

SCHOOL FUNDING INITIATIVES

DOUGLAS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

APRIL 2023



MOORE INFORMATION GROUP
RESEARCH • ANALYSIS • RESULTS

METHODOLOGY

Method: Two in-person focus groups were conducted April 18, 2023.

Location: Marriott, Lone Tree

Group 1: 5:30pm – 7:00pm MST

Group 2: 7:30pm – 9:00pm MST

Moderator: Evan Wilson, Moore Information Group

Participant Criteria: Registered Douglas County voters age 25+ who are homeowners and are likely to vote in the November 2023 General Election.

- Group 1 (Parents): Participants included parents/legal guardians of kid(s) in grades K-12 currently attending DCSD public schools.
- Group 2 (Non-parents): Participants included those who do not currently have any kids attending DCSD schools. MIG ensured a minimum of 2 participants in this group had kids and/or grandchildren who had attended DCSD schools in the past.

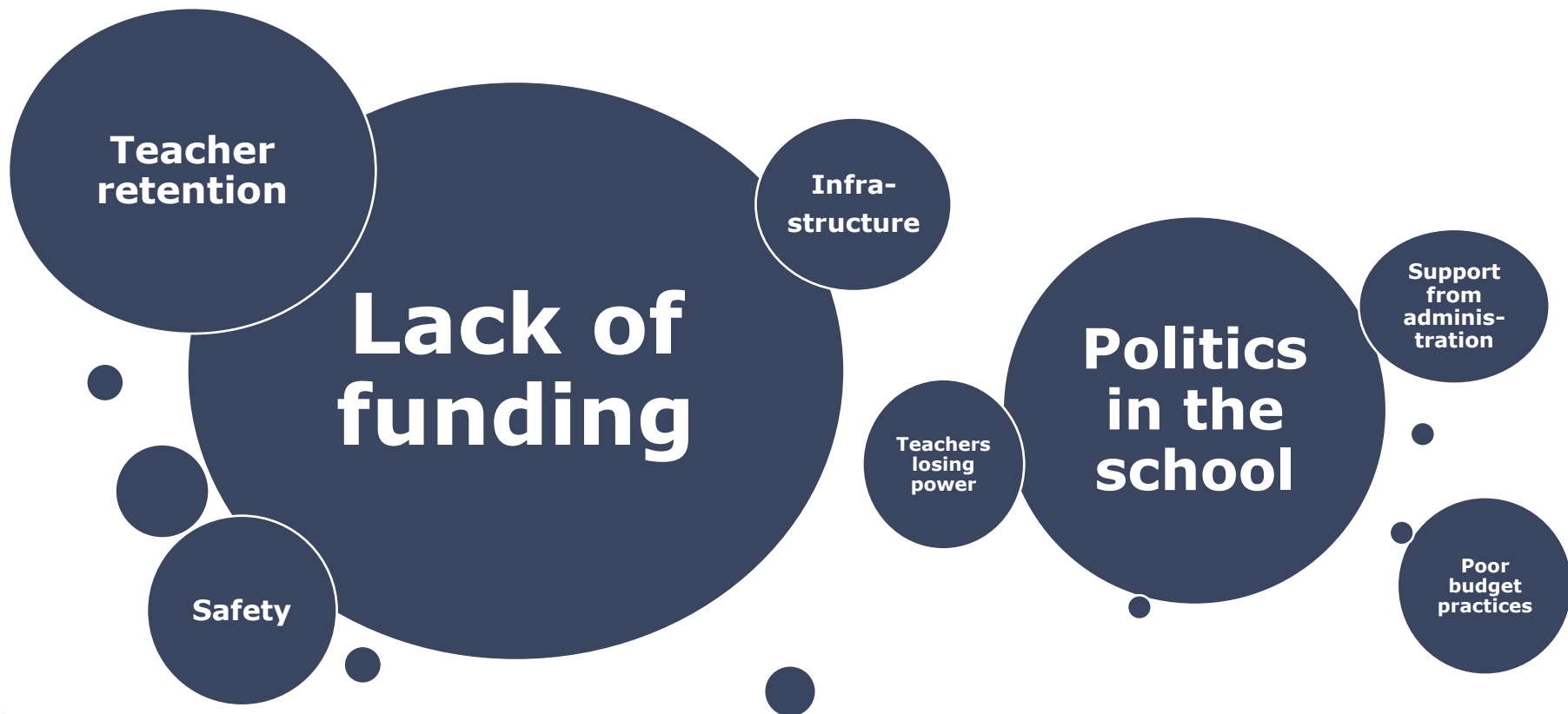


COMPOSITION OF GROUPS

		Gender		Age		Income		Party Registration		
	Total	Men	Women	18-54	55+	<\$100k	\$100k +	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
All participants	21	10	11	12	9	4	16	7	9	5
Group 1/Parents	10	5	5	9	1	1	9	1	5	4
Group 2/Non-parents	11	5	6	3	8	3	7	6	4	1



TOP ISSUE FOR DCSD: *FUNDING*



INITIAL BALLOT

At the outset of each group, participants were asked to cast an initial, secret ballot on increased school funding.

- Clear divisions surfaced between parents and non-parents.
 - The parent participants unanimously voted “yes”
 - The six anonymous “yes” votes among non-parents in Group 2 are key indicators that baseline support exists for 5A/5B

*Should the Douglas County School District (DCSD) receive **increased funding** to address issues such as competitive pay to retain and attract teachers and staff, building and expanding schools where needed to reduce overcrowding and performing capital improvements on its current school buildings?*

Vote Only One Option Below:

- Yes
- No
- Undecided

	Yes	No	Undecided
Group 1/Parents	10	--	--
Group 2/Non-parents	6	2	3



REVISED 5A MEASURE

"Shall Douglas County School District taxes be increased \$60 million annually commencing in collection year 2024 and in each year thereafter, which is estimated to cost homeowners approximately \$1 per week per \$100,000 of home value based on current assessment rates and assessed values for general fund purposes in order to:

- Retain and attract quality teachers and staff by increasing compensation for the 2023/2024 school year and thereafter maintaining district salaries;
