



The  
UNIVERSITY  
of VERMONT

**James M. Jeffords Center's  
*Vermont Legislative Research Service***



**Exit Poll of Voters in the June 7, 2011 Vote on the Chittenden East Regional Education School  
District Proposal**

Vermont's Act 153, passed on June 3, 2010, "stimulates voluntary mergers of school districts, specifies responsibilities for supervisory unions (SU), and addresses the inclusion of secondary students with disabilities in senior year activities and ceremonies." The act is based on expectations that consolidation will increase educational opportunities, increase economies of scale, and enhance cost efficiencies. Under the act, Vermont school districts are encouraged to form Regional Educational School Districts (RED), a specialized type of Union School District (USD), through a school district merger incentives program detailed in sections two through five. In addition, the act provides, tax incentives, a merger template for school districts interested in forming a RED, as well as stipulations of responsibilities associated with supervisory unions and superintendents subsequent to mergers.<sup>1</sup>

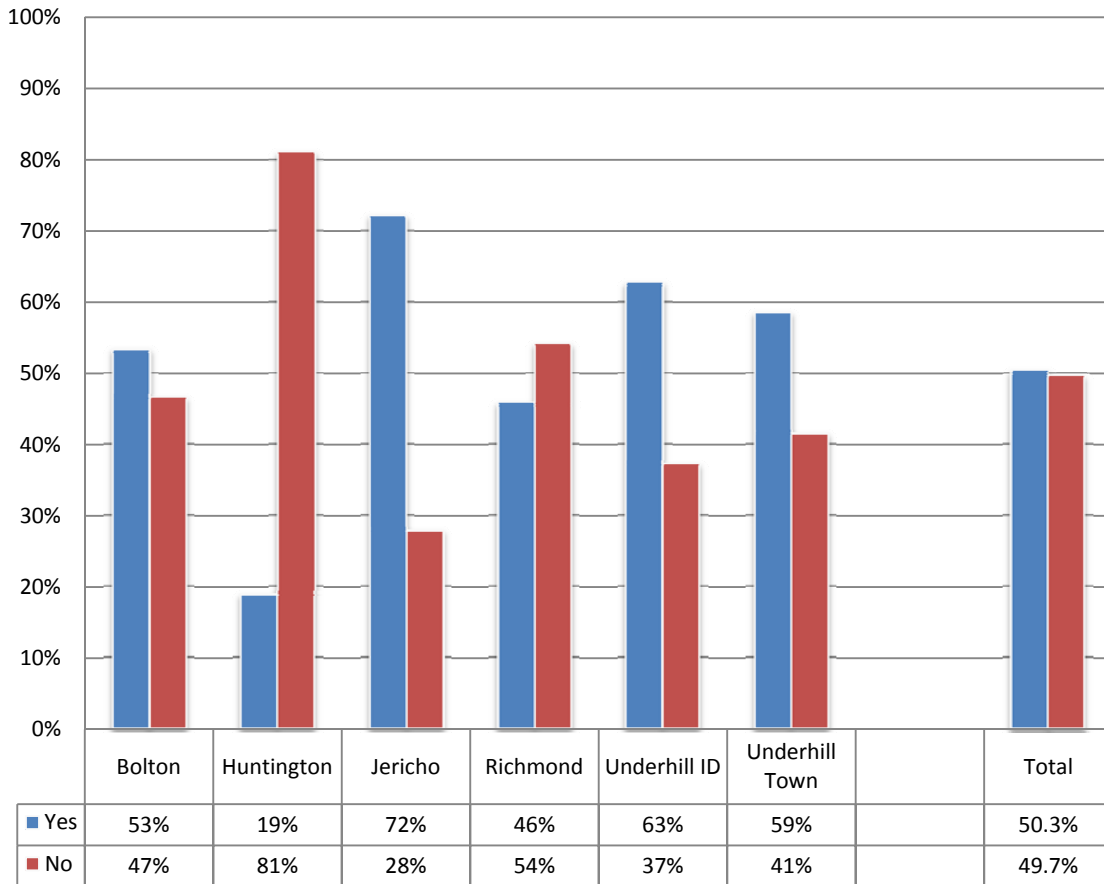
On June 7, 2011, voters in the Chittenden East Supervisor Union District (CESU) voted on and rejected a plan to create a single K-12 RED covering the school districts in Bolton, Richmond, Huntington, Jericho, and Underhill. In order for a consolidation proposal to be accepted all towns must vote in favor of the RED, and the plan was voted down in two communities (Huntington and Richmond). The CESU RED proposal was the second such rejection by voters; a RED proposal for Addison Northwest Supervisory Union was rejected earlier.<sup>2</sup> Election results by town are shown in Figure 1 below.

