



Poudre School District

Key findings from a community survey of
PSD residents

July 2019



TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	Methodology
5	Executive summary
7	Community landscape
11	Evaluating a potential mill levy override
15	Connecting with the community
24	Potential pushback
29	Contact information

Methodology



METHODOLOGY

- Strategies 360 conducted a live telephone survey of **400 residents** in Poudre School District.
- A combination of **landline and mobile phones** were called to ensure greater coverage of the population sampled.
- Interviews were conducted **July 11-14, 2019**.
- The margin of error for a survey of **400 interviews** is **±4.9%** at the 95% confidence level for each individual sample. The margin of error is higher for subsamples.

Executive summary



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The community generally projects a sense of satisfaction with the quality of education in Poudre School District.

Over six in ten respondents say they're satisfied with K-12 education quality in the district, while just 16% express dissatisfaction. Notably, fewer than 20% of district residents have children in the district, yet they still give district schools the benefit of the doubt.

Additionally, most residents believe Poudre schools need more funding than they currently receive.

Indeed, 69% believe Poudre public schools need additional funding. However, only 27% think the district *definitely* needs more funding. The needs case is broadly assumed but lacks intensity; residents need more context about the type and magnitude of financial need.

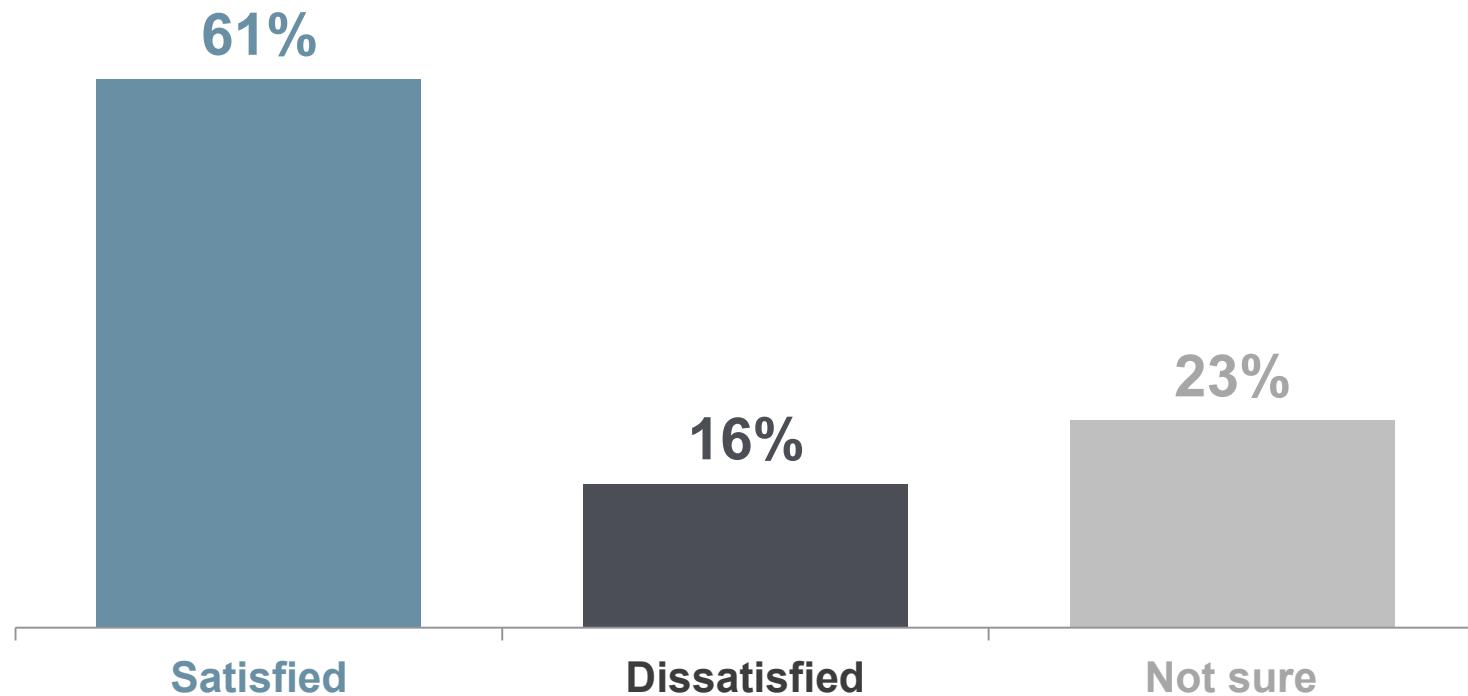
Most residents look favorably on a theoretical mill levy override that would meet district needs.

Nearly three quarters of residents respond positively to a potential \$16 million MLO. These numbers are further buttressed by district outreach focused on teacher pay and the difficulties of teachers and staff in making ends meet.

Community landscape

Overall, the community is quite satisfied with the quality of education offered in Poudre public schools.