- Benefits to be more competitive with neighboring school districts;
- Implementing safety and security upgrades."

The Good

- ✓ Implementing safety and security upgrades
- ✓ \$1 per \$100,000 of assessed value
- ✓ Retain and attract quality teachers and staff by increasing compensation
- ✓ Benefits to be more competitive with neighboring school districts

The Bad

- ✗ \$60 million annual tax increase
- ✗ General Fund purposes
- ✗ Cost to homeowners



REVISED 5B MEASURE

“With no expected increase in the district’s current bond fund mill levy rate of 6.700 mills and based on the district’s current assessed value and tax collection rate, shall Douglas County School District debt be increased \$450 million with a repayment cost of \$792.7 million, and shall district taxes be increased \$51.3 million annually to pay such debt, all for the purpose of:

- Updating and performing critical capital improvements and maintenance at existing educational facilities;
- Implementing safety and security upgrades;
- Constructing and equipping three new neighborhood schools and additions to two existing neighborhood schools to accommodate growth and reduce overcrowding; and
- Implementing other capital improvements as described in the district’s bond priority plan.”

The Good

- ✓ Implementing safety and security upgrades
- ✓ Reduce overcrowding
- ✓ Performing critical capital improvements

The Bad

- ✗ \$450 million debt increase with repayment cost
- ✗ \$53.1 million annual tax increase
- ✗ Three new neighborhood schools
- ✗ Other capital improvements

Words matter. The absence of language tying 5B directly to students and classrooms is an opportunity.



5A AND 5B: KEY SUBGROUPS

	Revised 5A		Revised 5B	
	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
All participants	67%	29%	38%	62%
Group 1/parents	100%	--	60%	40%
Group 2/non-parents	36%	55%	18%	82%
Gender				
Men	80%	20%	50%	50%
Women	55%	36%	27%	73%
Age				
<55	83%	8%	50%	50%
55+	44%	56%	22%	78%
Income				
<\$100k	50%	50%	--	100%
\$100k +	75%	25%	50%	50%
Party registration				
Republican	29%	57%	14%	86%
Democrat	78%	22%	56%	44%
Independent	100%	--	40%	60%



POSITIVE MESSAGES: *OVERALL SCORES*

7.9

TEACHER PAY: Douglas County School District is at risk of losing some of its best teachers to neighboring school districts because we cannot pay them as well as many other districts. DCSD starting teacher pay is currently \$43,680.

