



# **Ripon Area School District**

**REFERENDUM SURVEY REPORT  
June 2020**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ripon Area School District has engaged with the school community about its expiring 2014 referendum for curriculum materials, technology (including student devices), maintenance, and vehicles. That referendum, which will expire in 2021, allowed the District to make considerable progress in developing educational initiatives to better prepare students for careers, college, and life after high school. It also set the stage for the District to transform itself virtually overnight in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The District worked to provide information about the current financial situation and the critical need to replace the expiring referendum, despite efforts over the past six years to reduce operational expenses, ask staff to contribute more for healthcare, and use long-range planning to protect District assets. To that end, this survey was created to seek input on long-term, forward-looking options for the District.

This report provides a summary of responses to the survey, along with analysis from the Donovan Group team.

## PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

The survey was administered using the Donovan Group's survey engine. Efforts were made to ensure that all eligible respondents had the opportunity to take the survey, but that no respondents took it multiple times. In accordance with best practices in online research and to protect the security of the survey, internet protocol (IP) addresses were logged and each response was time-stamped.

To date, there is no reason to believe that anyone has taken the survey more than once or that anyone from outside the District has taken the survey.

To encourage residents to take the survey, the school district issued a news release, shared the survey via social media, and distributed a postcard to all District residents. The survey was open from June 12 to June 26, 2020.

Finally, it is worth noting that, by design, this data is not based on a scientific sample. Therefore, it should be treated as qualitative data that is similar to data from a large number of focus groups. Because we used a convenience sample, it would be methodologically inappropriate to carry out a regression analysis or attempt to calculate error. Our response pool to date is a solid one that provides sound data to the board.

## SURVEY RESULTS

A total of 481 community members completed the survey. A Spanish version of the survey was offered, but no results were recorded on it. To complete the survey, respondents must have clicked "submit" at the end of the survey and answered all of the required questions.

Below are the questions and their corresponding responses. The first set of data (in black) reflect the responses of all completed surveys. The second set of data (in blue) indicate responses from a comparison group of District residents who are not current parents of preschool or school-aged students, employees, or students. The comparison group includes parents of former District students.

We typically find the comparison group to be a more accurate representation of the general population. There were 107 completed results in the comparison group. This is a decent comparison group, representing about 22% of the total respondents. The responses of this comparison group differed from the overall response pool for some questions, as noted in the analysis of those questions.

Below the questions and results is some brief analysis from the Donovan Group team.

**To begin, we would like to understand your general thoughts about the District.**

The Ripon Area School District wants to be the “District of choice” when:

- Parents are choosing where to send their children to school
- A new family moves to the area
- A great teacher is looking for a job
- A business is looking to relocate or expand

**As you consider our District, how important are the following factors?**

**a) Developing student employability skills**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 82.92% | 80.53% |
| Somewhat Important  | 16.04% | 19.47% |
| Not Important       | 0.42%  | 0.00%  |
| Not sure/No opinion | 0.63%  | 0.00%  |

**b) Helping students plan for life after high school**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 87.29% | 88.50% |
| Somewhat Important  | 11.25% | 8.85%  |
| Not Important       | 1.46%  | 2.65%  |
| Not sure/No opinion | 0.00%  | 0.00%  |

**c) Maintaining competitive high school athletics**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 18.16% | 9.73%  |
| Somewhat Important  | 50.52% | 52.21% |
| Not Important       | 29.02% | 35.40% |
| Not sure/No opinion | 2.30%  | 2.65%  |

**d) Maintaining small class sizes**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 52.61% | 44.25% |
| Somewhat Important  | 40.92% | 43.36% |
| Not Important       | 5.43%  | 10.62% |
| Not sure/No opinion | 1.04%  | 1.77%  |

**e) Offering a variety of school activities (forensics, theater, FFA, etc.)**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 58.66% | 53.57% |
| Somewhat Important  | 35.49% | 39.29% |
| Not Important       | 5.43%  | 7.14%  |
| Not sure/No opinion | 0.42%  | 0.00%  |