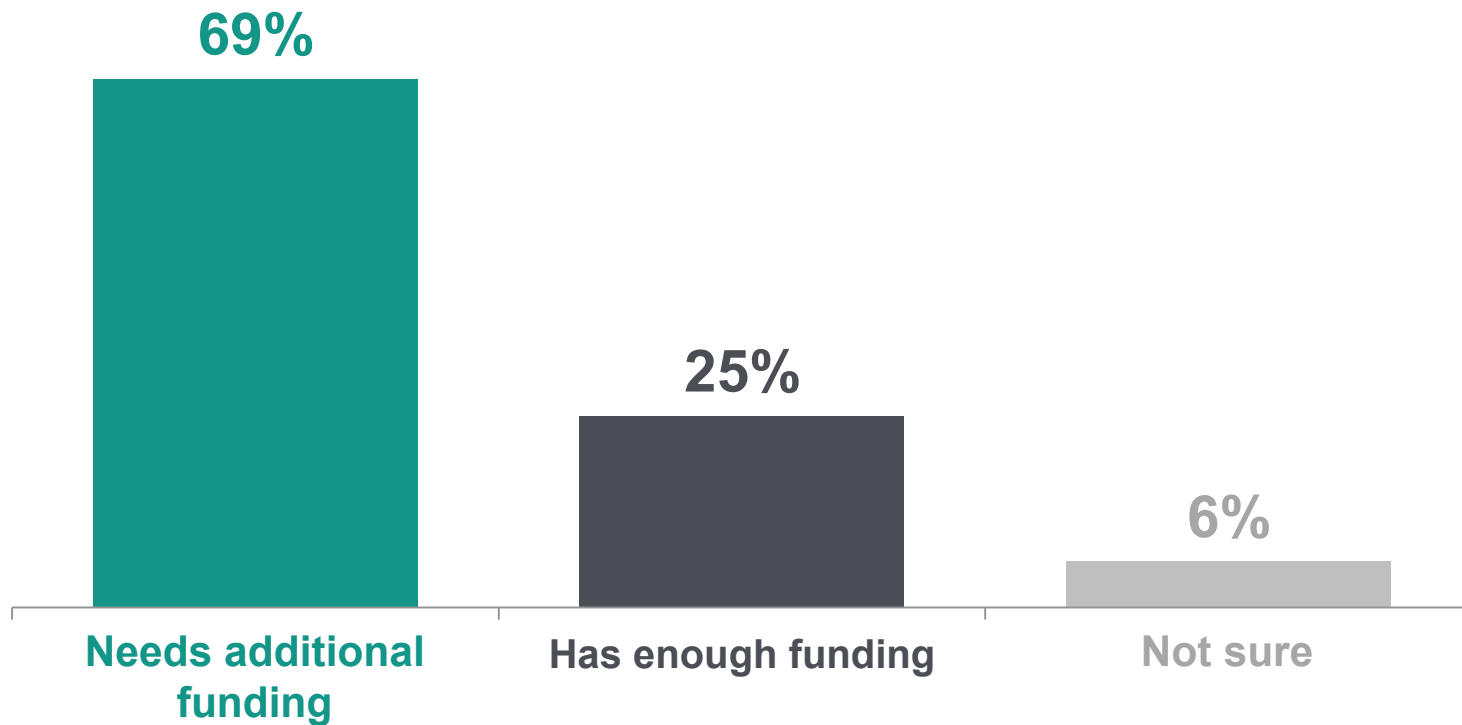
Satisfaction with education quality
in Poudre School District public schools



A broad majority assumes the district needs additional school funding.

Assumptions about funding need

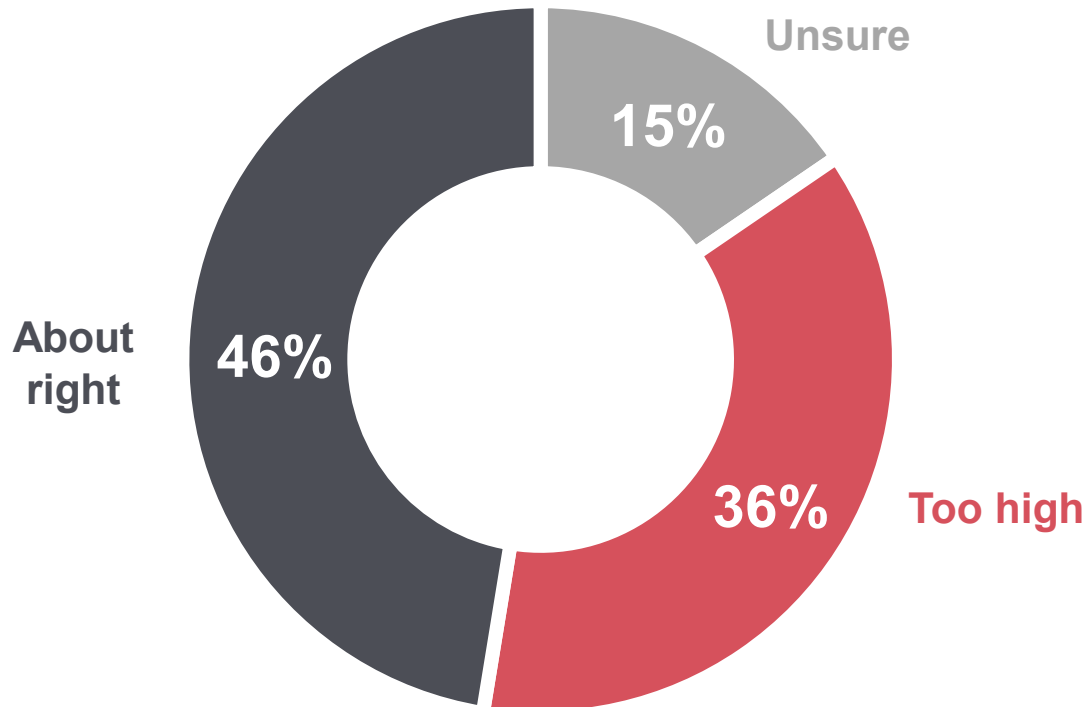
“would you say Poudre School District...”