7.67

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT: An investment in our students and schools is an investment in our community. Schools are an integral part of our neighborhoods, our economies, and our lives. A high-quality school system, which requires high-quality teachers and staff, attracts businesses and residents to our thriving community. And this helps keep our home values strong.

7.43

TEACHER RETENTION: Nearly 90% of students in Douglas County schools graduate – over 6 points higher than the statewide average and on par with neighboring districts Littleton and Cherry Creek. Yet, DCSD collects \$2,000 less per student in mill levy override dollars each year than both of those school districts. As a result, on average, teachers in Douglas County make anywhere from \$15,000 to \$19,000 less than those teachers. If passed by voters, this mill levy override will ensure we can recruit and retain the best teachers.

7.12

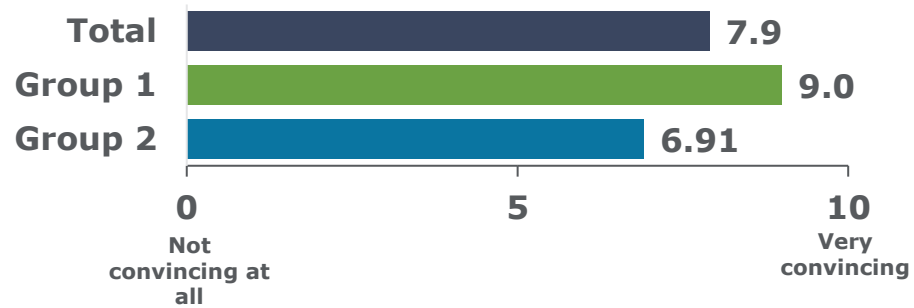
WHAT WILL IT COST ME?: Passing a mill levy override and bond measure is an investment in top teaching talent and our school buildings. This requires buy-in and support from taxpayers and amounts to an extra dollar per week for every \$100,000 of home value. That comes out to \$250 per year for someone with a \$500,000 home.



TOP POSITIVE MESSAGE: TEACHER PAY

"I WAS SHOCKED BY THE STARTING TEACHER PAY." MALE, GROUP 2

Message: Douglas County School District is at risk of losing some of its best teachers to neighboring school districts because we cannot pay them as well as many other districts. DCSD starting teacher pay is currently \$43,680.



Reaction from participants:

"The goal should be to retain great teachers, if the salary needs a boost, then we should figure out how to raise base pay."
Female, Group 2

"Teacher pay is too low, even compared to other districts." Male, Group 1

"It's specific and factual." Male, Group 2

"I gave a '10,' just because it tells you exactly what Douglas County's teachers are making. There's no roundabout to it. I don't think a lot of people know that." Female, Group 1

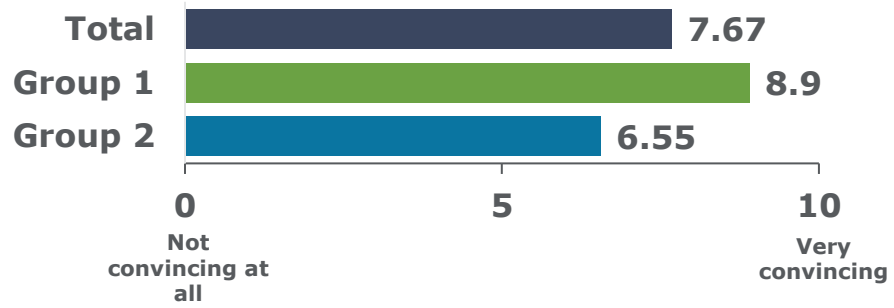
	Participants			Gender		Age		Income		Party Registration		
	All	Group 1/ Parents	Group 2/ Non-parents	Men	Women	<55	55+	<\$100k	\$100k+	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
Mean Scores	7.90	9.00	6.91	8.20	7.64	8.25	7.44	9.00	8.06	6.57	7.89	9.80



COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

“COLLECTIVE INVESTMENT - THRIVING COMMUNITY.” - FEMALE, GROUP 2

Message: An investment in our students and schools is an investment in our community. Schools are an integral part of our neighborhoods, our economies, and our lives. A high-quality school system, which requires high-quality teachers and staff, attracts businesses and residents to our thriving community. And this helps keep our home values strong.