**f) Offering parent and community education**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 27.08% | 29.20% |
| Somewhat Important  | 48.13% | 45.13% |
| Not Important       | 21.46% | 22.12% |
| Not sure/No opinion | 3.33%  | 3.54%  |

**g) Partnering with local businesses and industry**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 45.09% | 49.11% |
| Somewhat Important  | 45.51% | 40.18% |
| Not Important       | 8.14%  | 9.82%  |
| Not sure/No opinion | 1.25%  | 0.89%  |

**h) Partnering with technical and four-year colleges**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 67.78% | 70.80% |
| Somewhat Important  | 26.78% | 21.24% |
| Not Important       | 4.60%  | 7.96%  |
| Not sure/No opinion | 0.84%  | 0.00%  |

**i) Supporting gifted and talented students**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 57.11% | 60.18% |
| Somewhat Important  | 35.36% | 30.97% |
| Not Important       | 6.49%  | 7.96%  |
| Not sure/No opinion | 1.05%  | 0.88%  |

**j) Supporting non-English speaking students**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 52.72% | 55.36% |
| Somewhat Important  | 31.17% | 24.11% |
| Not Important       | 12.34% | 18.75% |
| Not sure/No opinion | 3.77%  | 1.79%  |

**k) Supporting students at-risk of not graduating**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 67.85% | 67.26% |
| Somewhat Important  | 26.72% | 24.78% |
| Not Important       | 3.97%  | 7.08%  |
| Not sure/No opinion | 1.46%  | 0.88%  |

**l) Supporting for students with disabilities**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 77.08% | 73.45% |
| Somewhat Important  | 20.42% | 23.01% |
| Not Important       | 1.25%  | 2.65%  |
| Not sure/No opinion | 1.25%  | 0.88%  |

**m) Providing access to the latest technology**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 57.20% | 53.10% |
| Somewhat Important  | 36.12% | 38.05% |
| Not Important       | 6.47%  | 8.85%  |
| Not sure/No opinion | 0.21%  | 0.00%  |

### n) Scoring high on state and national tests

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Important      | 26.67% | 29.20% |
| Somewhat Important  | 54.58% | 58.41% |
| Not Important       | 17.29% | 10.62% |
| Not sure/No opinion | 1.46%  | 1.77%  |

**Analysis:** For both the all-respondent group and the comparison group, “Developing student employability skills” and “Helping students plan for life after high school” received a high response rate. “Supporting for students with disabilities” and “Partnering with technical and four-year colleges” were the next-highest response areas.

### 1) How familiar are you with the school district's financial situation?

|                                      |        |        |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| I am very well informed.             | 11.85% | 18.58% |
| I have some familiarity.             | 54.05% | 62.83% |
| I have little or no knowledge of it. | 34.10% | 18.58% |

### 2) Are you likely to vote in a school referendum election?

|     |        |        |
|-----|--------|--------|
| Yes | 85.45% | 93.81% |
| No  | 14.55% | 6.19%  |

**Analysis:** We find that it is common that the community members most likely to take the time to complete a survey are also likely to vote in a school referendum election.

The percentage of respondents indicating they are well informed or familiar with the district's financial situation (65.9%) is a little lower than we would like to see. This suggests an opportunity to communicate more about the needs in the coming months.

### 3) How likely are you to continue to support an operational referendum for technology (including student devices), curriculum materials, and facilities maintenance if it results in no tax increase and simply replaces the expiring referendum?

|                                    |        |        |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| I would definitely support it      | 55.00% | 50.44% |
| I would probably support it        | 25.00% | 19.47% |
| I'm not sure if I would support it | 10.00% | 8.85%  |
| I would probably not support it    | 3.75%  | 7.96%  |
| I would definitely not support it  | 6.25%  | 13.27% |

**Analysis:** Support for technology, curriculum materials, and facilities maintenance is relatively high, with 80% who would definitely or probably support the referendum in the whole group and about 70% in the comparison group.