Most residents don't express strong feelings about current property tax levels, though just over a third believe they are too high.

Local property tax sensitivity

"in general, would you say local property taxes are..."



An additional 3% answered "too low."

Evaluating a potential mill levy override



CONCEPTUAL BALLOT TITLE TEST

Respondents were asked the following question:

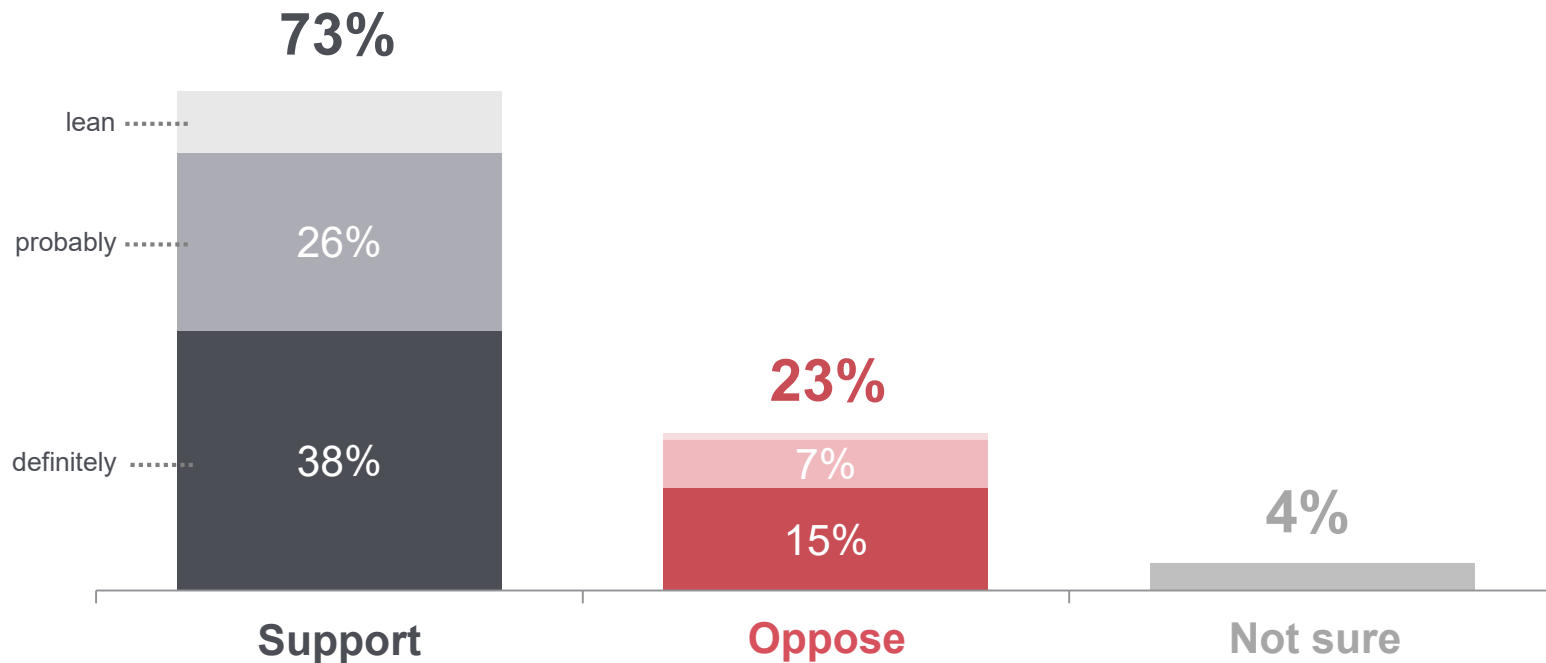
“Shall Poudre School District’s taxes be increased \$16 million annually and by whatever amounts are raised annually thereafter by a levy of 4.25 mills, and shall such additional taxes be deposited into the general fund and used for educational purposes, including but not limited to...

1. Increasing the number of counselors, and mental health and suicide prevention professionals to support our children and youth; and
2. Enhancing school safety and security by adding additional security personnel to keep our students as safe as possible;
3. Allowing the district to offer competitive, market-value wages to recruit and retain high-quality teachers

Would you support or oppose this proposal?”

The community reacts very positively to a rough approximation of what a prospective ballot title might look like.

