



Burlington  
K-6

# Chesterfield Township School District

**Referendum Date:** December 13, 2005

**Total Referendum:** \$19,558,778

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or Louise Zoilkowski, *Business Administrator* (609) 298-0307

With people moving into the community every day, the population in the Chesterfield Township School District was on the rise. By September 2005, enrollment at Chesterfield Elementary School was 30 students over capacity. As a short-term solution, the district installed temporary classroom trailers. However, based on a demographic study, the condition was only expected to worsen.

To address the problem, the district decided to present the community with a \$19.5 million referendum to build a new 60,000-square-foot elementary school to house students in grades 3–6. In addition, renovations were planned at the existing elementary school, which would then serve students in grades K–2 and children attending the preschool handicapped program.

Since the district had presented the same proposal to the public two years earlier and had failed to pass the project, Zander Consulting was hired to develop and implement a comprehensive communications program.

**Zander Consulting responded with an in-depth campaign** that included project-focused publications, community engagement activities, and public information events such as tours and open houses. Several pages on the district website were also dedicated to the plan. In addition, Zander Consulting staff assisted in the creation of a key communicators group. This team of volunteers was charged with serving as ambassadors within the community, explaining the needs behind the plan as well as the project details. To reach as many voters as possible, an editorial was also authored and published in the local press.

The issues Zander Consulting faced on this project were significant. First, the public refused to believe the projected enrollment increase would come to fruition. Second, the tax impact for the project was extremely high. Finally, the project was expected to cost \$2 million more in 2005 than it did in 2003 for the same scope of work. Although this was simply the result of higher construction and materials costs, it was difficult to communicate to this skeptical community. Ultimately, despite the best efforts of the board, administration, and Zander Consulting staff, district voters rejected the plan once again.

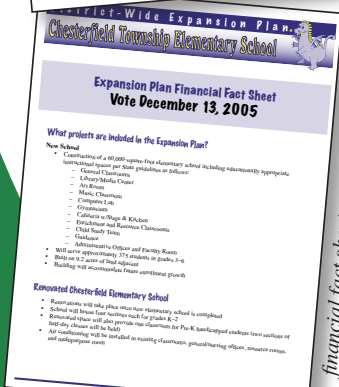


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