



# A COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS PROPOSING VATR ELECTIONS



## INTRODUCTION

Proactive and modern communication is absolutely essential for school districts considering proposing a Voter-Approval Tax Rate (VATR) election. Explaining the need for these elections can be difficult, however, due to the proliferation of new communication platforms and the diminishing reach of some of the old ones — not to mention the details and technicalities involved with these proposals. School districts and their advocates must understand and embrace the changing messaging landscape and plan well in advance to explain the opportunities that a VATR election presents.

Many school districts do not have the staff or infrastructure to quickly launch a comprehensive communications campaign around VATR elections and other finance issues. Other districts may have the infrastructure but are not using it to its fullest potential. While every district has its own unique constituencies and needs, this toolkit is an effort to share some of the best practices around school communications and also provide greater context about the climate in which districts now operate.

**This is not a campaign playbook, and the intention is not to provide a roadmap for how to turn out voters to support a VATR proposal.** Rather, it is a toolkit to help school district trustees, administrators, and communicators better explain their needs and vision to the public. This guidance should help these educators provide credible, engaging information that will connect with a diversity of audiences. This toolkit also seeks to illustrate the ways that members of the public consume information. Its intent is to help public school leaders clearly communicate with the public about the choices presented by a VATR proposal while not advocating for a particular electoral outcome. Presenting information, and not electioneering, is the school district's role.

## Part 1: Perceptions of Texas Public Schools

It's important to recognize the difference in messaging to members of the community who have children in the public schools and those who do not. While support for public schools remains strong among parents with children enrolled in them, there has been a decline in support over the last couple of years among non-parents.

	Parents of children enrolled in public schools who give their local public schools an A or B:	Voters who do not have children enrolled in public schools who give their local public schools an A or B:
<b>2022</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>2021</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>56%</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>46%</b>

[Source: Charles Butt Foundation](#)

However, overall support of public education in Texas has been relatively stable over the last few years. [Polling from the Texas Politics Project at the University of Texas at Austin](#) shows that views of K-12 education quality increased in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic as the public witnessed schools' extraordinary efforts to ensure learning continued, but then dipped back down. Overall, during the last few years, the public's beliefs regarding the quality of Texas elementary and secondary schools have been relatively stable.

### Quality of K-12 Education

	Good or excellent:	Not very good or terrible:
<b>Feb. 2022</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>Feb. 2021</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>Oct. 2020</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Feb. 2020</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>June 2019</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>Feb. 2019</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>42%</b>



## **It is important to remember that most Texans believe public schools need more money.**

The Charles Butt Foundation Poll released in 2022 found that:

- 56% of Texans say the public schools in their community don't have enough money
- About a third say they have the right amount
- About 10% think schools have too much money
- These numbers are largely unchanged over the last three years.
- Only 3% of public school parents think schools have too much money.

Similarly, [a poll that Texas Parent PAC released in May 2022](#) found robust support for priorities that VATR proposals often help fund:

- More than 90% of Texas voters support hiring more teachers, increasing teacher salaries, and increasing funding for school supplies.
- 80% of voters support offering teachers a retention stipend for their hard work during the pandemic.

**Key Takeaway:** Texans remain broadly supportive of public education. In fact, a relatively small number of Texans believe public schools have too much money. Texans will be receptive to well-constructed narratives about why local public schools need additional resources. That said, there is no denying that public schools face increased scrutiny and criticism from well-organized (and often well-funded) interest groups. It is important to recognize that some audiences (current public school parents) are especially willing to hear these messages. It is up to public school advocates to create messages that recognize the different feelings toward public education among various audiences.



## Part 2: The Short History of VATR Elections

The Legislature created the concept of Voter-Approval Tax Rate Elections with the passage of House Bill 3 in 2019. Similar to Tax Ratification Elections before them, the basic concept behind VATR elections is to allow local voters to decide whether they want to pay a little bit more in local property taxes in order to provide additional funding for operations of the local public schools.

VATR elections must be in November and, so far, the record is mixed. Voters were more receptive to these initiatives in 2021 than in 2020. Interestingly, three districts whose VATR elections failed in 2020 won passage in 2021, while one district's VATR initiative failed both years.

2020	2021
5 out of 12 passed	15 out of 19 passed

**One revealing note about the appeal of dollars for instruction/operations:** While **79%** of VATR elections in November 2021 were successful, just **65%** of the proposed bond spending statewide was approved on the same day. Of course, these were different districts holding different elections. However, between 2020 and 2021, bonds became less popular and VATR propositions became more popular, as judged by their approval rate.

## Part 3: Messaging Guidance

The presentation of a VATR election initiative to the community is an opportunity to tell a broader story about where the district is, what it needs, and what it wants to be in the future. It's an opportunity to frame a particular moment in history and help the public understand that they have an active role in writing the next chapter.