Reaction from participants:

- "When you have better teachers and schools, more educated people come to the community." Male, Group 2*
- "Tangible; focuses on big picture/community." Female, Group 1*
- "Community and home values are important to me." Female, Group 2*
- "Humanizing the statement and making people who oppose understand the impact." Female, Group 1*
- "Don't know what it costs. Solid statement everyone can get behind." Male, Group 2*

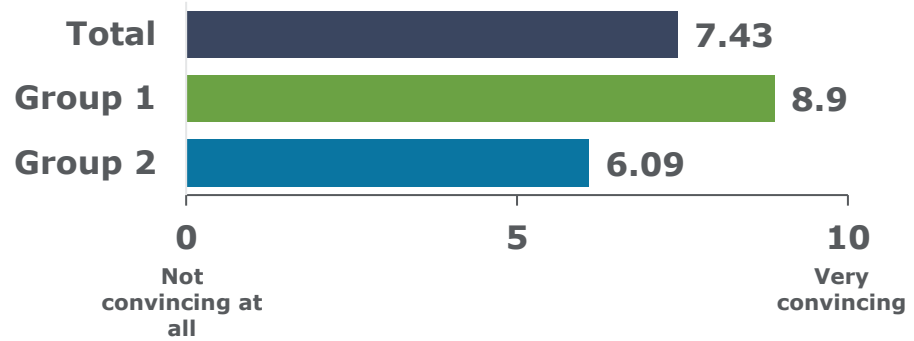
	Participants			Gender		Age		Income		Party Registration		
	All	Group 1/ Parents	Group 2/ Non-parents	Men	Women	<55	55+	<\$100k	\$100k+	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
Mean Scores	7.67	8.90	6.55	7.60	7.73	8.42	6.67	8.00	7.75	6.14	8.22	8.80



TEACHER RETENTION

"THE COMPARISON IS GREAT" - FEMALE, GROUP 1

Message: Nearly 90% of students in Douglas County schools graduate – over 6 points higher than the statewide average and on par with neighboring districts Littleton and Cherry Creek. Yet, DCSD collects \$2,000 less per student in mill levy override dollars each year than both of those school districts. As a result, on average, teachers in Douglas County make anywhere from \$15,000 to \$19,000 less than those teachers. If passed by voters, this mill levy override will ensure we can recruit and retain the best teachers.



Reaction from participants:

- "Specifics on differences in school districts is convincing." Male, Group 2*
- "Teachers should make more money." Male, Group 1*
- "Quality teachers are imperative for our students to get the education they deserve." Female, Group 2*
- "Again...teachers not general funds should get the increase." Male, Group 2*

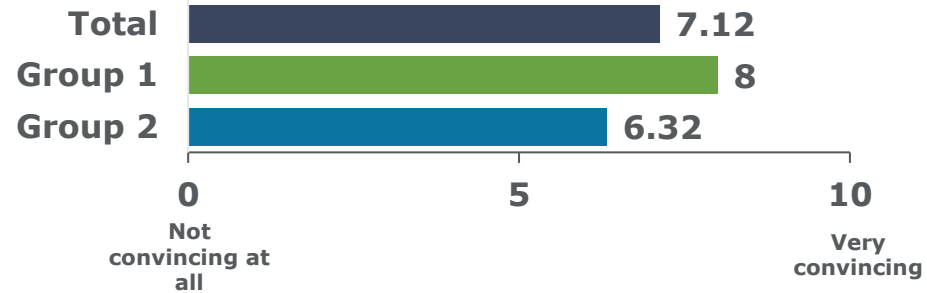
	Participants			Gender		Age		Income		Party Registration		
	All	Group 1/ Parents	Group 2/ Non-parents	Men	Women	<55	55+	<\$100k	\$100k+	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
Mean Scores	7.43	8.90	6.09	8.00	6.91	8.08	6.65	6.25	7.94	5.14	8.11	9.40