The Vermont Legislative Research Service (VLRS) and the James M. Jeffords Center conducted exit polling at all voting locations in the Chittenden East School District for that referendum. This report details the results of the exit poll.

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<sup>1</sup> Vermont House of Representatives, *Act 153* (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Thatcher Moats, "School Merger Law Has Tough Going," *The Barre-Montpelier Times Argus*, June 19, 2001, p. A1.



**Figure 1: Vote on RED proposal for Chittenden East Supervisory Union, June 7, 2011.**  
**Source: Chittenden East Supervisory Union, accessed June 20, 2011,**  
<http://www.cesu.k12.vt.us/>.

### Exit Poll Methodology

On Tuesday, June 7, 2011 eight University of Vermont (UVM) students conduct the exit poll under the supervision of the Jeffords Center and the Vermont Legislative Research Service. Due to larger populations in Richmond and Jericho, two students were assigned to administer the exit poll in these locations. Bolton, Huntington, Underhill Center and Underhill ID only required one student per polling location. Three towns (Jericho, Underhill Center, and Underhill ID) were chosen by a random selection process to be polled in the morning from 7am to 1pm, and the other three towns (Richmond, Bolton, Huntington) were polled in the afternoon from 1pm to 7pm. Each exit poll interview was conducted outside the voting location. The student interviewers were instructed to ask the first person that walked by for an interview. Upon completion of the interview, the next available voter was approached. As seen in Figure 2, a total of 366 voters were interviewed at the six locations. For this sample of 366 voters the sampling error is less than plus or minus 5 percentage points with 95% confidence after adjusting for the finite population of actual voters.

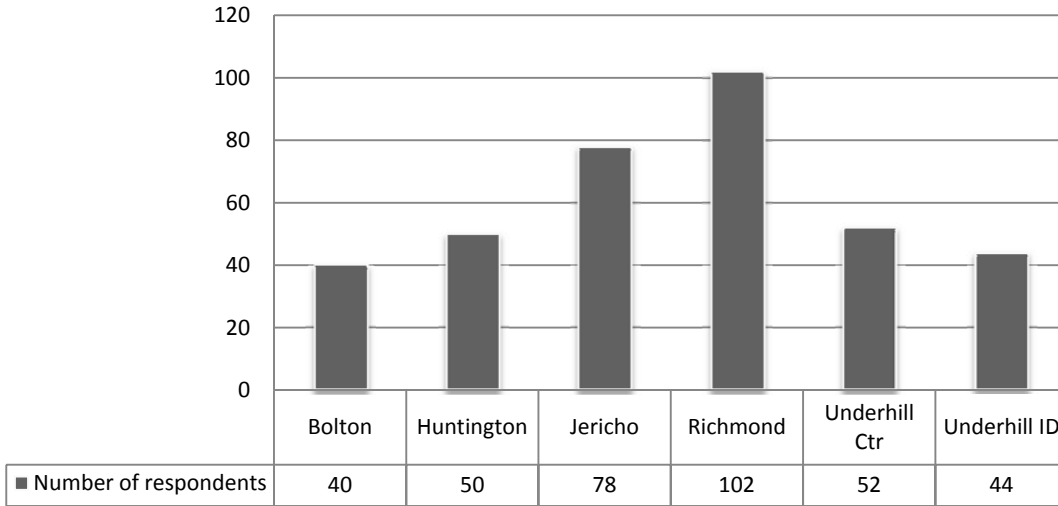


Figure 2: Number of Respondents by Polling Place (total = 366)

### Results

Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents who were in favor or opposed to the proposal to merge school districts to form a single K-12 Regional Education District.<sup>3</sup> Although slightly more than half the respondents either strongly favored or somewhat favored the proposal, the merger did not pass because both Huntington and Richmond opposed the proposal. Forty percent of respondents either somewhat or strongly opposed the proposal.