Ultimately, the challenge is to excel in the realms of message and delivery. Every school district is unique and has its own story to tell. Some districts can afford a much more developed communications infrastructure than other districts. Still, there are strategies and considerations that can help any school district tell its story more fully and effectively.

### KEY CONTENT STRATEGIES

#### 1. Create a narrative.

What is the overarching story you want to tell about why this conversation matters at this point in time? If your neighbor asks you in the front yard why the district is proposing a VATR election, and you have little time and no visual aids at your disposal, what are you going to tell them? A narrative is more important than a slogan. Perhaps the narrative is that relatively low salaries are costing the district highly qualified teachers, or that the VATR election offers the rare opportunity to raise revenue that is not subject to recapture. Early in the process, sketch out the biggest ideas that you want your constituents to understand and then build your case from there.

#### 2. Keep the story focused on children.

Members of the public are used to being asked to approve funding for construction. Throughout your messaging, emphasize that these are resources for actual instruction that will impact the quality of education children receive on a day-to-day basis. Other than children, the most important people to highlight are teachers. The Charles Butt Foundation poll shows that Texans trust teachers more than anyone else in education — more than principals and much more than administrators and elected officials. Finally, remember the two are linked...The point of giving teachers raises is not only to award them with more money, but also to keep the best and brightest in the district.

#### 3. Paint a picture that shows how these resources will impact learning.

It's important to articulate a clear and compelling vision for how the district will use these resources. This should not be an abstract discussion, and it should not be one that you need a Master's in Education to understand. Emphasize benefits the public will understand: Smaller classes, higher pay for teachers facing rising living costs, an instructional coach who can help struggling students catch up. Find the most compelling and understandable ways the dollars will be used and emphasize those.

#### 4. Keep language simple and conversational.

Remember that you are telling a story, you aren't writing legislation. Members of the public have various levels of understanding of what happens in school every day. Don't assume, for instance, that they know what AVID is, or that they use phrases such as "postsecondary education." Many will not know the difference between an auxiliary employee and a paraprofessional. Tell us what these employees actually do.

#### 5. Make sure the community understands the stakes.

The district's obligation is not only to describe how the VATR election would positively impact students, but also the consequences of failure. While it is critical not to exaggerate the impact, you are usually going to need something more compelling and relatable than "We are going to be operating at a deficit." Are we talking about fewer teachers or extracurricular programs? Not as many counselors to help students with mental health issues? To borrow a term from presidential politics, it should be more of a choice than a referendum. Which future do you want for our students and our community?

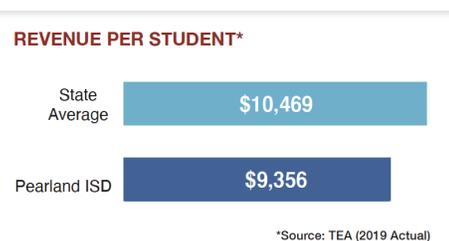
#### 6. Appeal to the public's competitive side.

Nobody wants to think that they are getting less, or doing worse, than others in the state and in the region. If you need revenue to help catch up to how much other districts are spending, this can be an effective and compelling messaging point.

DISTRICT	BEGINNING TEACHER SALARY	AVERAGE TEACHER SALARY
Northside ISD	\$55,110	\$59,887
South San Antonio ISD	\$54,500	\$58,645
Harlandale ISD	\$54,150	\$60,643
Medina Valley ISD	\$53,710	\$57,000
San Antonio ISD	\$53,400	\$57,081
Fort Sam Houston ISD	\$53,000	\$59,668
North East ISD	\$53,000	\$56,837
Judson ISD	\$52,552	\$55,270
East Central ISD	\$51,500	\$56,706
Schertz-Cibolo Universal City ISD	\$50,600	\$61,279
<b>Alamo Heights ISD</b>	<b>\$52,950</b> 8th Ranking in Bexar County	<b>\$57,880</b> 6th Ranking in Bexar County

\* 2020-2021 Salary Comparison by Texas Association of School Boards (TASB)

Source: Alamo Heights ISD



Source: Pearland ISD

#### 7. Anticipate questions.

Think about the questions that good-faith members of the public would likely have regarding a VATR proposal, and then go about answering those questions in your messaging. You may want to set up an FAQ section of your website. A few examples of questions to anticipate:

- Why is this necessary in light of the COVID relief money the district received?
- Didn't the state give us a bunch of money in 2019?
- How much of this will go to the classroom as opposed to central office?
- How did we end up in a scenario where this vote is necessary?
- Why does this have to happen now, at a time when taxpayers are facing high inflation in their daily lives?