WHAT WILL IT COST ME? DETAILS COUNT

“MORE CONVINCING WITH ACTUAL DOLLARS.” – MALE GROUP 2

Message: Passing a mill levy override and bond measure is an investment in top teaching talent and our school buildings. This requires buy-in and support from taxpayers and amounts to an extra dollar per week for every \$100,000 of home value. That comes out to \$250 per year for someone with a \$500,000 home.



Reaction from participants:

"Even though I do not have children in the schools- education taught by qualified teachers is worth the investment." Male, Group 2

"More convincing with actual dollars." Male, Group 2

"Payment ratio applicability is helpful. Annual figures are more relatable than weekly." Female, Group 1

"Gives examples of what it's going to cost me." Female, Group 1

	Participants			Gender		Age		Income		Party Registration		
	All	Group 1/ Parents	Group 2/ Non- parents	Men	Women	<55	55+	<\$100k	\$100k+	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
Mean Scores	7.12	8.00	6.32	7.30	6.95	7.71	6.33	7.75	7.16	5.57	8.06	7.60



NEGATIVE MESSAGES: *OVERALL SCORES*

7.05

DISTRICT HAS ENOUGH MONEY: The district should have enough money already, especially with property values increasing and a tax increase for schools that passed just five years ago that was supposed to help adequately pay teachers and take care of school buildings.

6.19

CUT ADMINISTRATION: The school district would have plenty of money if it cut more from administration.

6.05

NOW'S NOT THE TIME FOR NEW TAXES: We should not raise taxes during a time of high inflation and skyrocketing cost of living on everything from groceries to gasoline.

4.38

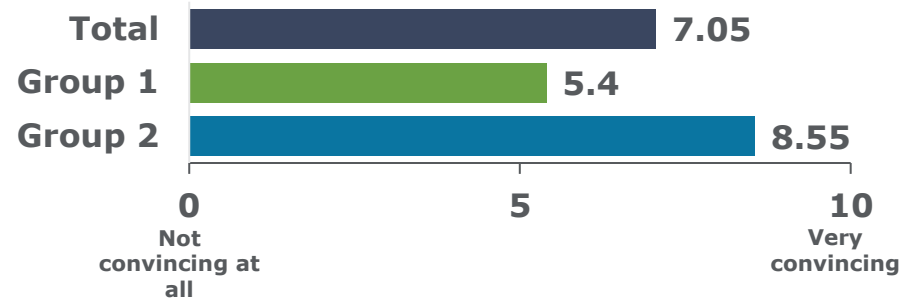
MAKE DEVELOPERS PAY: Much of the need for new schools to alleviate crowding is due to growth not paying its way – we need to make developers and new homeowners pay more, not existing residents.



DISTRICT HAS ENOUGH MONEY

"WHERE DID ALL THE MONEY GO?" – MALE, GROUP 1

Message: The district should have enough money already, especially with property values increasing and a tax increase for schools that passed just five years ago that was supposed to help adequately pay teachers and take care of school buildings.



Reaction from participants:

- "With the number of homes being built and value of homes going up - should have enough to pay teachers more." Female, Group 2*
- "Where is all the money?" Female, Group 2*
- "Yes, why is that not enough?" Male, group 1*
- "Taxes have increased, where is the money?" Male, Group 2*