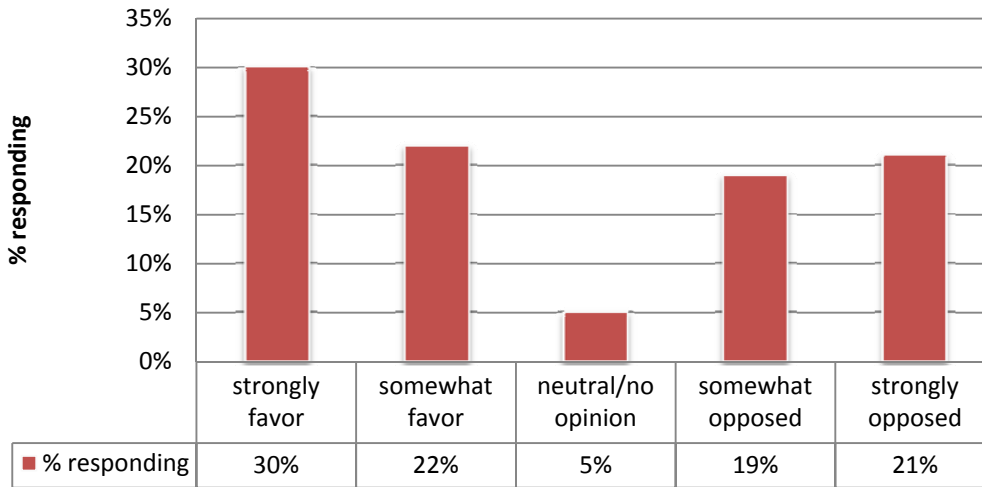


Figure 3: “How strongly do you favor or oppose the proposal to merge school districts to form a single K-12 Regional Education District.”

<sup>3</sup> Three percent of respondents are missing from this chart because they either did not know or refused to answer the question (answers 8 and 9 respectively).

The benefit that respondents most often thought would result from the merger of school districts was the opportunity to save money, with 33 percent of the response (See Figure 4 below). The two responses most often cited following the opportunity to save money were “Increase educational opportunities” and “Enhance the quality of education”; both of these benefits were noted by a significant portion of the respondents and together they amount to 38 percent. Therefore, a strong segment of the respondents appear to indicate that merging school districts will result in a better education for students. Those respondents who selected “other” as their response (n = 33) cited expectations of increased administrative efficiency and the equity of educational opportunities as benefits.

