



**I BELIEVE**  
**IN 27J SCHOOLS**

**VOTE YES**  
**ON 5A & 5B**  
**FOR 27J KIDS**



**2022 National School Public Relations Association  
Communication Awards  
GOLD MEDALLION ENTRY - BOND/FINANCE CAMPAIGN**

**27J Schools - Brighton, Colorado**  
**PreK-12 District | 20,000 Students**  
**Communications Department (3 Team Members)**  
**Entry Title: I Believe in 27J Schools**

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## ABOUT 27J SCHOOLS

Located just northeast of Denver, Colo., 27J Schools includes communities in Brighton, Thornton and Commerce City. The district's central hub is largely blue collar and very proud of its history. They also have a long history of being staunch anti-tax communities and 27J Schools has had very limited success in passing tax initiatives.

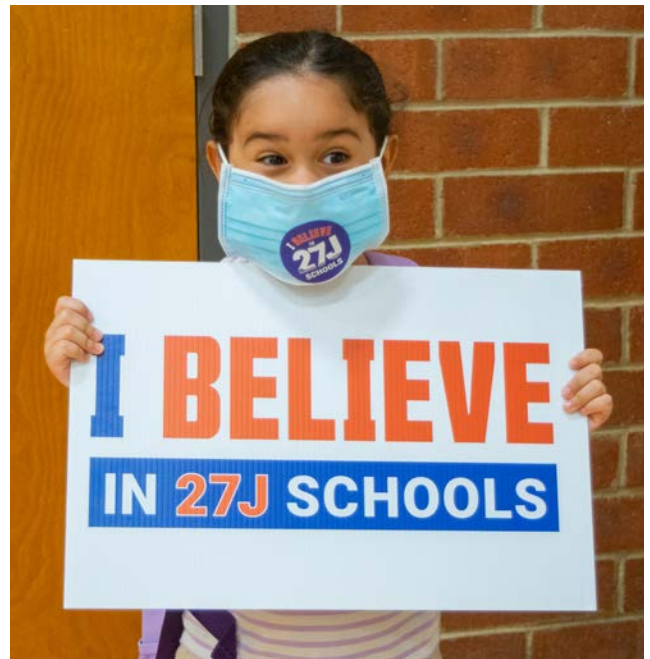
The district is home to more than 20,000 students in 29 traditional and charter schools serving grades preschool through 12th grade with about 2,000 employees.

The student body is richly diverse with a population that is 44.4 percent white, 2.2 percent Black, 3.1 percent Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 46.6 percent Hispanic/Latino, 0.3 percent Alaska Native, and 0.2 percent Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. The district's minority enrollment (52 percent) is greater than the Colorado public school average of 47 percent (majority Hispanic). Additionally, 26.9 percent of students are economically disadvantaged and 11.1 percent are English Language Learners.

For the last four consecutive years, 27J Schools increased its graduation rate during which time the district boasted the highest graduation rate (88.2 percent) in Adams County. This is particularly remarkable given the district's rapid growth which impacts academic achievement and school buildings.

A citizens advocacy group, named "I am 27J," studied the district's enrollment data, facility capacities and trends in new housing starts which indicated schools were overcrowded and projected to continue to be so. The district was growing by about 1,000 students each year and projected to reach 50,000 in the next 15-20 years.

As a result, I am 27J recommended the district present the community with a bond proposal at its next election in November 2021. The Board of Education agreed.



The district surveyed the community and hosted focus groups around the district. The research was used to craft two campaign plans – one marketing campaign plan for the district and an election campaign for the citizens I am 27J group, which was the Vote YES campaign. These plans were strategically synchronistic as they seamlessly worked together. All three of the district's communications department staff volunteered for the I am 27J campaign in addition to working on the district marketing campaign. Using research collected regarding the community and the district, campaign goals, timelines, strategies, tactics and evaluation success measures were developed. Implementation of the plans led the district to a victory at the polls and a better understanding of the community.

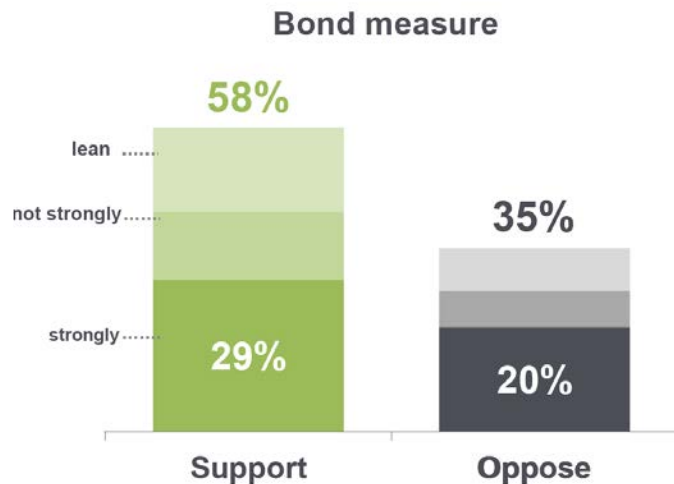
About 20 years ago, the district served 5,000 students. Today, the district has more than 20,000 students and is projected to reach 50,000 in the next 15-20 years. District data showed that the size and number of existing schools would not accommodate the projected growth in enrollment even for the near future.