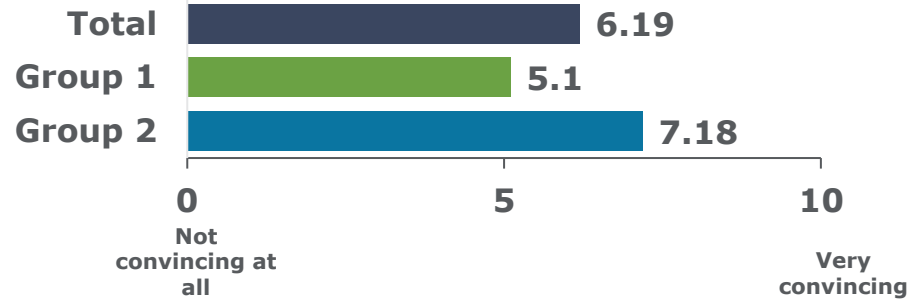
	Participants			Gender		Age		Income		Party Registration		
	All	Group 1/ Parents	Group 2/ Non-parents	Men	Women	<55	55+	<\$100k	\$100k+	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
Mean Scores	7.05	5.40	8.55	7.40	6.73	6.17	8.22	8.25	6.56	9.00	5.44	7.20



CUT ADMINISTRATION

“ADMINISTRATORS ARE OVERPAID.” – FEMALE, GROUP 2

Message: The school district would have plenty of money if it cut more from administration.



Reaction from participants:

- "Administration is getting money and teachers do not." Male, Group 2*
- "Administrative costs need to be cut and they need to be audited and forced to a budget." Female, Group 2*
- "It is convincing but cutting admin salaries is not enough." Male, Group 1*
- "DCSD is in the news a lot and people typically don't like the administration." Female, Group 1*

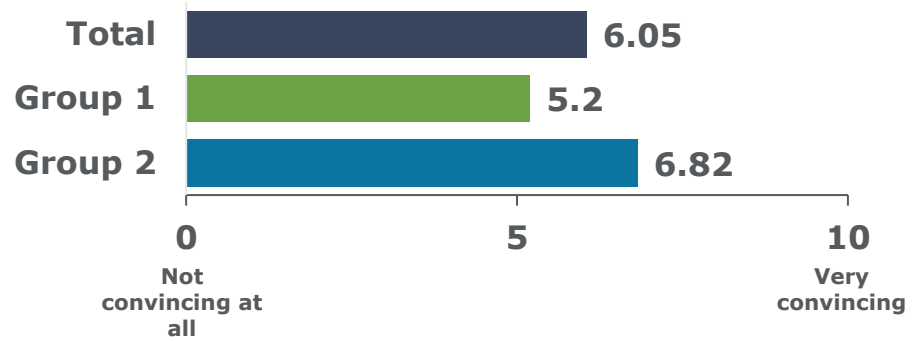
	Participants			Gender		Age		Income		Party Registration		
	All	Group 1/ Parents	Group 2/ Non-parents	Men	Women	<55	55+	<\$100k	\$100k+	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
Mean Scores	6.19	5.10	7.18	5.40	6.91	5.92	6.65	7.25	6.00	7.71	5.89	4.60



NOW'S NOT THE TIME FOR NEW TAXES

"TAXPAYERS ARE ALREADY PAYING TOO MUCH."

Message: We should not raise taxes during a time of high inflation and skyrocketing cost of living on everything from groceries to gasoline.



Reaction from participants:

"There are a lot of low-income families that are having a hard enough time." Female, Group 2

"Every household is seeing impacts on inflation." Female, Group 2

"Stuff is more expensive." Male, Group 2

"It's a very valid point. The benefit will have to clearly outweigh this for people who are on the fence, especially those with fixed incomes." Female, Group 1

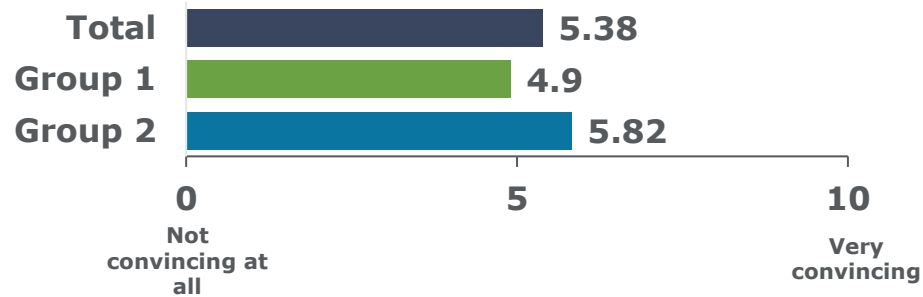
	Participants			Gender		Age		Income		Party Registration		
	All	Group 1/ Parents	Group 2/ Non-parents	Men	Women	<55	55+	<\$100k	\$100k+	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
Mean Scores	6.05	5.20	6.82	5.30	6.73	5.83	6.33	5.75	5.88	6.57	5.67	6.00



