



Smoky Valley Public Schools USD 400
Patron Telephone Survey 2025
Executive Summary
December 5, 2025

In November 2025, the Smoky Valley Public Schools USD 400 engaged ExcellenceK12 to conduct a brief telephone survey with 250 randomly selected, head-of-household, registered voters living within the boundaries of the district.

Calls were placed to landlines and cell phone numbers, and the completed interviews were divided into three geographic segments, with the number of completed interviews for each area based on the general population pattern, according to district leadership. The data collected has a Margin of Error of plus or minus 5.5%. (The Margin of Error within the demographic and subgroups is higher because of the smaller number of respondents.)

The results of the survey are as follows:

“Grading” the district’s performance

Overall, survey findings showed the Smoky Valley Public Schools has support from its patrons.

Based on a 5-point weighted scale – where 5.00=A, 4.00=B, 3.00=C and 2.00=D and 1.00=F – the top three factors – plus the district’s overall performance (**3.74**) – received a score of 3.70 or higher. An overall score of 5.00 is only possible if all 250 respondents answered each statement with an A.

The top-performing areas were:

- Quality of education – 3.96
- Quality of the school facilities – 3.91
- Preparation of students for college, vocational training, or employment – 3.86

Strengths and areas for improvement

The evaluation portion of the survey continued with two open-ended questions offering respondents the chance to share their thoughts on the district's strengths and on areas where it could improve.

All 250 responses to each question were read and, where possible, coded, based on common words, phrases, and ideas to pinpoint the most frequently mentioned areas. Those that were outside of these "common" responses or that had more than one idea in the response are shown in verbatim form to the right of the related charts in the dashboard, with minor edits for punctuation, spelling, and grammar.

In doing so, "Teachers/staff/administration" topped the list of strengths (72 mentions). This was followed by "Provides a good education" (46 mentions) and "Don't know" (42 mentions).

In terms of areas needing improvement, that list was led by "Don't know" (70 mentions), followed by "Watch spending/budget" (49 mentions) and "Pay teachers more" (34 mentions).

Having "Don't know" as the top response for 28% of the participants on this question is good news because it means a notable percentage of the population has no specific concerns or issues.

Note: See the addendum and the dashboard for all the coded and verbatim responses.

Statement exercise

In the next section of the survey, respondents were asked how strongly they would agree with four statements people might make about the Smoky Valley Public Schools. At least 85% of the respondents said they "Strongly agree" or "Somewhat agree" with all but one of the statements.

The three high-scoring statements of agreement were:

- It's important to keep our school buildings up to date and in good condition to protect our community's investment in those facilities – 93%
- I'm willing to support building improvements to make sure the quality of education in the Smoky Valley Public Schools is equal to or better than that of neighboring districts – 86%
- The quality of the Smoky Valley Public Schools provides a strong foundation for property values in our area – 85%

The remaining statement – "The district does a good job of listening and responding to community opinions" – only had 41% agreement from the respondents. This is not surprising, as the lowest scoring factor in the grading section was "The district's efforts to involve the community in decision-making" (3.42).

Support or opposition for potential projects

The next set of questions presented six different project ideas to address the district's long-term needs. After each was described, respondents were asked if including this project in a future bond election would make them "More likely to vote in favor," "More likely to vote against" or would it "Make no difference" in their voting decision.

Four of the projects stood out, in terms of the level of support (descriptions truncated):

- Perform maintenance at all facilities, including various interior finishes, HVAC, plumbing, electrical, etc. – 74% "More likely to vote in favor"
- Construction of an addition for the new Ag Program – 68%
- Make playground improvements at Soderstrom Elementary School and Smoky Valley Middle School – 56%
- Renovation of existing fine arts facilities at Smoky Valley Middle School and Smoky Valley High School – 53%

The support for the remaining two projects dropped below 30%, and more respondents said they would be "more likely to vote against" the bond election than those who said "more likely to vote in favor":

- Construction of a new youth baseball and softball field – 27% (41% against)
- Construction of a district-owned sports complex – 25% (40% against)

Having the opponents outnumber the supporters for the last two projects – considering the stronger support for others – indicates a high number of respondents have some concerns about these particular projects.

Support or opposition for a ballot issue

After hearing all six project ideas, respondents were provided four different tax level increase options (for the owner of \$200,000 home) and asked to provide their level of support. Respondents also were reminded the district's property tax rate was reduced in 2016, following the payoff of the New High School Construction bond issue.

Less than one-third (30%) of the respondents said they would "Strongly support" or "Support" a \$500 per year tax increase. Keeping the Margin of Error of plus or minus 5.5% in mind, support at the top tax level ranged from 25% to 36%.

When opponents and those who were undecided were asked about their support for a \$400 per year tax increase, total support slightly increased to 33%.

Those who did not support or were undecided about the previous tax increase amount were then asked if they would support a \$300 per year tax increase. Support increased to 38%.

Continuing opponents and undecided respondents were then asked if they would support a \$200 per year tax increase. Support increased significantly (by 14%) to 52%.

Keeping the Margin of Error of plus or minus 5.5% in mind, support at the lowest tax level ranged from 47% to 58%.

Additionally, respondents were asked how strongly they would support combining sales tax and property tax to minimize the property tax rate increase on the proposed bond election.

More than half of the respondents (55%) said they would “Strongly support” or “Support” this proposal.

Communication from the district

To determine the best way to communicate with patrons, the last question of the survey asked respondents how they receive news about the district.

For this open-ended question, all the responses were reviewed and, where possible, coded, based on common words, phrases, and ideas to pinpoint the most frequently mentioned areas. Those that were outside of these “common” responses or had more than one idea in the response are shown in verbatim form below the related chart in the dashboard, with minor edits for punctuation, spelling, and grammar.

Respondents said their top source for district news, other than friends and neighbors, was “Facebook/social media” (76 mentions/30%). The second-top response was “Local newspaper/*The Lindsborg News-Record*” (38 mentions/15%).

The other top sources were:

- Website (36 mentions/14%)
- Newsletters (31 mentions/12%)
- Email (28 mentions/11%)

Note: See the addendum and the dashboard for all the coded and verbatim responses.

Final analysis

When taking into consideration all the sections and responses in the survey, we see a district that is doing well. The grades are on par with other districts we work with. The strengths and areas of improvement revealed no surprises. The “civic-minded” section shows a patron population who cares about the future of the district and the community.

The projects presented were, for the most part, appealing to most patrons. It is no surprise the two sports-oriented projects received lower support, as that is typical in almost every district in Kansas.

And while the tax tolerance questions were not what the district was hoping for, it was not bad news. Or, at least, it was not surprising news. A \$200 per year tax increase has been about the ceiling for the last five to seven years in Kansas. Getting 52% support for a \$200 per year increase is a home run for the district.

If the district is able to combine that figure with an appropriate sales tax increase, many of the projects could be attainable. The district should be happy with these results and plan a future bond election accordingly.

Note: All data from the survey are available in the district's dashboard. Additionally, the responses to the open-ended questions related to areas of strength and areas for improvement, as well as district news sources, are shown in the addendum and the dashboard.