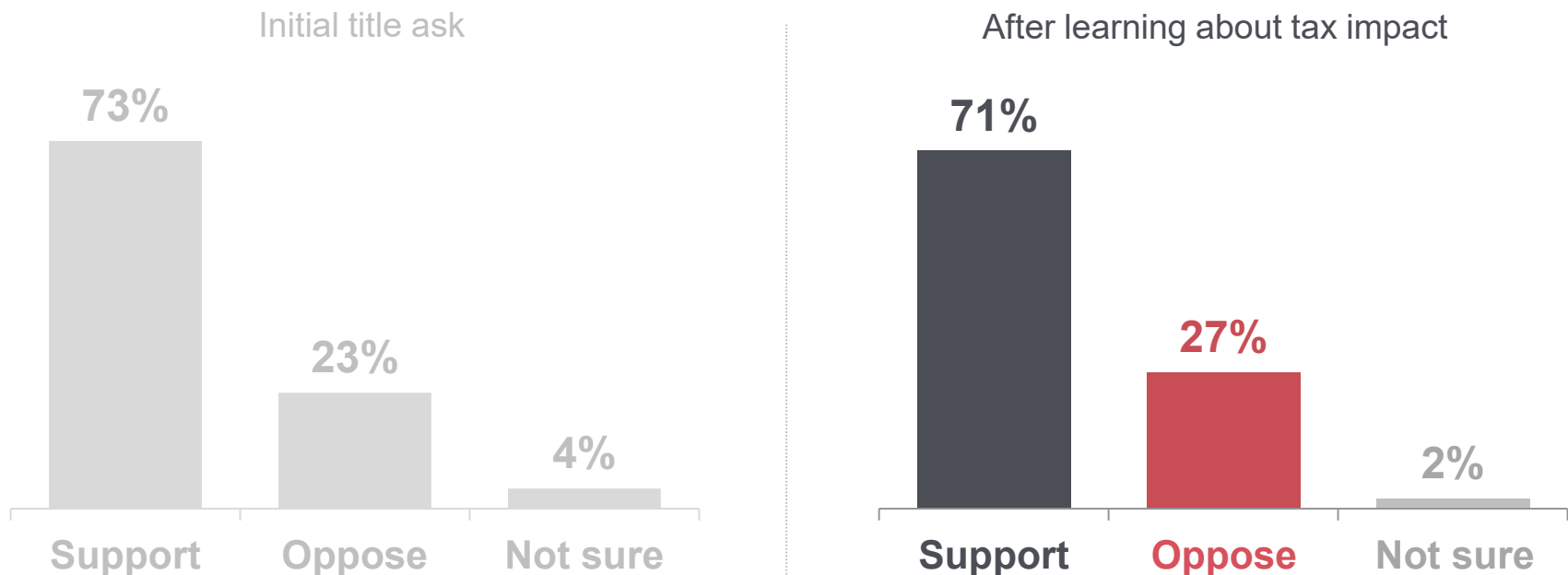
Initial reactions to concept of \$16m MLO ballot title test



Learning that a \$16m mill levy override would result in an additional \$31 per year for every \$100,000 of assessed home value does not make a material difference to the community.

Reactions to concept of \$16m MLO

initial ask vs. cost ask

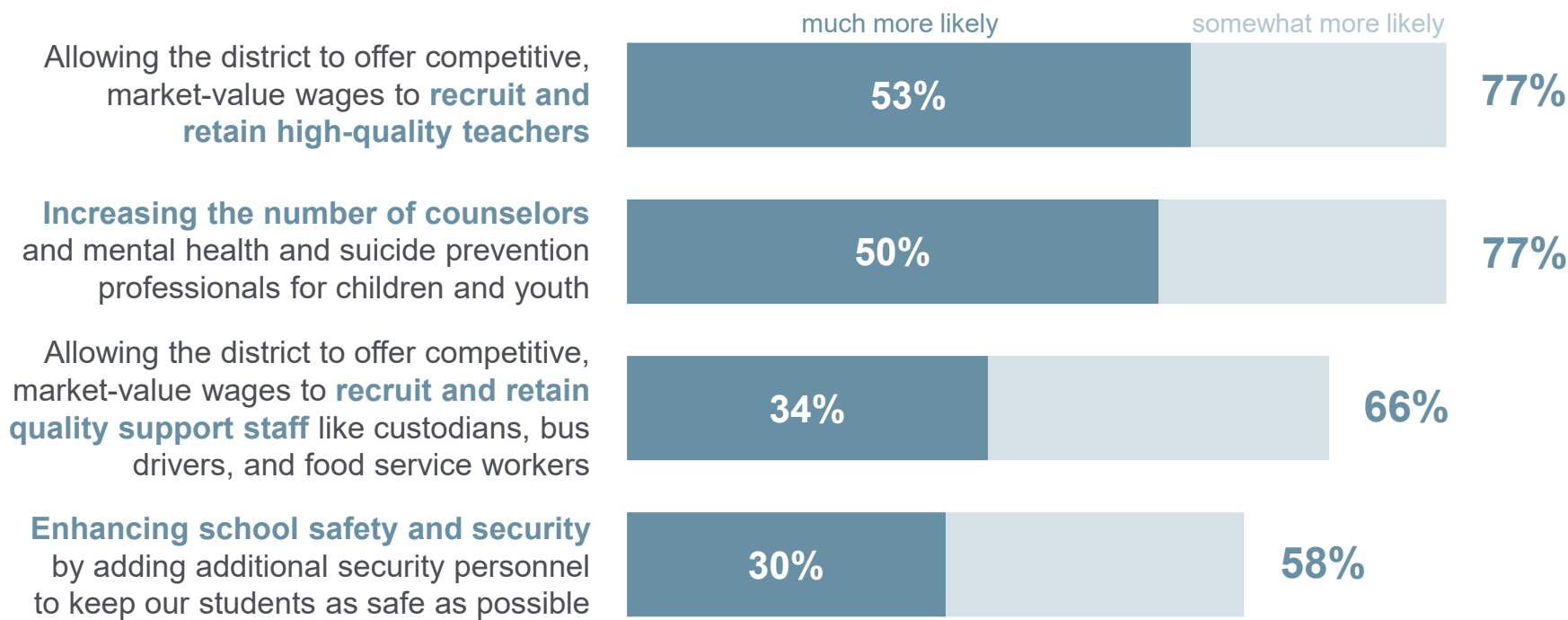


Actual question text: "This proposal would increase property taxes in Poudre School District by about 31 dollars per year for every 100,000 dollars of assessed home value, or 124 dollars per year on the value of an average home, which is roughly 400,000 dollars. Knowing this, would you support or oppose this proposal?"

