

## Pomperaug Regional School District #15

### Challenge:

Pomperaug Regional School District #15 in Connecticut is made up of two towns, each with distinct demographics. One town is home to a large retirement community, housing a disproportionate senior citizen population that repeatedly resists school budget referendums. Serving two towns can make communicating about school-related information more difficult and more complex.

When the Board of Education and administrators began the strategic planning process, they turned to First Experience Communications to help them gain an understanding of their communities' perceptions of the school district, and how to create and sustain effective communication with community members.

### Solution:

In order to understand the issues that were important to community members and how they were receiving information about the schools, a survey was mailed to each household in both towns and a random follow-up telephone survey was conducted. The surveys were utilized as tools to establish communication and gave residents without a direct connection to the schools, such as retirees and households without children, an opportunity to share their thoughts.

Many of the survey comments specifically addressed the need for sustained communication between the Board of Education and the communities. Survey responses also indicated what issues residents believed were important to address, which included technology proficiency and science curriculum.

Based upon the survey results, a Board of Education newsletter, mailed three to four times a year, was recommended to deliver consistent information to each household related to the strategic plan, curriculum, budget, capital improvements and testing. Communication workshops were held with administrators to help them understand the importance and benefits of establishing not only open communication, but also a dialogue with community members. Training was provided on how to form relationships with local media to utilize them as a means to deliver accurate school-related information.

### Results:

The communication efforts of the Board of Education and administrators resulted in both towns approving a \$3.3 million dollar budget increase in the first referendum vote scheduled for the district. It had been several years since a budget was accepted after just one referendum. Region #15 continued to improve communication by redesigning their district website, applying for a grant that allowed them to hire a school-community liaison, distributing monthly electronic (HTML) newsletters with more individual, school-specific content, and creating an insert with student and teacher accomplishments for a local weekly newspaper.