## 8. Remember the freeze on 65+.

As we have noted, those who do not have children in public schools do not view schools as fondly as public school parents. Some of the citizens who do not have children in schools are, of course, senior citizens. It is important to emphasize to this important constituent group that their taxes will remain frozen, regardless of what happens with the VATR election. Also, because homeowners often pay their property taxes as part of their monthly mortgage payments, it is reasonable to talk about how much the tax bill on an average home will increase per month.

## 9. Provide context around the ballot language.

It's important to maintain credibility with the community by not trying to trick them about what's happening with the tax rate. You do not want them to read the ballot language and think they have been misled. The ballot language used with VATR elections is especially confusing. Here is how Section 26.08(b) of the Tax Code requires the ballot to read:

*"Ratifying the ad valorem tax rate of \_\_\_\_ (insert adopted tax rate) [\$\_\_\_\_\_ per \$100 valuation] in (name of school district) for the current year, a rate that will result in an increase of \_\_\_\_\_ (insert percentage increase in maintenance and operations tax revenue under the adopted tax rate as compared to maintenance and operations tax revenue in the preceding tax year) percent in maintenance and operations tax revenue for the district for the current year as compared to the preceding year, which is an additional \$\_\_\_\_\_ (insert dollar amount of increase in maintenance and operations tax revenue under the adopted tax rate as compared to maintenance and operations tax revenue in the preceding tax year)."*

The language compares the amount of M&O revenue that will come in if the VATR election passes with the amount of M&O revenue from the previous year. So if your property values have gone up and caused you to rely more heavily on local revenue, the statement is not a true comparison. Further, it counts as M&O revenue the amount of money that the state takes away from the district through recapture. As we know, recapture is rising. So if you go from \$10 million in M&O revenue to \$12 million, but \$1 million of that increase is more recapture, then a 10 percent increase in revenue you get to keep will be represented to voters as a 20 percent increase.

The most effective way to respond in these circumstances is to try to prepare the community for the ballot language so they will not be caught off guard, then work

proactively in your communications to explain what the real difference is. Tell them that the ballot language is state-required language that does not make an apples-to-apples comparison. Explain that when property values go up, the district takes in more in local funding, but it loses out in state funding or has to send more local funding to the state through recapture.

## 10. Emphasize the rare opportunity to keep more local revenue.

One of the most important aspects of VATR elections is that the first 8 pennies are “golden pennies,” which means these dollars are not subject to Robin Hood. This can be a powerful messaging point for districts that have lost many millions of dollars to recapture. Just remember to explain it in terms that are easy enough to understand. Example: “While the state typically takes millions of dollars out of our school district through Robin Hood, all of the money raised through this election will stay entirely in our local schools to help local students.” At least one Texas district has astutely drawn attention to this fact by calling its VATR election the “golden penny election.”

### What is a Golden Penny?

Tax Revenue that is **not** subject to recapture



**HB3 gives our district access to 4 golden pennies through voter approval. In HPISD, each penny generates ~\$1.6 million.**



## KEY TACTICAL STRATEGIES

### 1. Have a social-first strategy.

Social media platforms, primarily Facebook and Instagram, are the best ways to spread your message on your terms. This may seem obvious, but we can forget that these tools are available at our disposal and largely free to use. You don't have to invest money in paid social campaigns. In fact, organic content that your followers share is more effective because the Facebook algorithm prioritizes content from friends and family. But it needs to be compelling and frequent. Set the tone on social media with your overarching message and use photos and (very short) videos to make it stand out. **Remember that it's OK to use your social channels to talk about VATR elections, but not to advocate for the passage of VATR elections.** Most school districts have a healthy following on at least one social platform. Use it.

### 2. Create a hub of information online.

A microsite is a one-stop-shop page for members of the public to gather information about the VATR proposal. The Texas School Coalition recently created one to serve as a public resource regarding Robin Hood; it's called [RecaptureTexas.org](https://RecaptureTexas.org). Try to come up with a simple URL (DistrictNameISD.com/Election, for instance) to help your community find it. This can also provide a place to go if you invest in [Google search ads](#) to convey factual, objective information about the VATR election.

