

More Than A School

**Personal Decisions Leading to Support for
Construction of the Ocosta Elementary School**



**2019 WSEMA Conference
September 17, 2019
Skamania Lodge**

Ocosta Elementary School

Dedicated June 11, 2016



**North America's First Vertical Evacuation,
Tsunami Engineered, Safe Haven Building**

Reflecting on the decision to vote for and build the school, we began to wonder ...



Why?

Why did the people of the school district approve this particular bond measure after rejecting two previous attempts to rebuild the school?

Why did people vote for the bond measure although they had no real ties to the school?

- **Never had children who went to the school?**
- **Moved to the area later in life?**

**To answer our questions, we
decided to conduct a survey
with focus groups**

HPRB approval from Pacific Lutheran University

**To conduct research
in the communities of the
Ocosta School District**

**Westport * Rural Westport * Ocosta * Grayland
North Cove * Tokeland and the Shoalwater Bay Tribe**

Focus Group Questions

- How did you first learn about the ballot measure to build a new elementary school with a tsunami refuge?
- Can you describe the type of information you received, e-mail, flyer, meetings, word of mouth? Did you talk about it with other people from the community?
- How often did you receive information about the elementary school ballot measure prior to the election?
- Can you describe the type of backing the project received before the voters approved the ballot measure?
- Can you describe, in as much detail as possible, what factors led to your decision to support the ballot to build a tsunami refuge school?
- What was the hardest part about deciding?
- Did you think of it as a tax?
- Was there anything that surprised you about making the decision to vote for it?
- What do you think is the best part about the decision, now that it's done?
- Any last thoughts you want us to record?

Background

Need **60%** bond approval to pass (Pacific County & Grays Harbor County)

Feb 03, 2009 Special Election - **DEFEATED:**

GHC A-702 R-645 PC A-168 R 125 Total votes-1640 Approved -870 **(53.05%)** Rejected-770 (46.95%)

\$24,370,438 to replace the old elementary school building, construct a new transportation center, add a new communication system and make improvements to the gymnasium and grandstand as well as health and safety improvements to the JR/Sr High school.

May 19, 2009 Special Election - **DEFEATED**

GHC A-509 R-704 PC A-167 R-139 Total votes-1519 Approved-676 **(44.5%)** Rejected-843 (55.5%)

\$15,500,660 Bond defeated to replace the old school building only

April 23, 2013 Special Election – **PASSED**

GHC A-875 R-379 PC A-201 R-83 Total Votes 1538 Approved-1076 **(69.96%)** Rejected-462 (30.04)

\$13,800,000 to authorize the school district to renovate to Ocosta Elementary School, including constructing a new school building that will include a tsunami refuge.



School elevation = 11 feet
Subsidence expected to be 4-6 feet
 $\frac{3}{4}$ mi. from beach to school
200 yards from bay to school



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Survey

Themes

Findings

What does it tell us...?

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Safety

Risk

Fear

Hope

Relief

Inclusion

Save Lives

Common Sense

Value

Vulnerability

Community

Belief

Tax/Investment

Practical

Prevention

Separation

Refuge

Opportunity

Design

Pre Traumatic Stress

Obligation to Protect

Excerpts from the Narrative

“To me it’s common sense.”

**“Why wouldn’t you want a
tsunami safe school?”**

“You either move the school to a safe place or you move a safe place to the school.”

“If you have 15 minutes from an earthquake to the tsunami, how long does it take to load kids on busses, get the busses to schools...have you ever tried to get 15 kindergarteners to do anything at once? **Never gonna happen.”**

“I saw it as a means of supporting the school.”

“An investment in the community, it’s functional and practical”

“It’s our contribution”

“My granddaughter is 13 and has been hearing about the tsunami possibility since she was 5, I think. When she was that age, she was like, “I wish a tsunami would already happen. Hurry up already.” She was so on the edge all of the time, I wish it would hurry up. But now she doesn’t have to worry about it.”

“... would be surprised if there was a lot of objection to this building, this tsunami safe place – but, when you think that the kids were being brought from Ocosta, which is up on a hill... into the most vulnerable part of our county, it just seems like something ought to be done. We shouldn’t condemn all the children to be wiped out.”

“It took away their worry too!”

“I would agree with that, because my son – same thing when I moved here. He was really stressed about that happening.”

“Like a feeling of doom or something.”

“Exactly. And since the news the school was built, I haven’t heard about it since.”

“It was way overdue, and we just moved to the area 6 years ago, and my oldest child has special needs, so we were excited for that aspect, that she would be safe at school, if something were to happen.”

THEMES

Safety

Risk

Fear

Hope

Relief

Inclusion

Save Lives

Common Sense

Value

Vulnerability

Community

Belief

Tax/Investment

Pre Traumatic Stress

Obligation to Protect

Practical

Prevention

Separation

Refuge

Opportunity

Design

Lessons Learned & Future Considerations

- Process**
- Issues of Design**
 - Vulnerability**
- Anticipatory Anxiety/Pre-Traumatic Stress**
- Inclusion/Prevention**
- Obligation to Protect**



What Questions Do You Have?



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