Introduction

Overview: The Midland 2023 bond election campaign was a comprehensive, multifaceted effort aimed at informing and engaging the Midland community on the bond proposal, its benefits, and its long-term impact on the school district and community. The comprehensive Proposition A bond program included a lofty $1.415 billion package that would replace the existing Midland and Legacy high schools with new, comprehensive 6A campuses; provide district-wide safety and security upgrades; renovate more than 30 aging facilities; convert a high school and freshman center into two additional middle schools; and construct a new elementary school. These projects align the district's facilities with anticipated growing enrollment figures and address safety and security needs. This bond was no small feat for the district as the community had voted down five consecutive bonds addressing secondary needs over the past twenty years. Community support and trust were a major hurdle during the bond process, and the district remained committed to providing consistent communication and transparency related to bond efforts.

Problem: The Midland community continues to grow, with demographers projecting an average increase of over 400 students yearly. Midland ISD surpassed this projection by enrolling over 1,000 new students during the 2023-24 school year. Many of the facilities used by Midland ISD are outdated, including parts of Midland High School that are 96 years old and Legacy High School aging at 63 years, and no longer equipped to accommodate the increasing number of students and provide adequate environments for 21st century learning. As a result, overcrowding has forced schools to rely on

multiple portable buildings to alleviate congestion. Without the passage of a school bond, MISD was projected to need an additional 130 additional portables added in the district over the next 10 years to accommodate growth. These additional portables would result in an estimated $19.5 million cost to the district. Since the 1990s, the Midland ISD community voted down five consecutive attempts to address secondary facility needs. The most recent one, in 2019, was defeated by just 26 votes. The bond project also faced opposition from multiple fronts with at least three anti-bond groups that were at the forefront.

Objective: The primary goal of the campaign was to secure voter approval for the bond, which would fund critical safety and security improvements, address increasing enrollment, and allow for grade reconfiguration moving from a PreK-6, 7-8, 9, 10-12 model to a PreK-5, 6-8, 9-12 model. The bond package also included the conversion of an existing high school and freshman campus to become the fifth and sixth middle schools for the district and added an elementary school.

Campaign Theme

- **Overall Theme**: The overarching message focused on improvements to safety and security, addressing enrollment growth, allowing for grade reconfiguration, and providing improvements to aging facilities.
- **Key Messaging**:

- Transparent and thorough communication was critical leading up to the bond election. The district focused on providing factual information related to the key areas the bond aimed to address.
- Messaging was focused on the four main areas of concern for the district - safety and security, growth, grade reconfiguration, and addressing aging facilities.
- Highlighted fiscal responsibility, detailing how the bond funds would be spent.

Goals

- **Measurable Goals**:
  - **Voter Turnout**: Increase voter participation from district staff and the 18-35 demographic as compared to the 2019 school bond.
  - **Approval Rate**: Secure a minimum of 51% voter approval.
- **Community Engagement**: Host a minimum of 60 community presentations. Midland ISD alone delivered 64 presentations.

Campaign Strategies

- **Bond Planning Committee:** A committee of 100 community members, MISD staff, students, and parents was created to develop the bond program. This strategic effort was in place to glean as much community input as possible to

alleviate a concern that previous bond packages did not meet the needs and vision of the community as a whole.

- **Media Engagement**: A total of 23 press releases were distributed to the community regarding bond planning, resulting in local media covering over 85 stories related to the bond.
    - **Social Media**: There were over 121 posts related to Bond 2023 across social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (X) during the active campaign.
- **RoadShow Events:**
    - Community Group Meetings
    - Listen & Learns
    - Campus Visits
    - Hosted two campus tours at each of the two existing comprehensive high schools for community members to learn about the bond program and see the existing campuses firsthand.
- 400 “Your Voice Matters” yard signs that included early voting and voting day information were delivered to campuses and district facilities. (in English and Spanish)
- Stickers with Midland Bond 2023 branding were distributed to all campuses and the district’s Central Office.
- Mailed letter from the Superintendent to all parents of MISD students
- Campus Posters (in English and Spanish)
- High School campus digital board signage