MAKE DEVELOPERS PAY

"NEW DEVELOPMENTS SHOULD PAY THEIR WAY." MALE, GROUP 2

Message: Much of the need for new schools to alleviate crowding is due to growth not paying its way – we need to make developers and new homeowners pay more, not existing residents.



Reaction from participants:

- "I agree with this statement, share the burden is a common theme. Hold developers accountable for these issues." Female, Group 1*
- "Agree, not homeowners only developers, they are more able to pay." Female, Group 1*
- "Everyone should pay their way." Male, Group 1*
- "This would be fair to raise them [taxes] from the new residents." Female, Group 2*

	Participants			Gender		Age		Salary		Party Registration		
	All	Group 1/ Parents	Group 2/ Non-parents	Men	Women	<55	55+	<\$100k	\$100k+	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
Mean Scores	5.38	4.90	5.82	5.50	5.27	5.08	5.78	5.25	5.44	6.43	4.56	5.40





VOTERS WHO DON'T HAVE KIDS IN SCHOOLS NEED A REASON TO SUPPORT DCSD FUNDING MEASURES

Those who don't have children in DCSD need concrete reasons why they should support additional funding for schools.

- Voters oppose the measures on secret ballot vs. statutory ballot because they are wordy and unclear. The “ask” needs to be simplified.
- These voters need a good reason to support additional district funding. Good reasons are ones that communicate real facts and “humanize” the rationale behind the ask for more funding.
 - ✓ It's an investment in the community.
 - ✓ It's about building the future.
 - ✓ It's about increasing property values.
- Having specific comparisons of why this funding is needed also provides good rationale to this group of voters.
 - ✓ It's about reaching parity with Littleton and Cherry Creek.
 - ✓ We will lose good teachers to other districts if we can't offer competitive teacher salaries.





TOP MESSAGE RESONATES IN BOTH GROUPS: *TEACHER PAY*

Top Scoring Message:

“Douglas County School District is at risk of losing some of its best teachers to neighboring school districts because we cannot pay them as well as many other districts. DCSD’s starting teacher pay is currently \$43,680.”

- This message generated the highest overall score from both focus groups. However, voters who do not have children in district schools were much less impressed than those who have kids in schools.
 - ✓ Group 1 rated this a 9.0 (out of possible 10)
 - ✓ Group 2 rated this a 6.9.

- This message is successful because it provides voters with a human element with the mention of the current starting teacher's salary. Further, it is specific and plays to voters’ concerns about “Keeping up with the Jones.”

- Selected comments about this message:
 - ✓ *“It tugs at my heart strings.” Female, Group 2*
 - ✓ *“It’s specific and factual.” Male, Group 2*
 - ✓ *“The goal should be to retain great teachers. If the salary needs a boost then we should figure out how to raise the base pay. I like the inclusion of the teacher pay.” Female, Group 2*
 - ✓ *“Teachers are an investment in our kids’ future.” Male, Group 1*
 - ✓ *“We should at least be equal to other districts.” Male, Group 1*
 - ✓ *“To everyone in DCSD this should stand out.” Female, Group 1*





5B NEEDS TO BE HUMANIZED

**5A is about
the teachers;
5B needs to
be about the
kids and the
classroom**

- People naturally understand why a district is pursuing a teacher pay raise but aren't as easily able to conceptualize why capital improvements are needed.
- Framing capital improvements in terms of necessity and broad community benefit helps "humanize" 5B.
 - ✓ Increases safety and security
 - ✓ Better school buildings benefit the community as a whole, not just the students.





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