## RESEARCH

To accommodate the next five years of [projected growth](#), the district needed to build at least six new schools and provide renovations and additions to all other schools including charter schools. New facilities were also needed for specific academic programs. Science, technology, engineering and math programs along with career and technical education (STEM/CTE) programs were the most popular; however, not all students had access to all courses because different ones were offered at different schools. To make all STEM/CTE programs accessible to all students, a [bond plan](#) included building a dedicated STEM/CTE center at each comprehensive high school giving all students the chance to learn in state-of-the-art facilities with current industry tools and technology while eliminating the need for students to drive to other schools to get the courses they wanted.

In addition to the district's data on facilities and enrollment growth, the district needed to understand the values and priorities of its community. The district's 3-member communications team spearheaded a comprehensive community-wide poll and a series of focus groups around the district.

Initial polling of the community showed 27J Schools had a mixed report card from residents about their satisfaction with the district. The results showed 26% satisfied, 34% dissatisfied, and [40% weren't sure about education quality in the district](#). However, among parents, a majority shared positive reviews of education quality (55% satisfied, 35% dissatisfied). Furthermore, most residents assumed the district needed more financial resources (64% believed 27J needed additional funding, while 24% believed it had enough). But, those views didn't necessarily translate into support for hypothetical funding solutions—this poll showed the devil was in the details.



*Initial community polling showed a potential but difficult path to passing a bond measure*

While most of the community leaned toward supporting a bond measure (58%), that support was far from assured. The data suggested a very difficult pathway to passage as roughly 45% of those with vote history in similar off-year elections would support a bond measure. Voters most likely to support funds for capital construction were young adults ages 18-35, Democrats, parents of current school-aged children particularly those new to the district, and people of color.

## RESEARCH (CONTINUED)

STEM/CTE was popular with 81 percent of respondents in support of the program which represented the strongest substantive component of a potential bond measure. The [next tier of components focused on capital improvements](#) such as safety updates (75% support) and addressing overcrowding with new buildings (75% approve). There was less support for charter schools (58%).

## FOCUS GROUP DATA ANALYSIS

Focus groups further clarified the community's values and priorities.

- Most people without children in schools were largely unaware of what was happening in their schools.
- Non-parents said they did not know the quality of education provided by their schools or how successful students were after leaving our schools.
- In the absence of a relationship with or information about a school, people were more likely to adopt a negative perspective of schools which prompted them to voice opinions that the schools and district were ineffective, wasteful and not to be trusted.
- When asked why they adopted such a negative view without evidence to support those views, people blamed the schools and district for not doing whatever it took to get information to the community and have routine conversations.



## PLANNING

Based on all of the data collected and research, the communications team developed a marketing campaign including goals, strategies and tactics that were measured by specific success metrics throughout the campaign. At the same time, the citizens group, I am 27J, crafted an election campaign to advocate the passage of the bond measure. The two plans were strategically intended to work together. Given the continued COVID restrictions on meeting face-to-face, the team decided to make **the campaigns focused very heavily on digital communication** and using digital success metrics for evaluation purposes.

## GOALS

- Increase community awareness of its neighborhood schools.
- Increase engagement between community members and the schools.
- Motivate people to complete and return their ballots in support of the bond measure.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### STRATEGY

Using community research and a timeline to reach the ultimate goal of passing a bond issue in November 2021, the campaign (the district's marketing campaign and an election campaign from the citizens group) used a phased approach to meet their goals. The groups concentrated on reaching a high number of likely "Yes" voters with very little engagement of likely "No" voters. Due to the short timeline, tactics most likely to have a quick impact were selected.

#### PHASE I (July - August)

- Board approves referendum
- Launch campaign with the theme of "I BELIEVE in 27J Schools." The campaign is student-centered and builds community pride around its schools
- Connect faces and the stories of successful students with parents and non-parents using giant banners on each school.
- Establish the needs case

#### PHASE II (August - September)

##### Message framework used in plan tactics:

- Believe in your schools
- Relieve overcrowding in your schools
- Avoid split-schedules and year-round school schedules
- STEM/CTE programs prepare students to go into the workforce immediately with good paying jobs

##### Tactics

- Boldly illustrate the quality of the schools' product with a face and name of a school graduate featured on giant, full color, professionally installed banners at every school.
- Use stories to reach non-parents and humanize the issues, promote stories of the schools' featured "Great Grads," in his/her own voice to speak to



*Great Grad banners put a face on student success and pride in schools*

## STRATEGY (CONTINUED)

the quality of education and induce pride. Place featured stories on the district website and social media; promote Great Grads by the district and the citizens' group.

- Send two campaign-themed postcard mailings to likely YES voters with key messages

### PHASE III (September - October)

#### Message framework used in plan tactics:

- What your neighborhood school buildings need due to growth
- What's in it for you
- Where the funding comes from
- Return on investment
- New STEM/CTE facilities accommodate more students, give them hands-on skills that are in demand
- Students can immediately get good paying jobs upon graduation with STEM/CTE programs
- Relieve overcrowding
- Avoid split schedules and year-round school schedules

#### Tactics:

- Engage the community face-to-face
- Community festivals
- Back to school nights
- Civic organizations
- Parent groups
- SWAG items with campaign theme and logo, items people can wear, display and use. Give-away items to facilitate engagement with people out in public.
- Website - [IBELIEVEin27J.com](http://IBELIEVEin27J.com)
  - Special focus on aspirational goals aligned with research on community values, promoting positive involvement, and showcasing the needs case. Feature sections:
    - Proposal bond package
    - [FAQs](#)