### 3. Have a one-pager.

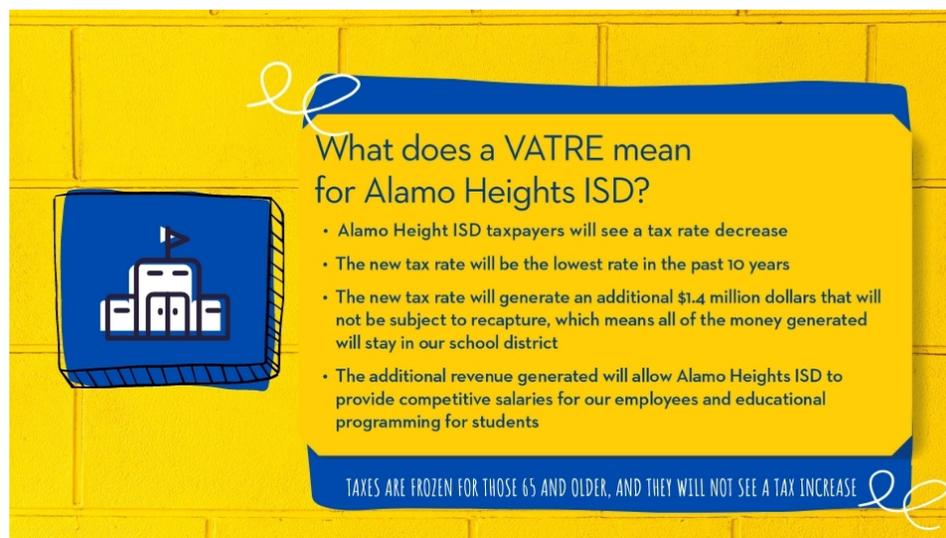
VATR elections are complicated (by design). There may be times when you need to provide context, but it is important to provide one-page summary sheets that can be shared with members of the public, the media, staff, and others to objectively explain what the election is about. You won't be able to include every school finance detail, but you should be able to make the stakes clear and communicate key themes. This should be one of the first pieces of collateral that a district creates so that it can be distributed far and wide throughout the community. Also, don't be afraid to go smaller, with an index card that can be easily distributed at community events presenting the facts surrounding the district's circumstances. For example content, see the appendix at the end of this report.

#### 4. Know who is asking questions.

The landscape is increasingly filled with partisan outlets that look a lot like traditional news organizations and may approach you that way, but have a much sharper point of view than the local newspaper. You must decide on an individual basis about whether to engage with them (and sometimes there is no point in doing so). Just do the research to know who is asking questions and what their point of view may be.

#### 5. Feed content to community influencers.

You should know the people in your community who have credibility and are often asked for their opinion on local issues. Work proactively to give these influencers factual, accurate information. Even if they do not always align with the district, it is critical to identify those key people (elected officials, civic leaders, opinion writers at the local newspaper) who are going to shape public opinion and make sure they have at least heard the district's narrative. These are folks who are likely to send one-pagers to their email lists or share your messaging on Facebook...or they may just share something positive at the Chamber meeting. Arm them, as well as other district supporters and employees, with informational graphics that can be shared on social media, such as the one below, and actively encourage them to share this content.



Source: Alamo Heights ISD

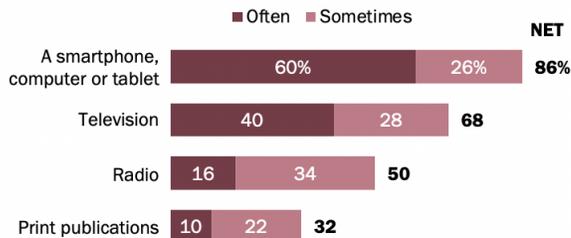
#### 6. Make your case in person.

Get out in the community and tell the district's story. Reinforce the narrative that's on your digital and printed materials. Be prepared to answer tough questions. Speak to skeptical audiences. Keep your cool, because you may well be recorded. Whether audience members agree with the proposition or not, they are going to appreciate the fact that you engaged with them and presented solid, credible information. Be respectful, but also be ready to make your case and push back against misinformation — and equip key allies and influencers to do the same.

## Part 4: Information Distribution and Consumption

### Large majority of Americans get news on digital devices

% of U.S. adults who get news \_\_\_\_ from ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

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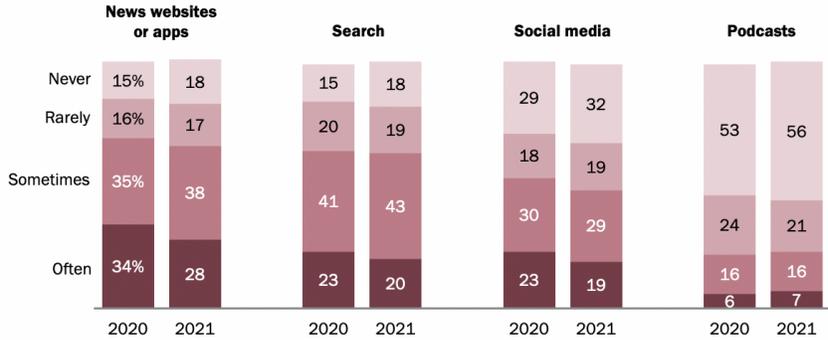
## FOUR TRUTHS ABOUT THE MODERN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