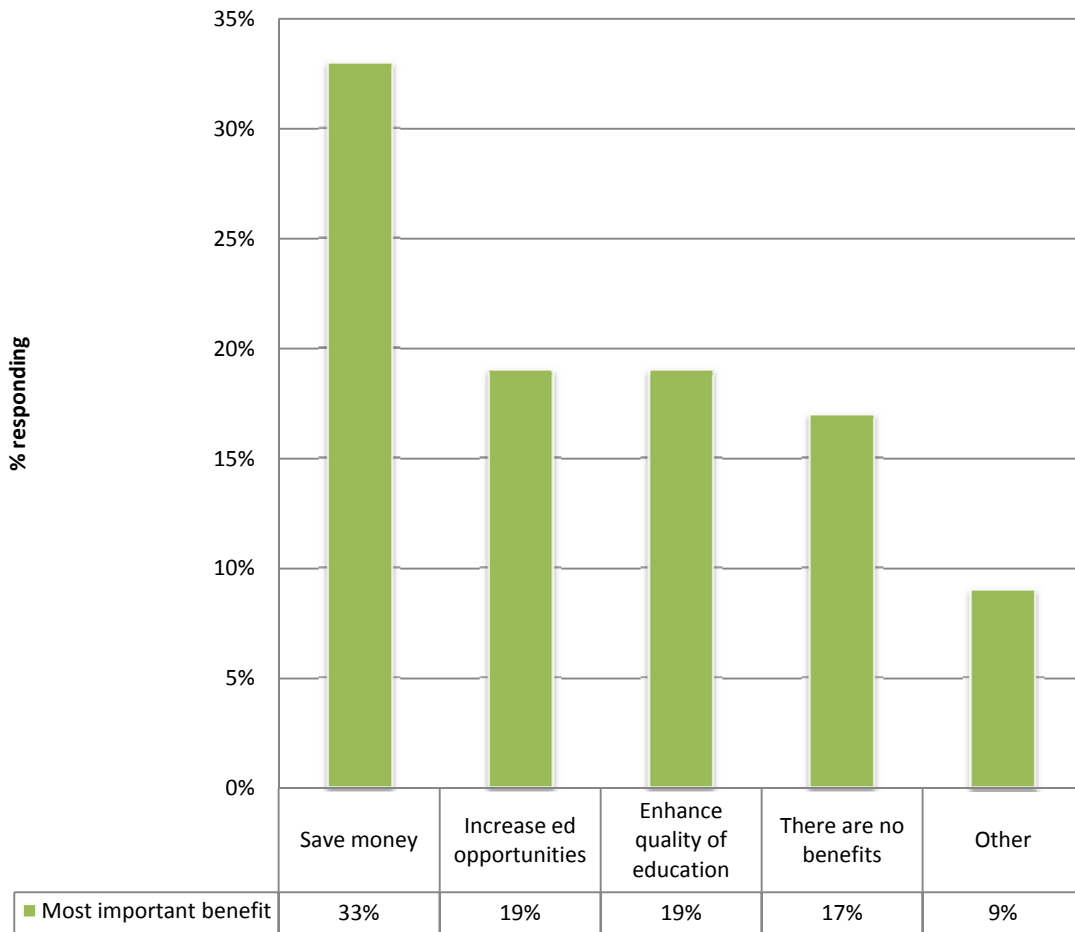


Figure 4: “Which of the following do you think will be the most important benefit of merging school districts?”

The dominant *concern* among the respondents, with 47% of the response, was a loss of local control over the schools. A distant second, with 17%, was the concern that schools will be closed as a result of the merger. Of twenty “other” responses, eight cited multiple primary concerns including harm to the quality of education and the closure of local schools, along with the loss of local control. Additional responses included a Huntington constituent’s concern that the mergers will bring little benefit to the Huntington school district, a comment that there is too much speculation about the benefits of merging schools and not a sufficient amount of supporting data, and finally one suggestion that the public may become confused or upset by the merger process and lose confidence in the school system.