**4) How likely are you to support an operational referendum if it results in an estimated tax increase of \$15.50 per year for 6 years on each \$100,000 of assessed property value to replace the endowment funds for Ingalls Field, as described above?**

|                                    |        |        |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| I would definitely support it      | 21.92% | 21.43% |
| I would probably support it        | 30.06% | 16.96% |
| I'm not sure if I would support it | 20.25% | 25.89% |
| I would probably not support it    | 13.99% | 14.29% |
| I would definitely not support it  | 13.78% | 21.43% |

*Analysis: A proposed referendum that increases taxes toward an endowment fund for Ingalls Field sees support drop to just 51.98% of all respondents and 38.39% in the comparison group. This represents a considerable decline from the previous question.*

**5) Please use the space below to provide any additional information to the School Board as it considers solutions to address the District's most urgent needs.**

*Two main themes emerged in the comments left by survey takers. Below are a selection of responses:*

***Prefer the referendum is focused more on education and less on athletics/Ingalls Field:***

- The top priority needs to be the education of all children in the school district, best achieved through maintaining small classes, providing students with appropriate technology, ensuring access for all, and giving teachers the tools they need to teach our students.
- There are more important needs in the district than Ingalls Field. I would support a referendum that would impact ALL students and not just athletes.
- Equal money should be spent on sports, music, art and scholastic programs - it seems more emphasis is placed on money for improving Ingalls Field.

***Desire to see Ripon College contribute to Ingalls Field expenses:***

- I would like to see how much Ripon College is putting forward for Ingalls Field.
- Since Ingalls Field is used both by RASD and Ripon College, what is the college contributing to the future of turf replacement?
- I know Ripon College is having financial challenges as well, what is their current portion of the replacement funding and if they are not able to pay their portion in the future, what does that look like?

*Summary: Generally, the comments left for this question focus on asking the district to use funds for educational purposes rather than athletics. Many suggested Ripon College contribute to the expenses of Ingalls Field. The comments largely reflected the drop in support for a proposed referendum between questions 3 and 4.*

## 6) What is your age?

|             |        |        |
|-------------|--------|--------|
| 18 or under | 0.63%  | 0.00%  |
| 19-25       | 1.04%  | 0.90%  |
| 26-34       | 14.41% | 7.21%  |
| 35-44       | 35.28% | 7.21%  |
| 45-54       | 27.35% | 6.31%  |
| 55-64       | 10.23% | 31.53% |
| 65 or over  | 11.06% | 46.85% |

## 7) Where do you reside?

|                                 |        |        |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|
| City of Ripon                   | 67.85% | 72.97% |
| Town of Metomen                 | 2.71%  | 0.00%  |
| Town of Ripon                   | 16.28% | 18.02% |
| Town of Rosendale               | 2.30%  | 2.70%  |
| Town of Springvale              | 0.21%  | 0.90%  |
| Village of Fairwater            | 0.21%  | 0.00%  |
| Town of Berlin                  | 0.63%  | 0.90%  |
| Town of Brooklyn                | 1.88%  | 2.70%  |
| Town of Green Lake              | 0.63%  | 0.00%  |
| Town of Nepeuskun               | 2.51%  | 0.90%  |
| Town of Utica                   | 2.51%  | 0.90%  |
| I do not live in the Ripon Area | 1.46%  | 0.00%  |
| School District                 | 0.84%  | 0.00%  |
| Other                           |        |        |

## 8) How long have you lived in the school district?

|                               |        |        |
|-------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Fewer than 2 years            | 3.54%  | 1.77%  |
| Between 2 and 5 years         | 9.79%  | 2.65%  |
| Between 5 and 10 years        | 11.67% | 5.31%  |
| Between 10 and 20 years       | 26.46% | 14.16% |
| Between 20 and 30 years       | 19.79% | 19.47% |
| More than 30 years            | 25.42% | 56.64% |
| I do not live in the District | 3.33%  | 0.00%  |