*Community "Vote Yes" testimonial videos earned high social media reach.*

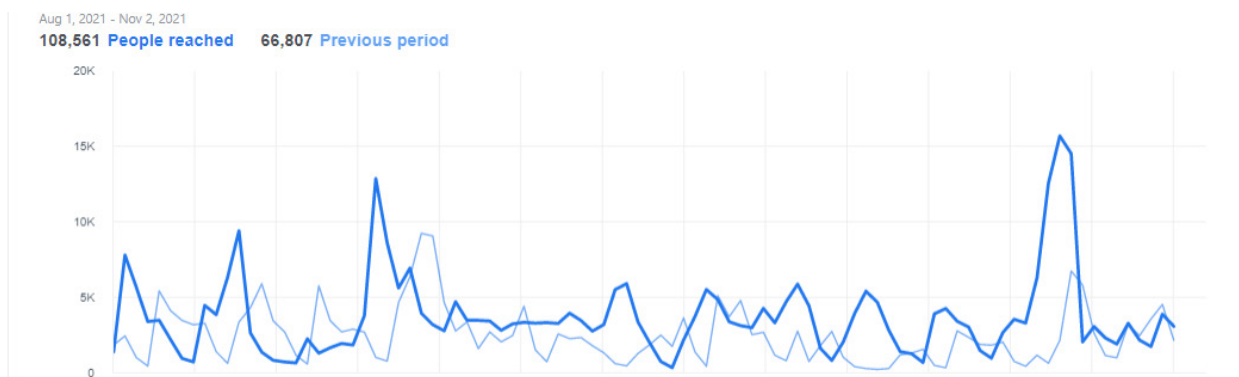
*This student-featured video was viewed 10,000+ times!*

- [Great grads feature stories and banner photos](#)
- [Facts on funding](#)
- [Fact sheet](#) - overview of proposal and benefits
- Social Media Campaign
  - District social media - Share the district story; great grad features; high school student contests to grow online followers
  - Citizens campaign - paid ads, video-sharing, testimonial videos of why I'm voting yes
- Send four household mailings - features progressive messaging around awareness of issues, specifics of proposal, value to the community and get out the vote
- Advertising
  - [Newspaper ads](#)
  - Google and Facebook ads
- Vote YES Yard Signs
- Phone banking - personal phone calls and conversations
- Send handwritten postcards with personal messages using campaign points
- Walk the Block - door knocking, literature drop, chat with neighbors to encourage community unity, ensure completion and return of ballot, and urge YES vote

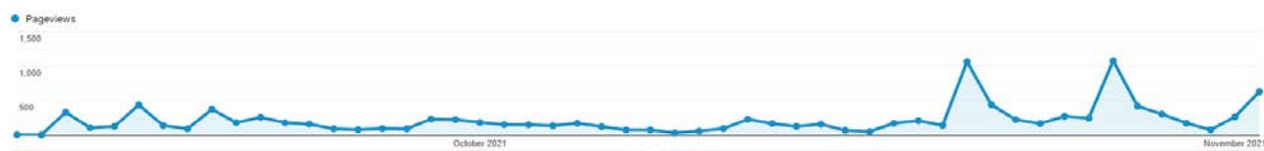
## STRATEGY (CONTINUED)

### ONGOING SUCCESS METRICS

- Social media - views, reach, engagement, increases in followers
- Videos online - views, reach, engagement
- Video testimonials posted by the community - increasing number of videos posted by community members
- Website - Google Analytics
- Walk the Block - canvassers' feedback forms tracking voter sentiment
- Community and civic group engagement - group feedback
- Vote YES yard signs - numbers of signs posted throughout community
- Phone banking - responses from personal interviews with voters



Facebook metrics across all phases of the campaign showed strong, continued growth in reach and engagement.



*ibelievein27j.com* received regular traffic from calls-to-action with high peaks around launch and election lead-up.

The plans were executed according to the timeline established with the 3-member communications team and citizens campaign volunteers. The success metrics were used throughout the implementation of the campaign and at the conclusion of the campaign to evaluate the effectiveness of the tactics in reaching established goals. For example, our measurements included analytics about our:

- Social media - District and I am 27J citizens' Facebook pages earned 55,300+ engagements which was higher than average social media engagement according to our digital media/political consultant
- Online videos - Videos raising awareness of district needs and promoting YES votes received 52,100+ views which was higher than average video views from similar campaigns according to our digital media/political consultant
- Website visits - 11, 274 total pageviews across *ibelievein27j.com*
- Phone banking - About 6,600 personal phone calls made across three phone banking events

Our metrics indicated people were engaging with our content at high rates. Videos performed especially well when featured in paid advertising online. Data from canvassers showed strong support in neighborhoods throughout the district. Phone banking showed questions still lingered on bond proposal specifics so our speakers paid careful attention to giving proposal specifics and context for the plan.

## STRATEGY (CONTINUED)

Focusing on the base voters most likely to support the bond proposal, households of targeted YES voters were on the lists for home visits by canvassers. Daily updates from the canvassers indicated the overwhelming majority of responses from residents were that they were aware of the election and the school needs. The vast majority were favorable and expressed intentions to get out and vote.

The campaign committee ordered 2,000 yard signs and all 2,000 were distributed and put up in residents' yards or busy intersections. Six large 10' x 6' signs were put on school supporters' private properties where signs had exposure to large intersections and/or highway traffic. All yard signs and large signs were claimed in just a few weeks and all signs were posted which was a measure of success.