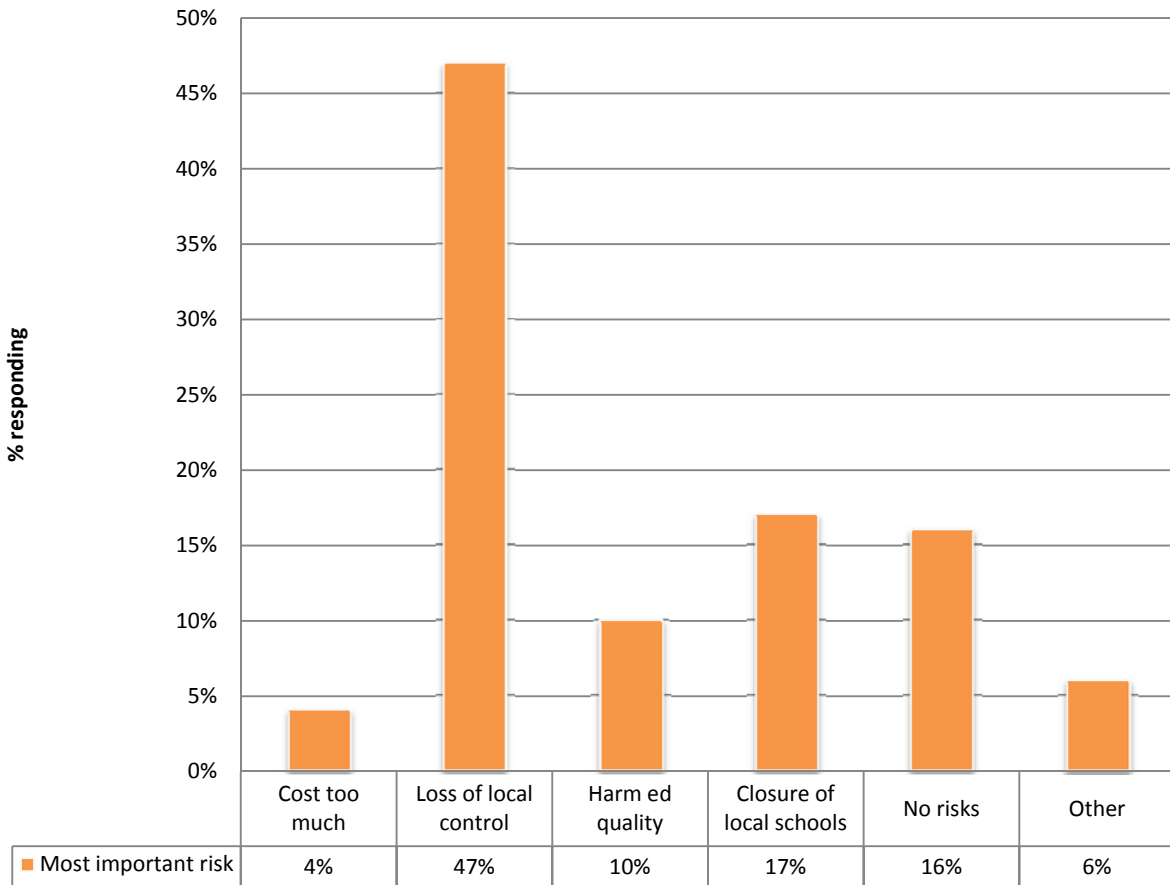


Figure 5: “Which of the following do you think is the most important risk about merging school districts?” \_\_\_\_\_

Respondents with a family member either currently enrolled or soon to be enrolled in the school district were evenly divided over the issue of merging school districts (see Figure 6 below). The merger received greater support from respondents without a family member in the school system than from those with a family member in the school system. Fifty-seven percent of respondents without a family member in the schools voted for the merger, compared to 49 percent of those with a family member in the schools.