- Text messages to parents and staff
- Emails to parents and staff
- Weekly information in the parent and staff newsletters
- One-pager fact sheet sent home to all elementary students (in English and Spanish)
- Early Voting Maps distributed
- Videos of renderings distributed across social media
- Videos of renderings played at home football games including the Crosstown Rivalry Game with an attendance of 11,500
- Bond package design survey was distributed to the entire Midland community
    - 3,000 respondents
- **Partnerships**: Partnered with community leaders, local businesses, and parent-teacher organizations to spread the message through factual presentations presented throughout the community. The Midland community, including well-known oil and gas companies, small businesses, Midland College, the Midland Chamber of Commerce, the Midland Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, families with children in private schools, private schools, and so many more in the community publicly supported the bond program.
- **Digital Presence**:
    - In partnership with Pfluger Architects, a dedicated bond campaign website was created, midlandbond2023.com, with detailed information, FAQs, and an option to sign up for updates.

- Sent bond specific information in parent and staff newsletters, text messages, and emails with detailed information, potential renderings, and voting information.
- Relied heavily on communicating through social media. While this method of bond communication was originally thought to not be a wise strategy, it quickly became apparent this channel was the best way to communicate facts about the bond program and provided the most engagement.

Frequency of Contact with the Target Audience

- **Social Media**: Two to four posts per week were initiated leading up to the election, including information about the average facility age in Midland ISD, safety and security information, enrollment growth, and grade reconfiguration. Also, aerial views of two new high schools, exterior rendering for a new elementary school, and safety and security upgrades were shared. We also included tax and voting information.
- **Email Campaigns**: Special messaging in the district's weekly newsletters to all staff and parents. Information in these newsletters directed people to the midlandbond2023.com website for information about the bond and information about voting.
- **Text Messages:** Parents and staff members received weekly text messages on voting information such as registration deadlines, where to vote, extended voting hours, and when voting ended.

- **Special Meetings**: Sessions with community organizations to discuss key topics related to the bond, including aging facilities, safety and security, and the bond's main focus areas.
- **Bond Advisory Committee:** Gathered members from the community who were interested in the bond. The purpose of the bond advisory committee is to guide and support the planning and execution of bond proposals, ensuring community involvement and input. The committee evaluates district needs, prioritizes projects, promotes transparency, and communicates the bond's benefits to foster trust and engagement.

6. Timeframe of the Campaign

- **Planning Phase**: 18 months of work took place with the Long Range Planning Committee leading up to the development of the Bond Planning Committee. The Bond Planning Committee put forth six months of work before calling for a bond in August of 2023 for a November 2023 election.
- **Active Campaign**: The main campaign efforts spanned 10 weeks leading up to the bond election (late August 2023 – early November 2023). However, community took place leading up to the calling of the bond including detailed information about each bond planning committee meeting.
- **Election Day**: November 7, 2023, with final pushes in the last 2 weeks.

Data Tracking and Analysis

- **Surveys and Polls**: Conducted a community survey to gauge community input on the preferred components of the bond program. 3,000 survey responses were collected.
- **Voter Turnout Data**: Used previous voter turnout data to identify under-engaged demographics and neighborhoods, tailoring specific outreach efforts toward these groups.
- **Event Attendance**: Tracked attendance at community events to measure in-person engagement.
- **Website Traffic:** Website traffic from Midlandbond2023.com indicates a spike in interest during the active campaign, highlighting the topics that captured the attention of visitors.

Results

- **Voter Turnout**: Voters approve Midland ISD $1.415 Billion School Bond - the 8th largest school bond in Texas history and the largest bond to pass in the history of Midland.
- **Approval Rate**: The bond was approved 56.12% (12,404 votes for) to 43.88% (9,699 votes against) with 22,103 voters participating in the election.
- **Community Awareness**:
    - **Social Media Engagement**: Social media posts had a 3,716.37 average reach per post, 76,444 engagements total, and a total of 386,867 impressions.

- **Email Campaign Success**: Open rates for the email campaigns averaged 40%, with high click-through rates to the website and information portals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Midland 2023 bond election campaign represented a significant and strategic initiative to engage the community in discussions about the future of education in the district. With a substantial $1.415 billion proposal, the campaign focused on critical improvements, including the construction of new schools and vital safety upgrades. Given the historical challenges of previous bond proposals, the district's emphasis on transparency and consistent communication played a crucial role in rebuilding community trust. Ultimately, this comprehensive approach not only aimed to meet the immediate needs of the school district but also positioned it for future growth, ensuring that educational facilities align with the needs of a growing student population.