## EVALUATION

We tracked pre-determined success metrics throughout the campaign and made adjustments wherever possible to maximize positive outcomes. For example, early phone banking indicated lingering questions about the details of the bond proposal. So we increased messages focused on the issues needing clarity and trained community speakers how to address those details. We also adjusted our website navigation to more easily get to plan details.

Ongoing measurements of success indicated our campaign tactics were working and were on track to deliver a win at the polls. Numbers were increasing where we wanted it and feedback was coming in positive and in regular intervals.

Polling experts told us that typically the community's percentage of YES votes goes down by about 1% each month between the time a poll is conducted to when ballots are cast. That experience held true in this election. Election experts also told us that because this was an off-year election, typical education-supporting voters were far less likely to come to the polls. That prediction also was born-out by our results. Less than 20% of registered voters made it to the polls in 2021 and with no big races on the ballot, most education-supporters stayed home. Despite these realities, we continued to see positive indications of an election win based on our ongoing success metrics we monitored.

## BOND MEASURE PASSES WITH 52% APPROVAL

Ultimately, the 27J Schools voters passed the bond issue for \$513 million dollars with 52% of voters casting a YES vote!

Post-election polling also showed we were able to move the dial on community perceptions and attitudes. For example, pre-election polling indicated the district and schools' job approval was weak with 26% satisfied and 34% dissatisfied, while 40% weren't sure about education quality in the district. The post-election polling showed we were successful at decreasing the percentage of people saying they were unsure about the district and schools. The support of the district's and schools' work improved to 53% approved, 34% disapproved and only 13% were unsure or had no opinion. [We moved 27% of the people from uncertainty to approval of the district's education quality.](#)

### What voters said after the election:

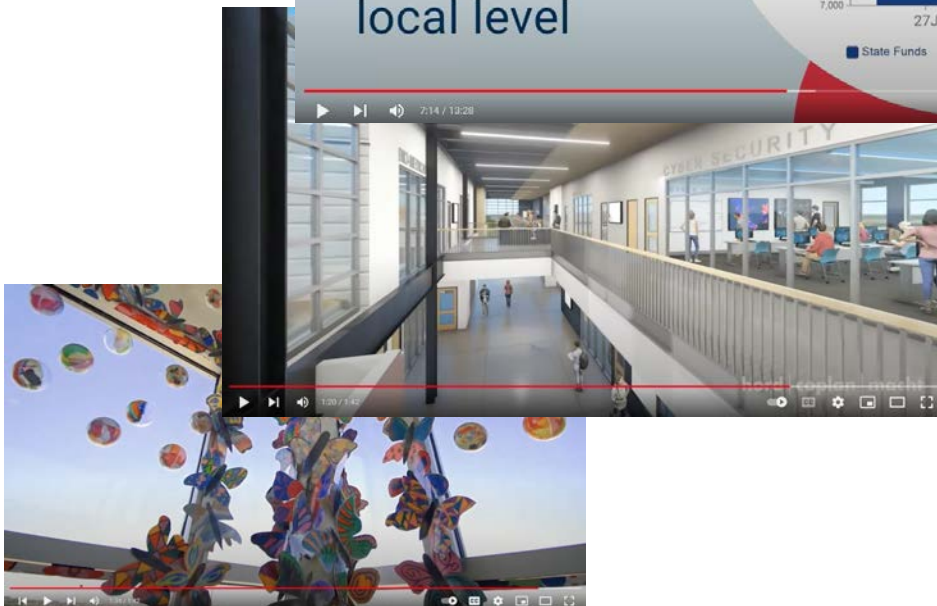
- *"Population growth pushes the need for buildings."*
- *"There are so many new houses going up. It's clear we need new schools to address the new students now living here."*
- *"We went through split schedules years ago when we didn't have enough space for all our students. I don't ever want to do that again!"*
- *"CTE and STEM are the best bargains our students can have!"*