1. The news media has changed considerably since many education leaders entered the field. Fewer and fewer communities have local newspapers, and those that still have them have fewer reporters and photographers to provide content. [According to a 2022 report from Northwestern University](#), since 2005, the country has lost more than a fourth of its newspapers and is on track to lose a third by 2025. Also since 2005, overall newspaper employment is down 70 percent.
2. While the reach and presence of news outlets has diminished, in communities that do have local news outlets, those outlets are especially important for reaching highly engaged members of the public. Broadly speaking, the news media has been weakened, but if you live in a community with a media presence, it is still important to use the media to tell your story. Polling shows that both Republicans and Democrats trust local news outlets more than national outlets. It is worth taking the time to build credibility with members of the news media in your community; if they know you, they will be more likely to pay attention when you try to provide context for an article.
3. News coverage matters not only because people will read or watch that coverage directly. You must also anticipate how a certain headline or passage from a story could be used against the school district on social media or other conversations. Anticipate how a response to a journalist's inquiry or a particular angle on a story could be spun in the worst possible light.

4. Finally, when misinformation starts to spread, you cannot rely solely on the news media to set the record straight. They may not want to wade into the conflict. Or, they may be so concerned about being called biased that they will treat all sides as equally credible, even when they are not. The media helps reach a broad audience, but you cannot count on it to be the judge of what is unambiguously true or not true. Even if you could, not nearly as many people are seeing those stories. Misinformation spreads more easily than information.

**News consumption across digital platforms**

*% of U.S. adults who \_\_\_ get news from ...*



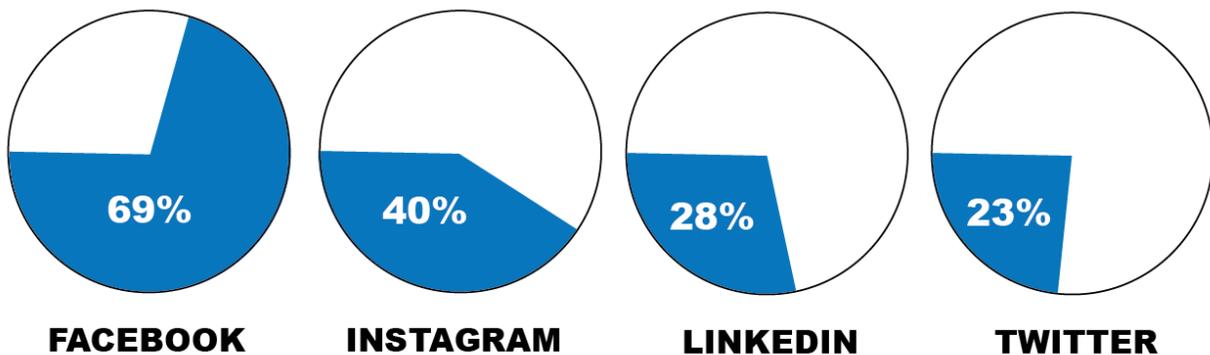
Note: Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.  
 Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted July 26-Aug. 8, 2021 and Aug. 31-Sept. 7, 2020.

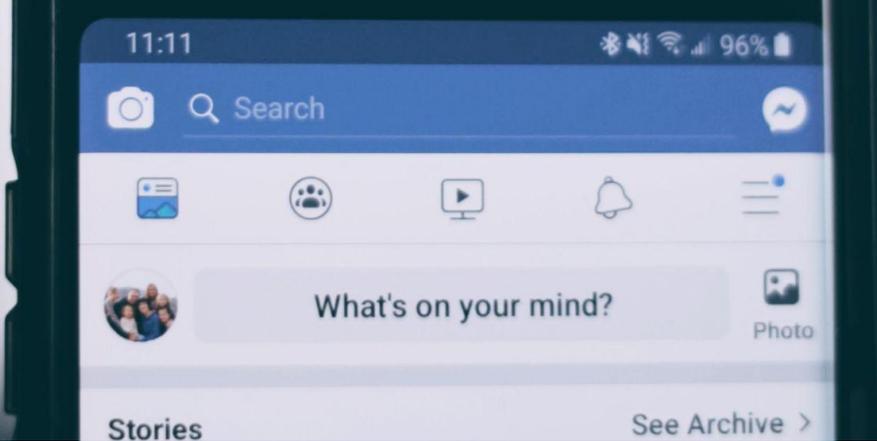


## THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is just one tool, but it is powerful. For all the pushback against platforms such as Facebook, these platforms are still extremely healthy. In fact, by many standards, they are growing. According to a July 2022 report from Hootsuite surveying internet users around the world, people are 2.5 times more likely to go to social media for news than physical newspapers or magazines — and Facebook, by far, is the most likely source they will check.

