positive rating for the job Lake Orion Schools does in communicating with district residents. Given the other high ratings for the district, it is not surprising that communications efforts would rank high as well.

If cuts are needed to balance the budget, every idea tested except one was opposed by overwhelming majorities. Eliminating all extracurricular activities, athletic programs, cutting freshman sports programs, cutting bus transportation for high school students, reducing fine arts programs, or middle school athletics were all opposed by more than 8-in-10 voters.

More than 7-in-10 opposed closing schools to balance the budget, and if that is the response district-wide, opposition within the area where a school would be closed would be much greater.

The only cost cutting measure that got a significant level of support was privatizing additional school district services, other than custodial, which was already privatized. While more than 4-in-10 supported the idea, just under a majority opposed it.

More than 8-in-10 district residents support the decision to maintain at least a 10 percent fund balance, and after hearing a description of the current amount of bonded debt, 6-in-10 said they thought \$160 million dollars in bonded debt was about the right amount, with only 1-in-5 saying it was too much, and 1-in-10 saying it was too little.

A narrow majority said they would vote "yes" on a 1 mil building and site fund, but that percentage includes voters who were undecided at first, but when pressed said they would lean toward voting "yes." The direct "yes" vote without leaners is less than a majority, which means that voter approval is uncertain.

Supporters cited how the building and site fund would improve facilities, maintain what the district has, and improve education quality as the top reasons to vote "yes," while opponents cited a tax increase, funding not needed and wasteful spending as the top reasons to vote "no."

A solid 6-in-10 respondents said they favor the current schools of choice program through the 2nd grade, with just under 1-in-3 saying they oppose the program. A proposal to expand the schools of choice program was not tested.

Word-of-mouth, the Lake Orion Review and the district newsletter were the top three sources of information that were cited by respondents.

Nearly 7-in-10 voters with school age children in the household said they would vote "yes" on a building and site fund, while a narrow majority of households without children said they would "vote "no."

Somewhat surprisingly, just over 3-in-10 respondents said that they visit the Lake Orion Community Schools website at least a few times a week or a month, which is a very high use of a school website compared to polling in most other school districts. Also, a solid majority uses social media sites at least a few times a week.

This was a mostly good news poll in terms of how Lake Orion Schools is viewed by voters in the community, but there were also some important findings and areas of concern that were found in the results, which can and should be addressed. First of all, while the community may have been informed of the problems that exist with the school buildings and other facilities during the bond campaign, the message did not get through. Just as you cannot judge a book by its cover, you cannot judge the condition and real problems of a school building based on the outward appearance of the building. Residents of the community need to be shown again what the problems are, what needs to be done, and the impact it will have on education. If it hasn't been used before, a video presentation and slide show illustrating the infrastructure problems with school buildings and what kind of changes are envisioned, can help voters visualize and understand the problems and solutions.

Likewise, the case must be made again about the benefits of the "Schools of Choice" program, not only in terms of the state funding it brings to the district, and the education program cuts that have been avoided. To the extent anecdotal stories can be shared about how students from other districts have succeeded, and how the change in the schools of choice program will keep families together, can help improve the perception of the program among parents whose students are directly impacted. Also, the case must be made for how the district has exercised prudent financial management, and how the taxes levied by the district are reasonable and not excessive.