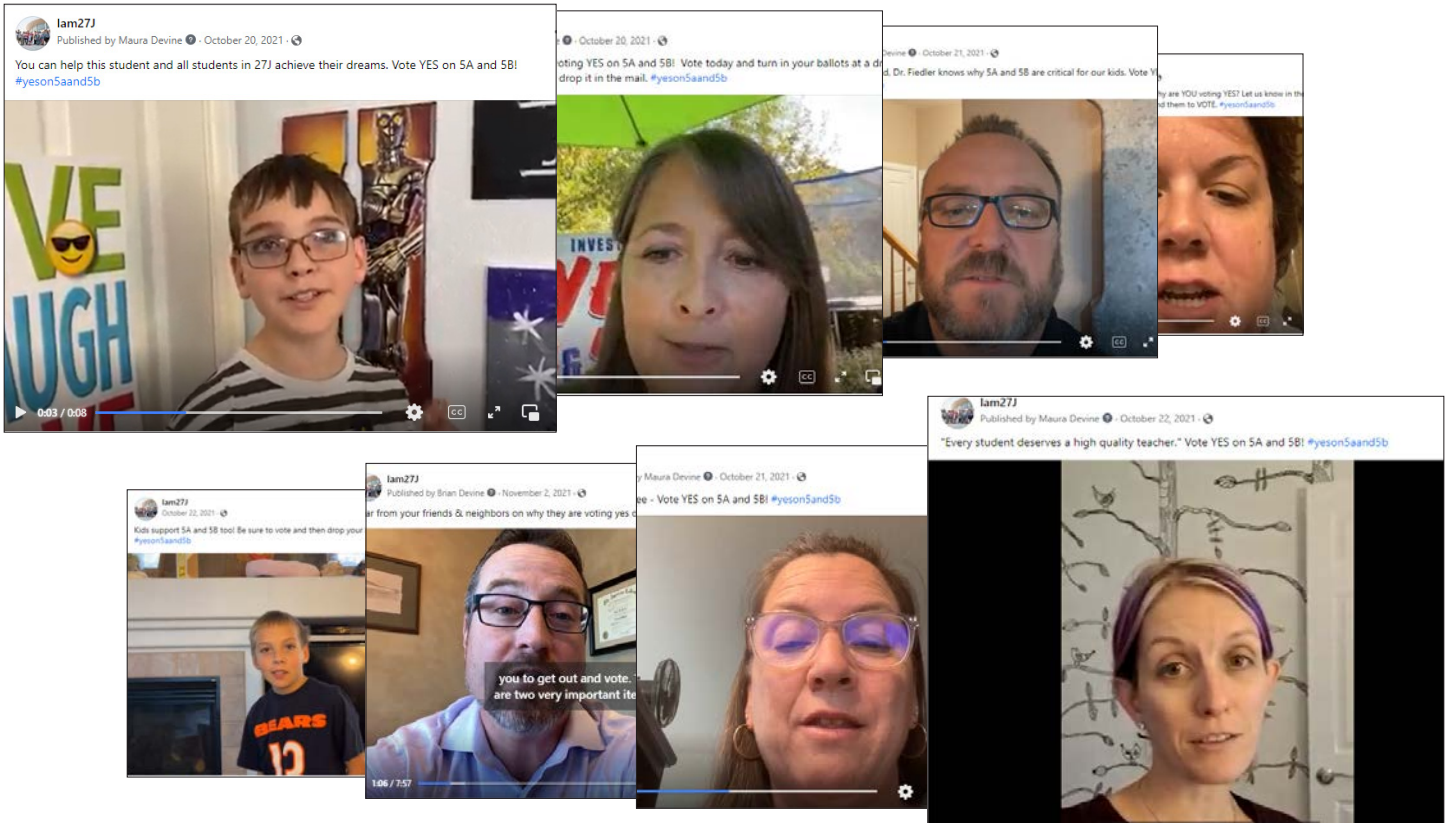
A variety of videos, featuring key messages, were shared via the campaign website, social media, and digital advertising. Performance metrics across videos showed a high level of engagement from viewers.



**How are schools funded?**  
State and local level



An online portal allowed community members to record themselves expressing support for the bond. These videos were shared on social media to show buy-in across stakeholder groups (students, parents, staff, etc.)



In the immediate run-up to Election Day, we used "selfie-style" videos from well-known representatives (principals, teachers, etc.) for GOTV calls-to-action in both English and Spanish.



**Fabricio Velez**  
PRINCIPAL, VIKAN MIDDLE

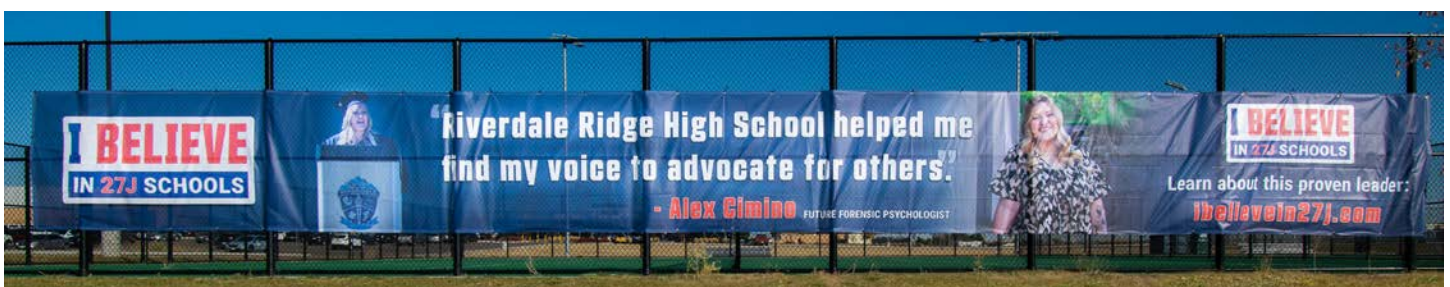


**Jane Archuleta**  
TEACHER, BRIGHTON HIGH



**Candice Reese**  
PRINCIPAL, ELEMENTARY 14

Giant banners at each school site put a face on student success and gave evidence of school quality. Banners reached not only student and parent audiences but wider, non-parent community audiences as well.