Percentage of U.S. adults who say they use each social media platform:





## BEST PRACTICES FOR SHARING MESSAGES ON EACH PLATFORM

### Facebook

**Post during ideal times.** The more people who engage with your post, the more the Facebook algorithm will share it. According to Sprout Social, posting between 8 am and noon on Tuesday through Friday is a highly effective time to reach the most users.

**Get the picture.** Photos are valuable content, more so than links. It helps to have variety, but if you can include a photo from your district in what you are posting, engagements are likely to rise. While not as potent in the algorithm as an authentic photo of students and/or teachers, infographics are also highly effective at conveying information in ways that are more compelling than long blocks of text.

**Use videos (wisely).** A video on Facebook should rarely be longer than a minute. Upload it directly into the Facebook app rather than posting a link to YouTube or Vimeo. And always turn on captions as another means of sharing your message, even if the user doesn't have the volume turned up.

**Create Facebook stories.** Stories are the best way to get seen because they are right there at the top of the user's feed. They are also easy to make. Want to convey three quick pieces of information about your VATR election? Post three quick stories that can run back-to-back. And if you don't have experience with stories, spend a few minutes playing around with it. It's very intuitive, very easy to learn, and very effective at reaching casual scrollers.

**Trust the analytics.** See what types of posts are getting the most engagements and content. Go deeper and look at your Page Insights to learn even more information about when your audience is engaging. Then build on what you learn.

**Invite comments.** Comments create engagement and engagements create broader reach. The Facebook algorithm rewards content that is drawing attention. At the end of your post, offer a question that invites your followers to comment in a positive way. Something like, "Tell us what you like about your child's school," or "Please share your family's favorite memory from the first semester."



## Instagram

**Apply the lessons learned from Facebook.** Instagram and Facebook are all part of the same company and they have a lot of similarities. Both feeds reward engagements and both reward people who use the story feature, which puts you at the top of your followers' feeds.

**Use Hashtags.** One way that Instagram is different from Facebook is that, on Instagram, there is much more utility in hashtags. You can use dozens of them. Just make sure that those hashtags are going to help people looking for your content to find it. Don't be too general. For example, if you use #education, you will get lost in many many posts about education. If you use #DallasISD, you are more likely to connect with people interested in Dallas ISD. Figure out the hashtags used by key voices in your community.

**Use a vertical photo** rather than a horizontal one to take up the maximum amount of real estate on someone's phone as they scroll (H/T: [ESV Creative](#))

**Ask questions** to generate comments. Then reply by thanking them for commenting.

**Remember that Instagram isn't only for the kids.** Yes, it's most popular among those 17-29. But according to the Pew Research Center, 48% of adults between 30 and 49 are on Instagram. That's more than a large enough potential following to make the time you spend on Instagram worth it.

## LinkedIn

**Use links.** LinkedIn tells us that posts with links to articles or web pages get more engagement than those without links. This is a great way to post something short and point your audience toward more information on your website. However, mix it up. Variety in social media content is always good, and a compelling post without links from time to time will do great.

**Don't forget the visuals.** We think of LinkedIn as a more buttoned-up form of social media, and it is. However, visual content is just as important as it is on the other platforms and it might even stand out more. Use those photos and videos effectively.

**Keep it human.** Again, LinkedIn is a little more stuffy than other platforms, but that's an opportunity to stand out with photos and videos of kids, teachers and everything that makes a school such a visually compelling place.



## Twitter

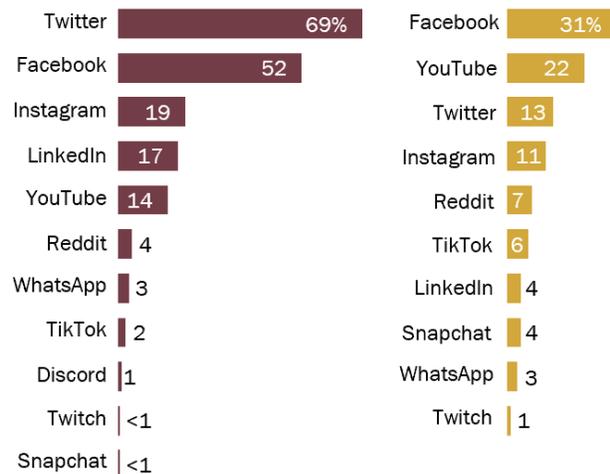
**Talk to teachers.** While Twitter may not be as widely adopted by the general public as other platforms, educators tend to be quite active on it. This is a good way to communicate with your teachers and other district staff about news coming out of the district.