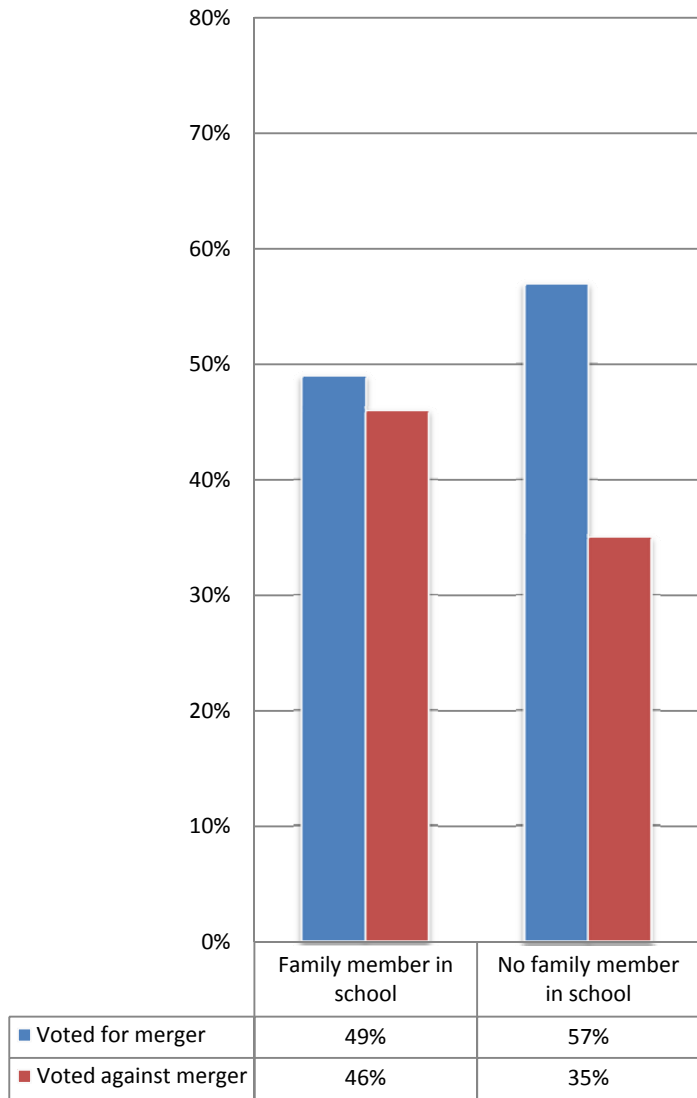


Figure 6: Responses to the question “Did you vote for the proposal to merge school districts into a single K-12 Regional Education District?” by presence of a family member “currently enrolled or soon to be enrolled in this school district.”

The news media was cited by a majority of respondents (43 percent) as the way in which they learned of the current proposal to merge school districts (see Figure 7). Following news media was the school district as the source of information with 32 percent of respondents. A number of respondents in Huntington identified the “Front Porch” internet discussion forum as an important source of information (n = 9). It is important to note that during the election campaign some information appeared in multiple formats.

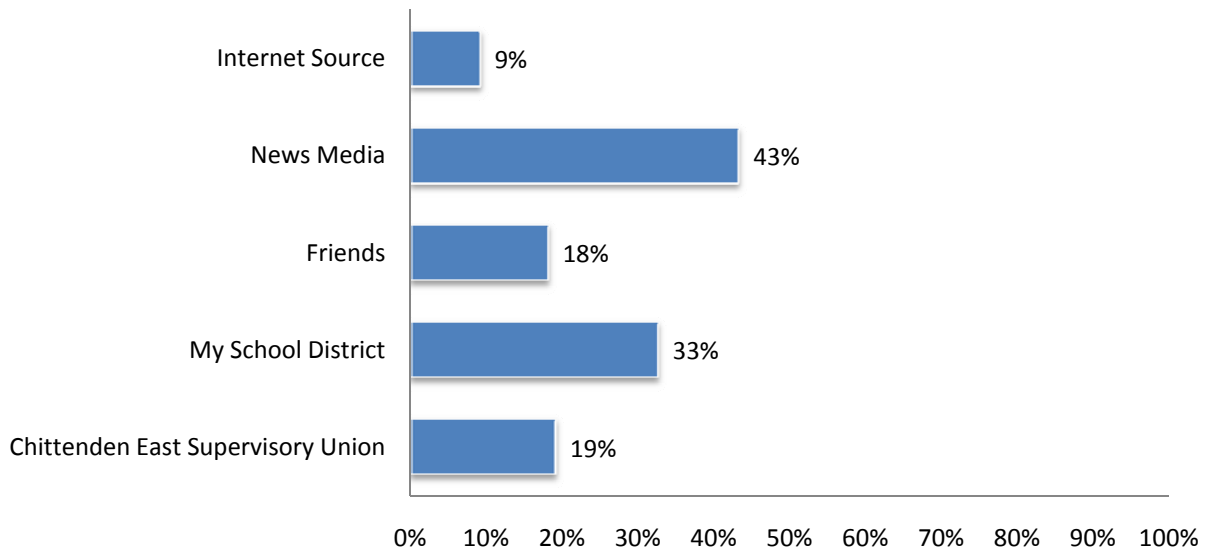


Figure 7: “How did you hear about the current proposal to join school districts to form a single K-12 Regional Education District?”