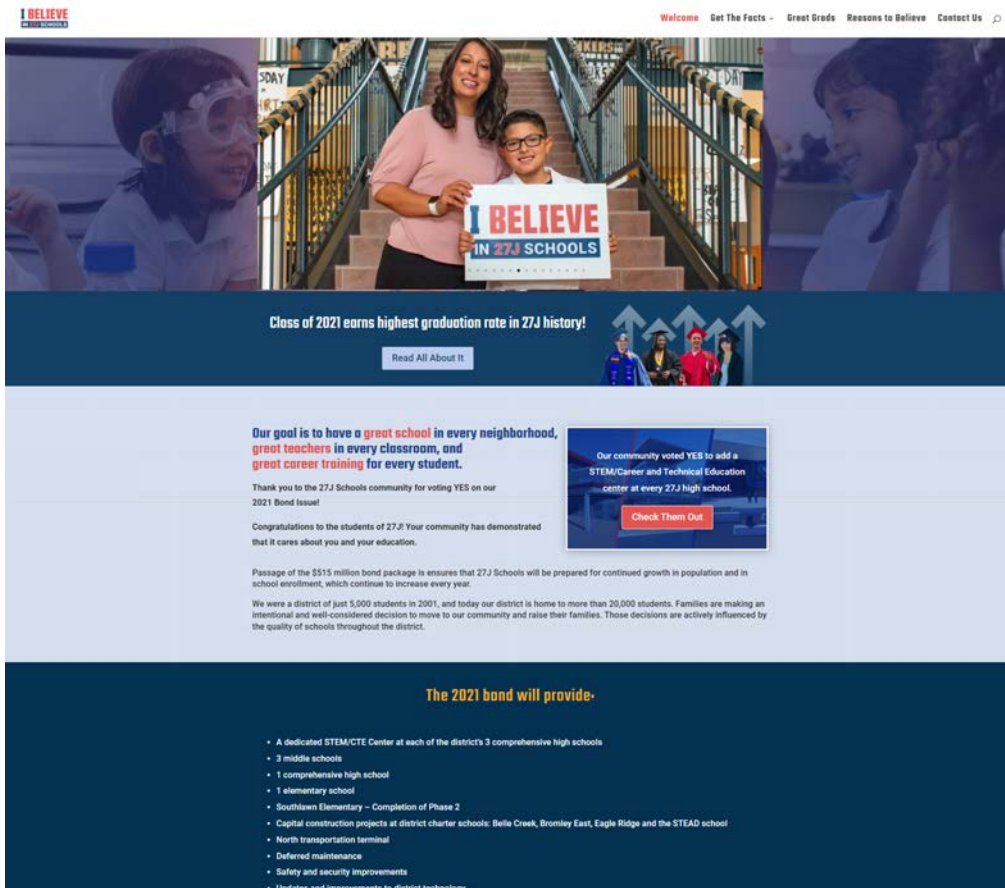


# GREAT GRAD BANNERS

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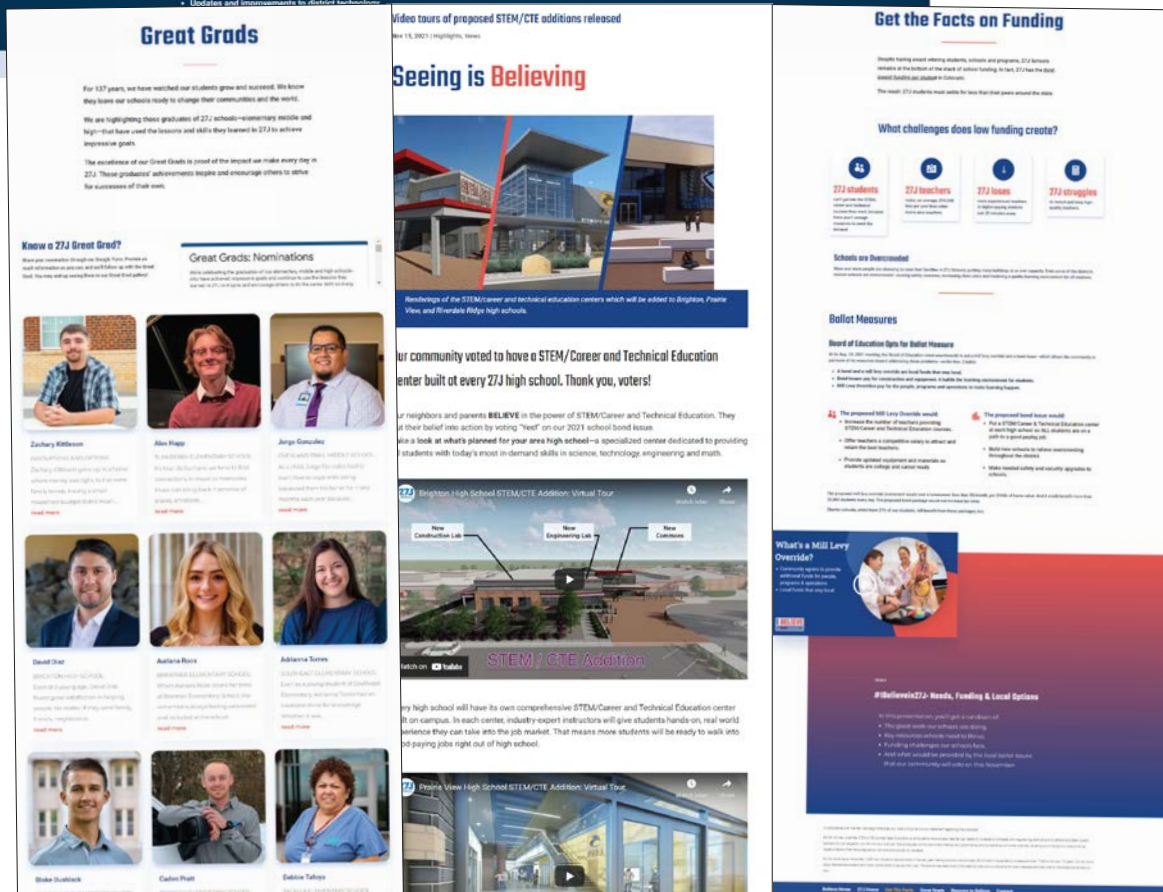