Connecting with the community

Each potential component of the MLO generates considerable support among district residents—especially increasing teacher wages and hiring more counselors.

Reactions to potential proposal components impact on stance toward MLO





COMMUNITY OUTREACH MESSAGES

Living costs

The cost of living in the Fort Collins area is higher than most of Northern Colorado. Yet, starting teacher salaries here in the Poudre School District are thousands of dollars lower than in neighboring districts, including Greeley and Loveland. Until we can pay our teachers what they'd make elsewhere, it will get harder and harder to give our kids the high-quality teachers they need and deserve.

Teacher pay

Here in Poudre School District, teacher pay has fallen behind. In fact, the average teacher salary is roughly \$20,000 less than it is for teachers in Boulder. Almost 200 teachers left the district in the 2017-2018 school year alone. If we don't pay our teachers what they deserve, we won't be able to keep them. Period.

Support staff

Recruiting and retaining qualified support staff is critical because our schools are only as good as the people supporting our children's learning. Qualified support staff like food service workers, bus drivers, and custodians help create safe and healthy learning environments in our schools, but we must be able to pay them enough so they can afford to live in the community they serve.

Turnover

Poudre schools have historically hired some of the best educators in the country, making the district especially high performing. But it won't continue to be that way if we can't offer competitive teacher wages. Growing teacher turnover can have a real impact on the student experience and learning in the classroom.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH MESSAGES (cont.)

Invest in kids

If we want a strong community, we need to invest in our local schools. This proposal will directly benefit classrooms — not bureaucracy. We can't afford to make our kids wait; now is the time to invest in their futures.

Walkouts

Last year, Colorado teachers joined teachers across the country in walkouts to advocate for more funding and resources for public education. The district understands the importance of taking care of its teachers. This measure will help support teachers throughout the district by making sure they have the salaries they need and deserve.

Security staff

Poudre schools are constantly improving security but work still needs to be done. This measure will add security personnel at our schools, protecting our kids and allowing school personnel to better control who enters the buildings and respond as quickly as possible in emergency situations.

Outreach messages related to teacher wages are easily the most impactful, reflecting the community's strong preference to increase teacher wages.

Outreach messages: first tier

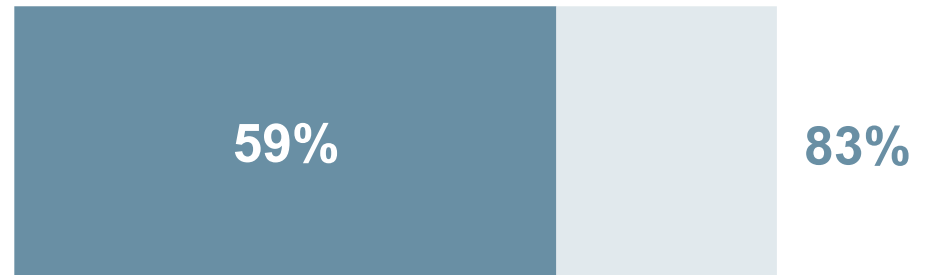
% convincing

very convincing

somewhat convincing

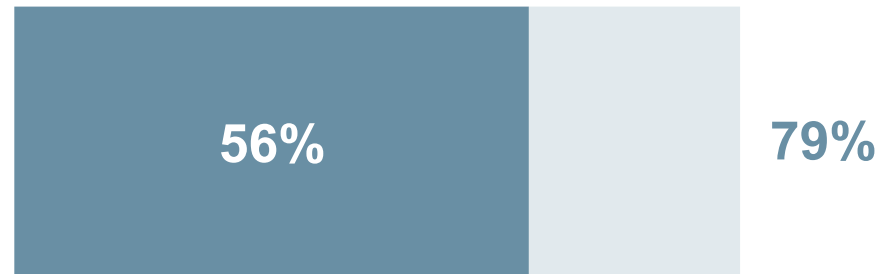
Living costs

The cost of living in the Fort Collins area is higher than most of Northern Colorado. Yet, starting teacher salaries here in Poudre School District are thousands of dollars lower than in neighboring districts, including Greeley and Loveland. Until we can pay our teachers what they'd make elsewhere, it will get harder and harder to give our kids the high-quality teachers they need and deserve.



Teacher pay

Here in Poudre School District, teacher pay has fallen behind. In fact, the average teacher salary is roughly \$20,000 less than it is for teachers in Boulder. Almost 200 teachers left the district in the 2017-2018 school year alone. If we don't pay our teachers what they deserve, we won't be able to keep them. Period.



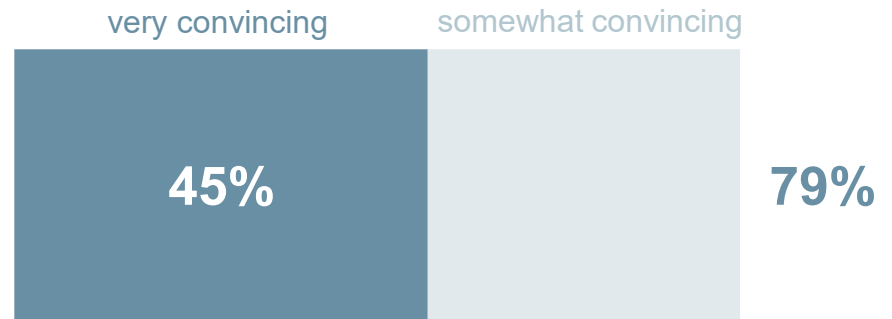
Focusing on losing teacher talent also resonates quite well, though less powerfully than when pay disparities are included. Support staff needs also connect strongly.