**Twitter shapes conversations.** Again, it's not the most-used platform, but it is the most closely followed by journalists and one of the best ways to get in front of those who shape the news. Make sure that you are following all local print, broadcast and online journalists in your community and they will follow you back. If you are struggling to connect with them, try a Twitter Direct Message.

**Use Twitter to hone your message.** You should be able to explain why the district is proposing a VATR election in a single tweet. The character limit is a gift — it will help you refine your narrative so that you can tell a short, simple, compelling story.

### Twitter is by far the most common social media site U.S. journalists use for their jobs, but the public most often turns to Facebook for news

*% of U.S. journalists who say \_\_\_ is the social media site they use most or second most in their job*      *% of U.S. adults who say they regularly get news on ...*



Note: Discord was not asked about in the survey of U.S. adults.  
 Source: Survey of U.S. journalists conducted Feb. 16-March 17, 2022. Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 26-Aug. 8, 2021.

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## CONCLUSION

Remember that the VATR election is a great opportunity to not only proactively present facts, but to tell the story of your district — where it is and where it wants to go. With a clear narrative and simple messages, a district can help explain the rationale for presenting the VATR proposal and help the community understand the choices it faces at a particular moment in time. Identify your key themes and then convey those themes in compelling ways. Present information to your community and leave the electioneering to others.

The Texas School Coalition is happy to visit with any school district leader who has further questions after reading this toolkit. Please do not hesitate to call our office at (512) 732-9072 or find us online at [txsc.org](http://txsc.org).

# APPENDIX

The following pieces of example content offer ideas for how to communicate about a VATR proposal in your community. Each VATR election is different, but we hope to demonstrate some best practices and offer inspiration for other districts as you work on your own messaging.

**One-page handout.** This is the type of document that can be circulated with key audiences electronically and in printed form. This one-pager is not cluttered with words and it points to a few clear benefits: higher pay for teachers and staff, as well as greater state aid. It uses a photo effectively and succinctly provides context around how long it has been since the tax rate last increased. It is straightforward — there are no semantic games.

**Arlington ISD**  
**VATRE**  
Voter-Approval Tax Rate Election

The Arlington ISD Board of Trustees has called for a Voter-Approval Tax Rate Election (VATRE) on Nov. 3, 2020. State law requires school districts to seek voter approval to raise their tax rate above a prescribed amount. Arlington ISD has never had a VATRE and its Maintenance and Operations (M&O) tax rate has remained the same or declined in each of the past 15 years.

**LEARN MORE**  
[aisd.net/vatre](http://aisd.net/vatre)

**WHY CALL A VATRE?**

<p><b>TEACHER PAY</b></p> <p>Arlington ISD has lost ground in competitive market pay for teachers over the last several years. A VATRE would be used to increase teacher compensation.</p>	<p><b>ACCESS TO ADDITIONAL STATE FUNDING</b></p> <p>The proposed tax rate increase would generate approximately \$18 million in state aid that the district would not receive otherwise.</p>	<p><b>STAFF PAY</b></p> <p>Arlington ISD would use the VATRE to increase pay for the approximately 4,000 support staff who provide educational support services for students, drive buses, clean and maintain schools and provide security services.</p>
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*If the VATRE is approved by voters in November, the total tax rate would increase 8.84 cents. It would generate approximately \$56 million in additional revenue for the district, a combination of tax revenue and state aid.*

**EARLY VOTING Oct. 13-30, 2020**   **Election Day Nov. 3, 2020**

Source: Arlington ISD

**Direct mail piece.** This colorful piece of mail from the school district presents factual information about the district's finances and about the date of the election, but it does not creep over into advocacy. It uses photos, charts, and text to convey a lot of information in an engaging way, especially with the chart making comparisons to other school districts. The context around school finance reform is also effective.



**Want to Learn More?**

To learn more about the Voter-Approved Tax Ratification Election (VATRE), visit our Alamo Heights ISD website at [www.ahisd.net](http://www.ahisd.net) and select the About the District tab.

Attend our Community Information Meeting set for **October 14, at 6 p.m.**, in the Oaks at Alamo Heights High School.

**Early Voting/Election Day:**

Early voting begins on **October 18** and runs through **October 29**.

**Election Day is November 2.**



NON PROFIT #1305

Alamo Heights ISD  
7101 Broadway  
San Antonio, Texas 78209




**ALAMO HEIGHTS ISD  
VOTER-APPROVED  
TAX RATE  
ELECTION 2021**

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**VOTER-APPROVED TAX RATE ELECTION**

**Just the Facts:**

The Alamo Heights Independent School District Board of Trustees called for a Voter-Approved Tax Rate Election (VATRE) that will be held on November 2, 2021.

A tax rate election is a special election called by a school district's Board of Trustees, asking voters to approve a tax rate proposal.