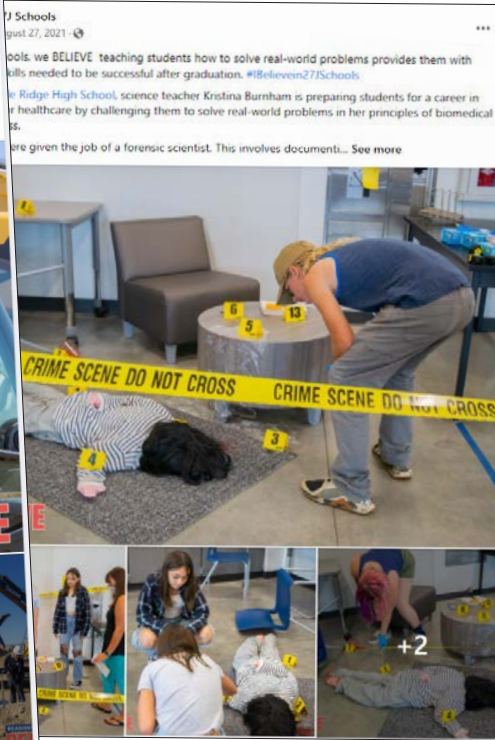


The district's campaign website centered on the theme "I Believe in 27J Schools" and key messages we knew resonated with our target audiences.

Web content included feature stories for each Great Grad and videos illustrating various components of the bond measure.

People could find answers to common questions, review the ballot language, start a conversation with the district, and read why others support their schools.

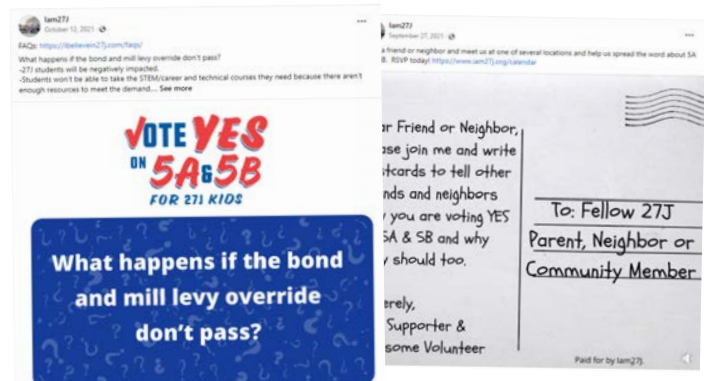


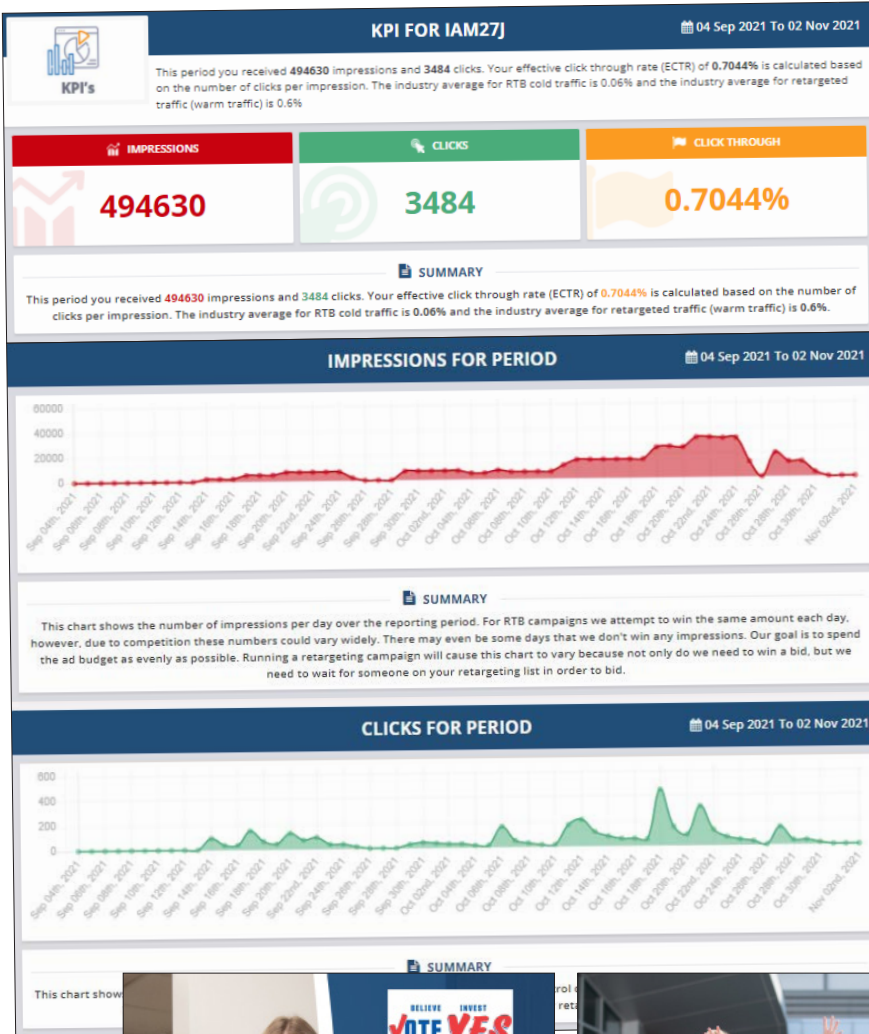


Social media was utilized heavily, by both the district and citizens campaign, to energize supporters and educate voters on the bond measure.