## 9) Please check all of the following that apply to you.

|  |        |       |
|--|--------|-------|
| I have school-aged children (as of fall 2019).   | 63.96% | 0.00% |
| I have preschool-aged children (as of fall 2019).  | 12.29% | 0.00% |
| I have children who currently attend school in the Ripon Area School District.                           | 61.46% | 0.00% |
| I have school-aged children who are open-enrolled into the Ripon Area School District (as of fall 2019). | 9.38%  | 0.00% |
| I have school-aged children who are open-enrolled into another school district (as of fall 2019).        | 0.83%  | 0.00% |

|  |        |        |
|--|--------|--------|
| I have grandchildren who currently attend or have attended a school in the Ripon Area School District.   | 8.75%  | 31.78% |
| I have children who have graduated from or previously attended school in the Ripon Area School District. | 33.33% | 61.68% |
| I have attended school in the Ripon Area School District.  | 32.71% | 31.78% |
| I am a community member who has never had children attend school in the Ripon Area School District.      | 6.67%  | 25.23% |
| I am an employee of the Ripon Area School District.  | 8.96%  | 0.00%  |
| I am currently a student at a school in the Ripon Area School District (as of fall 2019).                | 0.42%  | 0.00%  |
| Other:   | 1.88%  | 8.41%  |

**10) If you have school-aged children as of fall 2019, which schools do your children attend? (Select all that apply. If you do not have school-aged children, you may skip this question.)**

|                                    |        |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| Barlow Park Elementary School      | 15.00% |
| Journey Charter School             | 11.67% |
| Murray Park Elementary School      | 8.75%  |
| Quest Elementary School            | 11.25% |
| Ripon Middle School                | 22.29% |
| Catalyst Charter School            | 5.83%  |
| Ripon High School                  | 35.63% |
| Crossroads                         | 0.42%  |
| Odyssey Academy                    | 1.88%  |
| Public school outside the District | 0.63%  |
| Private school                     | 0.42%  |
| I do not have school-aged children | 0.21%  |
| My children are homeschooled       | 0.42%  |
| Other                              | 0.63%  |



**11) On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely would you be to recommend the Ripon Area School District to a friend, colleague, or family member? (A score of zero indicates you would not recommend the District, while a score of 10 indicates you would be extremely likely to recommend the District.)**

|           |        |        |
|-----------|--------|--------|
| <b>0</b>  | 1.46%  | 0.94%  |
| <b>1</b>  | 0.21%  | 0.00%  |
| <b>2</b>  | 1.67%  | 3.77%  |
| <b>3</b>  | 1.67%  | 1.89%  |
| <b>4</b>  | 2.92%  | 3.77%  |
| <b>5</b>  | 4.18%  | 5.66%  |
| <b>6</b>  | 5.64%  | 5.66%  |
| <b>7</b>  | 9.39%  | 7.55%  |
| <b>8</b>  | 20.88% | 21.70% |
| <b>9</b>  | 21.29% | 16.04% |
| <b>10</b> | 30.69% | 33.02% |

*Analysis: Most respondents give the district a high rating. With 10 representing extreme likelihood of recommending the district to another individual, more than 70% of respondents answered with an “8”, “9” or “10”.*

**12) How would you describe the Ripon Area School District to someone who is not familiar with it?**

*Many respondents described the district favorably, while others felt there are areas where the district could improve. Below are a selection of responses:*

***Favorable comments***

- A school district that is diverse in options. Not perfect, but is filled with teachers, staff and a community that care about and try to meet the needs of each individual student. Does not shy away from change, communicates with parents, and continues to impress me on a regular basis.
- It has good facilities, fairly small classes, and seems to be well run. It tries to prioritize the interests of the students and has a nice range of programs available, both in and beyond classes.
- Our district offers a variety of courses, extra-curricular activities, and schools to meet the needs of all students. The teachers and administration team continually pursue methods that will advance learning. I feel confident that our students are prepared for the workforce or post-education opportunities upon graduating.

***Felt the district could improve***

- It is basically a good school district and a person doesn't have to question sending their child to its schools. However, I do wish that as much attention would be given to academics as to sports. For

instance, continual publicity is given to the sports department but only sporadically or occasionally to the academic departments.