Outreach messages: second tier

% convincing

Support staff

Recruiting and retaining qualified support staff is critical because our schools are only as good as the people supporting our children's learning. Qualified support staff like food service workers, bus drivers, and custodians help create safe and healthy learning environments in our schools, but we must be able to pay them enough so they can afford to live in the community they serve.



Turnover

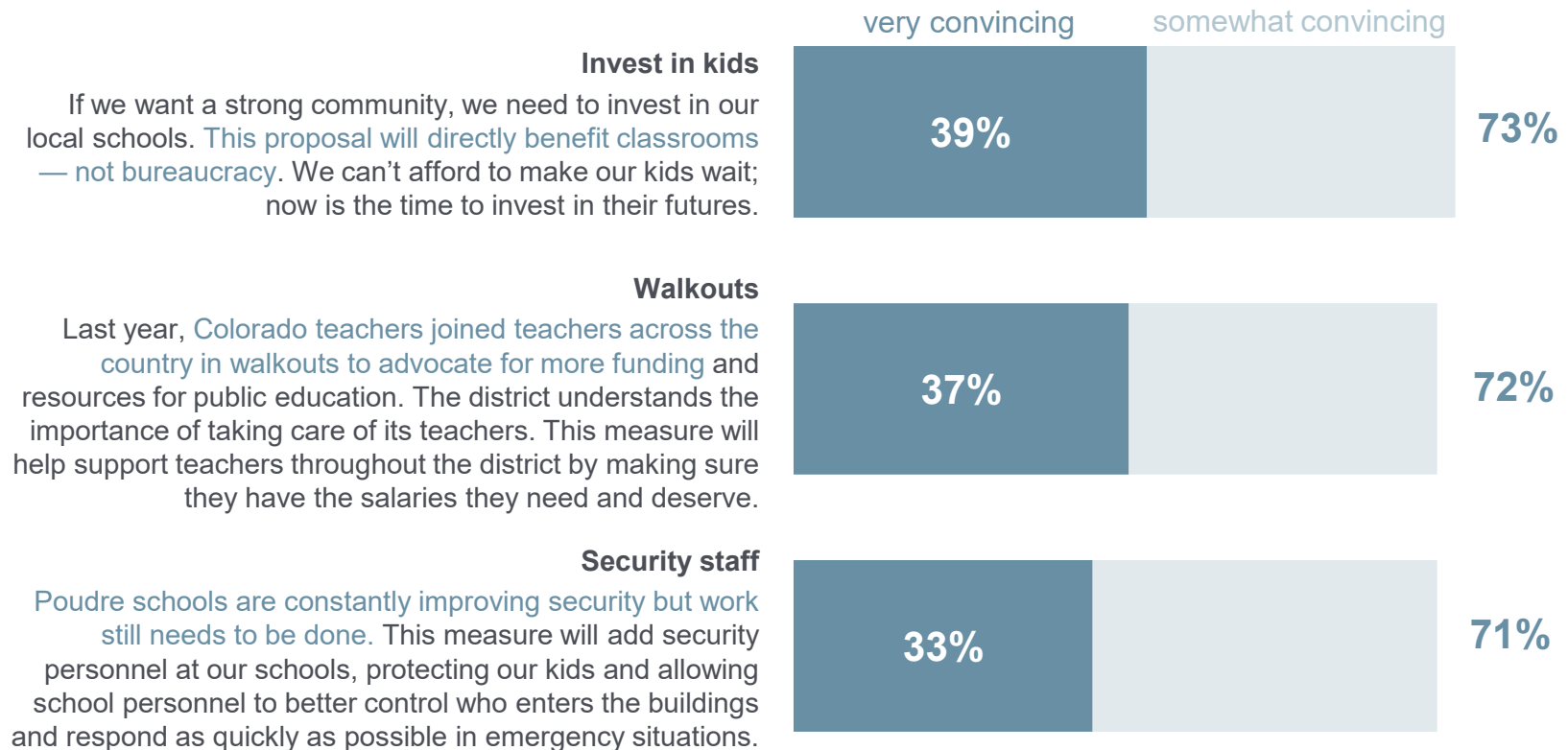
Poudre schools have historically hired some of the best educators in the country, making the district especially high performing. But it won't continue to be that way if we can't offer competitive teacher wages. Growing teacher turnover can have a real impact on the student experience and learning in the classroom.



Even third-tier messages connect broadly with the community, though they resonate less intensely than the aforementioned messages.

Outreach messages: third tier

% convincing





A sample outreach message that addresses the community's knowledge gaps:

Poudre School District knows that teachers are the backbone of our schools. That's why the district has historically hired some of the best educators in the country, making our schools especially high-performing.

Today, the rising cost of living in the Fort Collins area is higher than most of Northern Colorado. Meanwhile, starting teacher salaries here in Poudre School District are thousands of dollars lower than in neighboring districts, including Greeley and Loveland. In fact, the average teacher salary is roughly \$20,000 less in Poudre School District than it is for teachers in Boulder.