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### Conclusion

The rejection of voluntary merger in Chittenden East has important implications for the State of Vermont. After two failed elections, other supervisory unions may face an uphill battle in future elections and new proposals will likely need to demonstrate greater public support before school and supervisory union board members can pledge support. Even if a majority of votes are in favor, proponents of mergers will need to convince voters in the districts where they are least popular, and especially those who have family members enrolled in local schools. For future merger proposals to be successful, supporters of the proposed mergers will need to make use of the most frequently cited benefit (save money) and address the most prominent risk (loss of local control) expected by Chittenden East voters.

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Disclaimer: This report has been compiled by undergraduate students at the University of Vermont under the supervision of Professor Anthony Gierzynski. The material contained in the report does not reflect the official policy of the University of Vermont.



## Appendix: Exit Poll Questions

Hi, I am a UVM student conducting research for Vermont legislators and the Department of Education on voters' thoughts of the Chittenden East Regional Education School District proposal. Do you have a couple of minutes to answer a few questions about it? Your responses will be completely anonymous.

[A] How did you hear about the current proposal to join school districts to form a single K-12 Regional Education District?

- 1  From the Chittenden East Supervisory Union
- 2  From my School District
- 3  From a candidate or political party
- 4  From friends
- 5  From the news media
- 6  Internet source such as Google or Facebook
- 7  *OTHER: PLEASE WRITE IN*
  
- 8  *DON'T KNOW / NOT APPLICABLE*
- 9  *REFUSED*

[B] Did you vote for the proposal to merge school districts into a single K-12 Regional Education District?

- 1  Yes
- 2  No
  
- 8  *DON'T KNOW / NOT APPLICABLE*
- 9  *REFUSED*

[C] How strongly do you favor or oppose the proposal to merge school districts to form a single K-12 Regional Education District?

- 1  Strongly in favor
- 2  Somewhat in favor
- 3  Neutral or no opinion
- 4  Somewhat oppose
- 5  Strongly oppose
  
- 8  *DON'T KNOW / NOT APPLICABLE*
- 9  *REFUSED*

[D] Which of the following do you think will be the most important **benefit** of merging school districts?

- 1  Save money
- 2  Increase educational opportunities
- 3  Enhance the quality of education
- 4  There are no benefits

5 [ ] *OTHER: WRITE IN **MOST IMPORTANT BENEFIT***

8 [ ] *DON'T KNOW / NOT APPLICABLE*

9 [ ] *REFUSED*

[E] Which of the following do you think is the most important **risk** about merging school districts?

1 [ ] Costs too much money

2 [ ] Loss of local control

3 [ ] Harm to education quality

4 [ ] Closure of local schools

5 [ ] There are no risks

6 [ ] *OTHER: WRITE IN **MOST IMPORTANT RISK***

8 [ ] *DON'T KNOW / NOT APPLICABLE*

9 [ ] *REFUSED*

Now, just a few background questions....

[F] Are you a parent or family member of a student who is currently or soon to be enrolled in this school district?

1 [ ] Yes

2 [ ] No

8 [ ] *DON'T KNOW / NOT APPLICABLE*

9 [ ] *REFUSED*

[G] To which age group do you belong?

1 [ ] 18-24

3 [ ] 45-59

2 [ ] 25-44

4 [ ] 60 and over

8 [ ] *DON'T KNOW / NOT APPLICABLE*

9 [ ] *REFUSED*

[H] What is the highest degree of formal education you have completed?

1 [ ] Did not complete high school

2 [ ] High school diploma

3 [ ] Associates degree

4 [ ] Bachelors degree

5 [ ] Post graduate degree

8 [ ] *DON'T KNOW / NOT APPLICABLE*

9 [ ] *REFUSED*

[I] *Record gender:*

- 1  *FEMALE*      8  *CAN'T DETERMINE*  
2  *MALE*

Those are all of my questions. Thank you for participating!