- Relationships between teachers and school administration could be improved.
- The school needs to be focused more on one-on-one teaching, especially for students who need additional assistance.

**Summary:** *There were many positive responses recognizing areas where RASD excels. As is typical with a survey of this kind, some respondents provided feedback on areas in which the district could improve.*

**13) Where do you get information about the Ripon Area School District? (Select all that apply.)**

|   |        |        |
|---|--------|--------|
| Parent organizations                    | 13.33% | 4.67%  |
| Friends or neighbors                    | 41.25% | 41.12% |
| My children and their friends           | 40.83% | 15.89% |
| District mailings                       | 66.04% | 73.83% |
| District website                        | 58.33% | 44.86% |
| School newsletters (email or hard copy) | 65.83% | 42.99% |
| Tiger Update (email or hard copy)       | 42.50% | 15.89% |
| School Board meetings                   | 14.79% | 15.89% |
| Teachers and staff                      | 36.88% | 25.23% |
| Ripon Commonwealth Press                | 62.29% | 88.79% |
| Fond du Lac Reporter                    | 1.88%  | 5.61%  |
| Local blogs                             | 3.13%  | 7.48%  |
| Local television                        | 2.71%  | 7.48%  |
| Local radio stations                    | 4.17%  | 8.41%  |
| Facebook                                | 49.58% | 36.45% |
| Twitter                                 | 2.50%  | 4.67%  |
| Other                                   | 2.08%  | 4.67%  |

**Analysis:** *For older adults and those not connected to the district through children who are current students, the Ripon Commonwealth Press is a popular source for respondents to gain information about the district. District and school mailings, websites, and newsletters also appear to be important informational resources. Facebook is the most highly cited social media platform for district-related information.*

**14) How interested are you in receiving information about the Ripon Area School District?**

|                     |        |        |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Very Interested     | 55.93% | 42.86% |
| Somewhat interested | 35.59% | 43.81% |
| Not interested      | 8.47%  | 13.33% |

**15) How would you like to receive information regarding the Ripon Area School District?  
(Please select all that apply)**

|                              |        |        |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Email                        | 66.67% | 28.97% |
| District website             | 44.17% | 43.93% |
| Attend public forums         | 7.92%  | 9.35%  |
| School Board meetings        | 8.75%  | 8.41%  |
| Ripon Commonwealth Press     | 44.38% | 77.57% |
| Facebook                     | 42.29% | 29.91% |
| Twitter                      | 1.88%  | 3.74%  |
| District newsletter/mailings | 34.58% | 46.73% |
| Other                        | 1.25%  | 1.87%  |

**Analysis:** *As in the question about where community members receive information, the Ripon Commonwealth Press is one of the most popular sources for where respondents wish to continue to receive this information. Email, the district website, newsletters, and Facebook are other popular options.*

**16) I am satisfied with the communications that come from the Ripon Area School District?**

|                   |        |        |
|-------------------|--------|--------|
| Strongly Agree    | 32.42% | 24.30% |
| Agree             | 60.00% | 67.29% |
| Disagree          | 6.74%  | 8.41%  |
| Strongly disagree | 0.84%  | 0.00%  |

**Analysis:** *More than 92% of respondents indicated they are pleased with the communications coming from the district, which is much higher than we typically see. This suggests the district is doing a good job communicating with its stakeholders and should continue these efforts as it engages the community around the need for a replacement referendum.*

**17) Please use the space below to provide comments and suggestions to improve District communications.**

*Below is a sampling of responses:*

- A regular email bulletin would be nice, doesn't need to be fancy, just provide timely updates on what's going on now, and forthcoming issues, both more current families and community members who don't have children in the District.
- I like the mailings that come from the school board and district. Certain communications would benefit from more attention to important links and details. I feel I have to dig through a lot of filler to find key information.
- I think the majority of parents in the school district currently have social media, and some form of social media is their main form of communication. I think more information on the Facebook website, and the event calendar that could be done on Facebook would be beneficial.

**Summary:** *Overall, respondents seem pleased with the district and its communications efforts.*