Without competitive teacher salaries, teachers will have a harder time remaining in Poudre schools. Teacher turnover can impact student experiences in the classroom and Poudre's reputation as a high-quality school district. Almost 200 teachers left the district in the 2017-2018 school year alone. If we don't pay our teachers what they deserve, we won't be able to keep them.

Cost of living and competitive wages are challenges faced not only by teachers, but also by support staff, including food service workers, bus drivers, and custodians. Recruiting and retaining qualified support staff is critical because our schools are only as good as the people supporting our children's learning. Qualified support staff help create safe and healthy learning environments in our schools, but we must be able to pay them enough.

Finally, Poudre schools are constantly improving security—but work still needs to be done. We need to add more security personnel at our schools, protecting our kids and allowing school personnel to better control who enters the buildings and respond as quickly as possible in emergency situations.

1. Focus on teachers from the outset.
2. Use concrete numbers to establish pay gaps and explain the need for salary adjustments.
3. Preview the potential downside if salaries aren't increased.
4. Remind the community that support staff are an integral part of the district and are also impacted by cost of living challenges.
5. Build out the needs case with safety and security.



The elevator pitch: teachers, teachers, teachers.

Today, the rising cost of living in the Fort Collins area is higher than most of Northern Colorado. Meanwhile, starting teacher salaries here in Poudre School District are thousands of dollars lower than in neighboring districts, including Greeley and Loveland. In fact, the average teacher salary is roughly \$20,000 less in Poudre School District than it is for teachers in Boulder.

Without competitive teacher salaries, teachers will have a harder time remaining in Poudre schools. Teacher turnover can impact student experiences in the classroom and Poudre's reputation as a high-quality school district. Almost 200 teachers left the district in the 2017-2018 school year alone. If we don't pay our teachers what they deserve, we won't be able to keep them. Period.

Potential pushback



NEGATIVE MESSAGES

Recent measures

Voters just passed two funding measures for Poudre School District in 2016. Now the district is asking for more money. **We need to see how they're spending the money** they already have before we give them a third tax increase in three years.

No more taxes

Cost of living is higher than ever and property owners were just hit with property tax increases of nearly 18%. We all care about our schools, but this isn't the time for more property tax hikes.

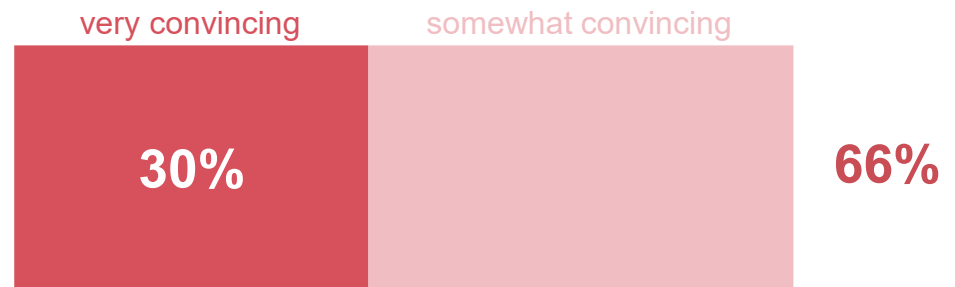
The potential of positive district communications outpaces the persuasiveness of potential pushback, though reminders of the 2016 measures do raise some questions.

Potential pushback

% convincing

Recent measures

Voters just passed two funding measures for Poudre School District in 2016. Now the district is asking for more money. We need to see how they're spending the money they already have before we give them a third tax increase in three years.