A landmark school funding law passed by the Texas Legislature in 2019, HB3, provided more funding to the majority of Texas school districts; however, Alamo Heights ISD received less funding than other districts across the state. If approved by voters in Alamo Heights ISD, the VATRE would generate an additional \$1.4 million dollars to allow the district to provide competitive salaries for our employees and educational programming for students.

This would **not** result in a tax rate increase; rather, it would reduce homeowners' property tax rates, creating the lowest total tax rate in 10 years. The decrease in property tax rates presents a unique opportunity for AHISD taxpayers to raise more local revenue.

The incremental new revenue would not be subject to recapture by the state; rather, it **would stay right here in Alamo Heights ISD**, to provide competitive salaries for our employees and educational programming for students.




**Did You Know?**

School Taxes are levied in two parts:

- Maintenance & Operations or M&O, which funds general operations like building maintenance and salaries.
- Interest & Sinking or I&S, which funds the payment of bonded indebtedness.

AHISD Tax Rates			
YEAR	M&O TAX RATE	I&S RATE	TOTAL TAX RATE
2020-2021 Actual	\$976.4	\$22	\$1,198.4
2021-2022 Recommended	\$993.4 (includes "golden" parcels)	\$20	\$1,193.4
Decrease			<b>-\$5.0</b>



DISTRICT	BEGINNING TEACHER SALARY	AVERAGE TEACHER SALARY
Northside ISD	\$55,310	\$59,887
South San Antonio ISD	\$54,500	\$58,645
Harlandale ISD	\$54,150	\$58,643
Medina Valley ISD	\$53,710	\$57,000
San Antonio ISD	\$53,400	\$57,081
Fort Sam Houston ISD	\$53,000	\$56,648
North East ISD	\$53,000	\$56,837
Judson ISD	\$52,552	\$56,270
East Central ISD	\$51,500	\$56,706
Schertz-Cibola Universal City ISD	\$50,600	\$41,279
<b>Alamo Heights ISD</b>	<b>\$52,950</b> 8th Ranking in Bexar County	<b>\$57,880</b> 6th Ranking in Bexar County

\* 2020-2021 Salary Comparison by Texas Association of School Boards (TASB)

**What does a VATRE mean for Alamo Heights ISD?**

- Alamo Heights ISD taxpayers will see no tax rate increase
- The new tax rate will be the lowest rate in the past 10 years
- The new tax rate will generate an additional \$1.4 million dollars that will not be subject to recapture, which means all of the money generated will stay in our school district
- The additional revenue generated will allow Alamo Heights ISD to provide competitive salaries for our employees and educational programming for students

Source: Alamo Heights ISD

**Social media post one.** This post from the fictitious Coalition ISD presents two different choices for the public. It doesn't hide the fact that the tax rate will be lower if the VATR proposal fails, but it also makes clear that the tax rate is still decreasing either way. It frames the choice right there in the post and then invites the reader to go to a web page for more information.



Coalition ISD voters will have the opportunity this fall to add 4 cents to our local school tax rate in order to generate additional funding for teacher salaries and other local educational needs

## IMPACT OF NOV. 8 VATR PROPOSAL

A vote **FOR** the VATR proposal:

↓ Tax rate would be 3.71 cents lower than last year

Average Coalition ISD tax bill decreases by \$95.62



Generates \$10 million for Coalition ISD schools



A vote **AGAINST** the VATR proposal:

↓ Tax rate would be 7.71 cents lower than last year

Average Coalition ISD tax bill decreases by \$198.72



Generates no additional funding for Coalition ISD schools



**Social media post two.** As mentioned earlier, it's important to contemplate the questions and confusions that members of the community might encounter as they learn about the VATR election. Social media is a good place to answer those questions, especially in a series of posts like this one, because it saves the community from having to search for answers on a website.



**Comal ISD**  
@cisidnews

...

**Q:** Can revenue generated by VATRE be used for bond projects, other district needs?

**A:** No, Board of Trustees approved a resolution in Aug. stating revenue generated by VATRE would be used solely for teacher & staff compensation, not for bldgs, buses, etc. [comalisd.org/vatre/](http://comalisd.org/vatre/).



Source: Comal ISD Twitter

**Social media post three.** This post from the fictitious Coalition ISD attempts to spell out the impact of the VATR revenue clearly and accessibly, without getting bogged down in technical language or acronyms and without sending the reader searching for information elsewhere.

**Coalition ISD**  
1m ·

The VATR proposal on the Nov. 8 ballot would raise \$15 million for education in Coalition ISD by adding 4 pennies to the tax rate. If approved, the rate would still be lower than last year's.

### The VATR proposal on the Nov. 8 ballot

-   
Smaller classes
-   
Higher teacher pay
-   
More individual attention

Like      Comment