Through the use of branded graphic overlays and hashtags, district social posts from August onward were framed within the "I Believe in 27J Schools" context.

Social media posts from the citizens campaign group focused on coordinating volunteer actions, explaining the bond measure and answering common questions about it, and GOTV calls-to-action.

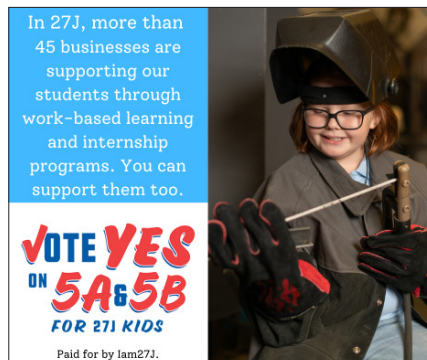
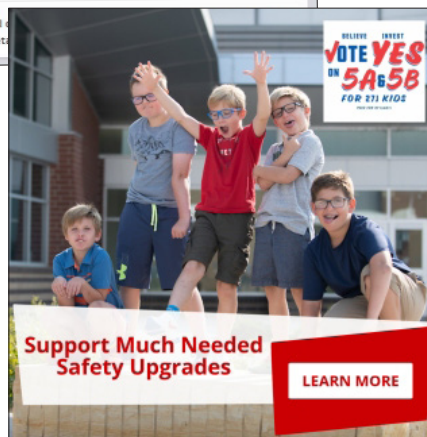




The lam27J citizens campaign used a hybrid (digital and print) advertising approach via Google, Facebook, TV and newspaper ads.

Performance data showed continued growth in reach and engagement throughout the campaign, with peaks optimally timed for the period after voters received ballots and before Election Day.

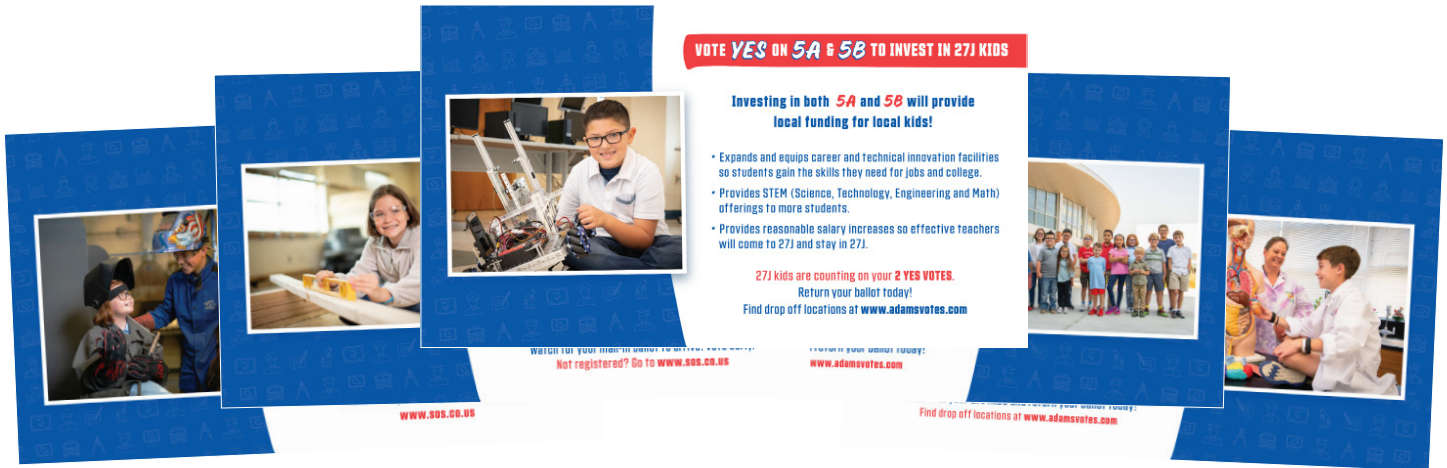
For web and television advertising, we targeted sites and channels to display ads by matching the profiles of likely "Yes" voters (e.g. adults ages 18-35, Democrats, etc.) identified in our voter research to site/channel audiences. For television advertising, that meant ads were ran on networks such as HGTV, MSNBC and ESPN.



# MAILERS

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A series of mailers were sent to households of voters identified in our research as likely “Yes” voters. Mailers reinforced key messages and were sequenced to align synergistically with the messaging schedules for social media and advertising efforts.

# GIVEAWAYS

**I BELIEVE**  
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“I Believe in 27J Schools” auto decals, vinyl stickers, and lanyards, and “Ask Me Why” buttons were distributed to staff and community members to increase campaign awareness, visualize public support for the district, and create real-world conversations about the bond measure.

Focus group research of high school students indicated the most effective engagement strategy to reach them was via Instagram. With the support of a student intern, we used Instagram giveaways of “I Believe in 27J Schools” branded materials to energize students in advocating for their schools.