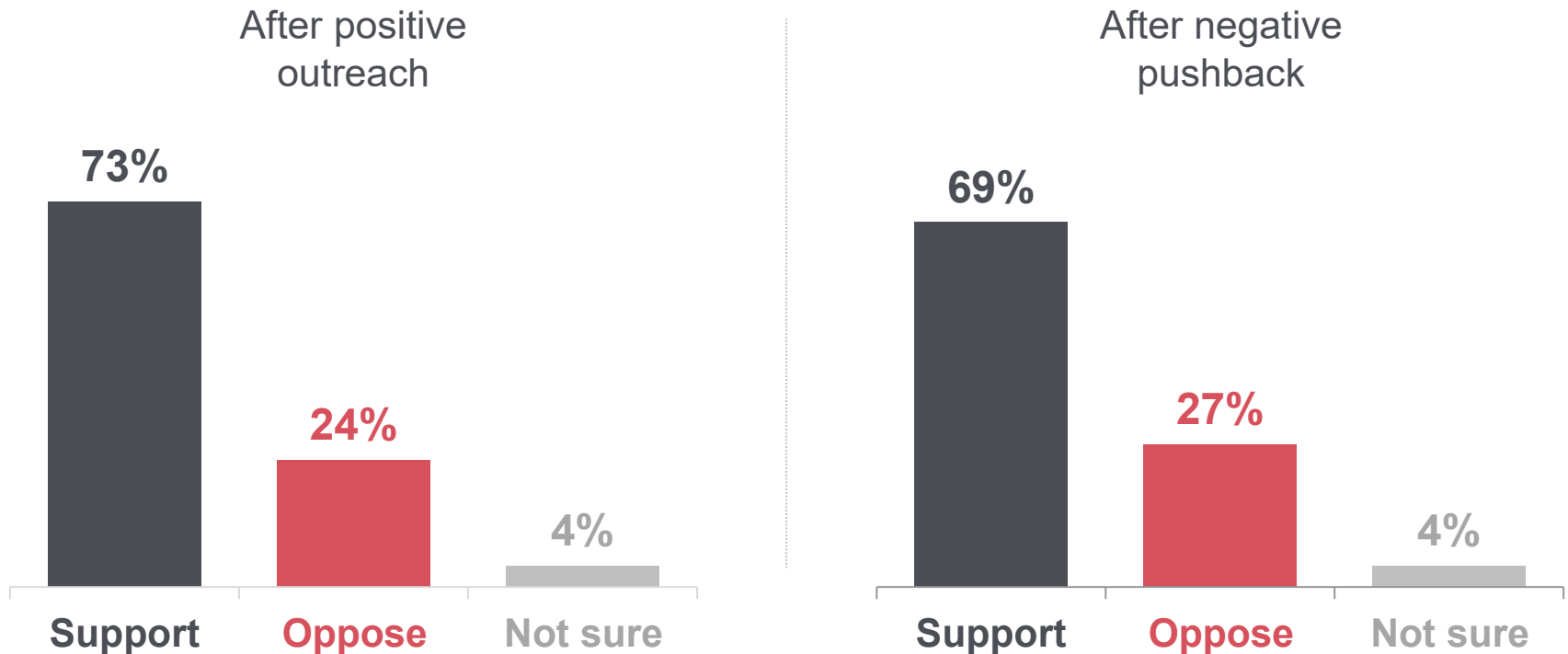
No more taxes

Cost of living is higher than ever and property owners were just hit with property tax increases of nearly 18%. We all care about our schools, but this isn't the time for more property tax hikes.



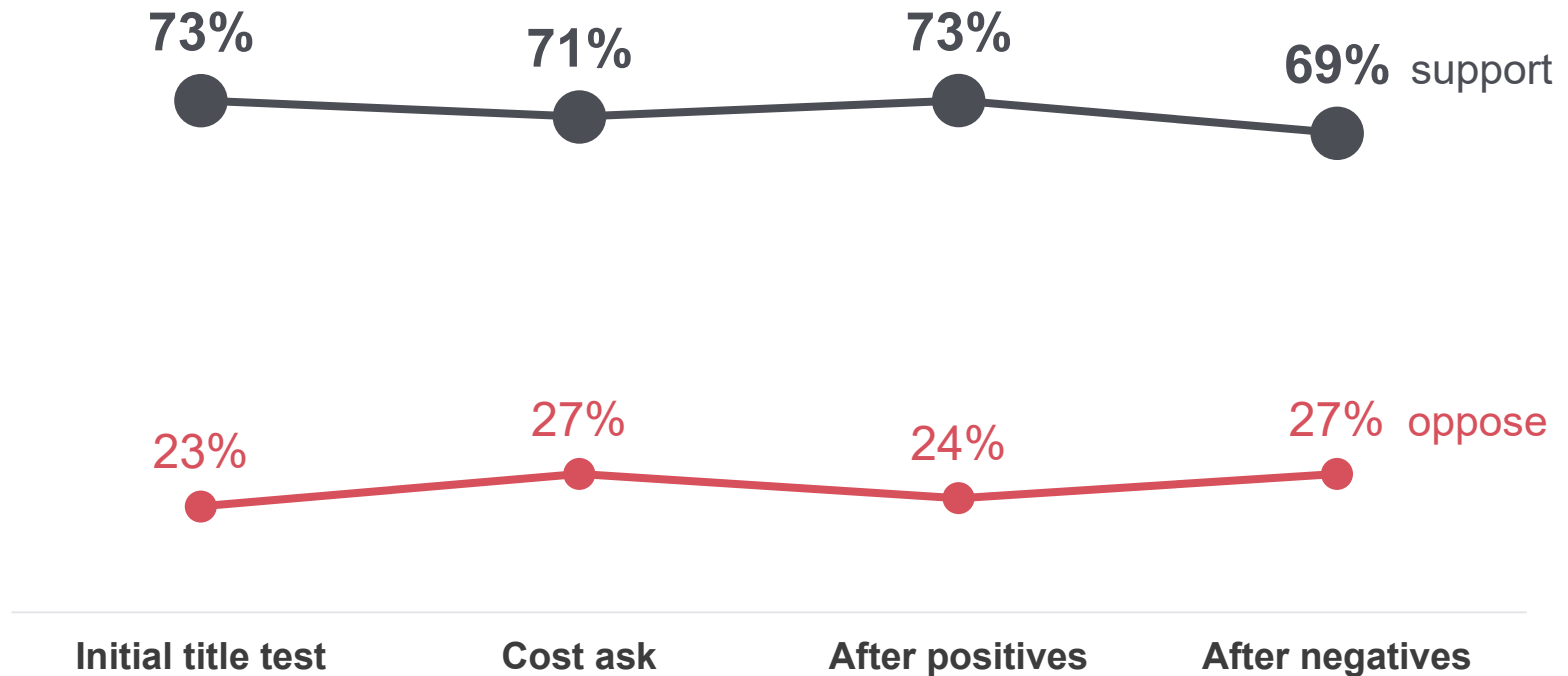
Negative pushback, when preceded by positive district outreach, largely does not resonate.

Reactions to concept of \$16m MLO stances after messaging



Over the course of the survey, favorable reactions to a theoretical MLO waver very little.

Community reaction to a \$16m mill levy override progression throughout the survey





Alex Dunn

Research Director

alex@strategies360.com

Emily Klein

Analyst

emily@strategies360.com

S360 RESEARCH OFFICES

Seattle, Washington | Denver, Colorado | San Diego, California

