

Unified School District 388
School Bond Survey
2019



Prepared For
Unified School District 388 Board and Administrators

Prepared By
**The Docking Institute of Public Affairs
Fort Hays State University**

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Mission:

To Facilitate Effective Public Policy Decision-Making.

The staff of the Docking Institute of Public Affairs and its University Center for Survey Research are dedicated to serving the people of Kansas and surrounding states.

USD 388 School Bond Survey 2019

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In pursuit of
The Docking Institute's Public Affairs Mission

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Executive Summary

- 74.8% of respondents indicated that they could support a bond as high as \$4 million, and 48.2% indicated that they could support a bond as high as \$5 million, assuming the bond contained projects of which they approved.
- If the school district were able to raise \$1.5 million in private money, 66.7% of respondents indicated that they could support a bond as high as \$3 million plus \$1.5 million in private donations, and 42.8% indicated that they could support a bond as high as \$5.5 million plus \$1.5 million in private donations, assuming the bond contained projects of which they approved.
- Ratings of support for the various improvement projects were significantly lower for respondents who would not support a bond of any size. However, the relative priorities of those who would not support a bond of any size were somewhat similar to those indicating they would vote for a bond of some size.
- There was no difference between female respondents and male respondents regarding their support for proposed improvement projects and their selection of bond options.
- Ratings of support for proposed improvement projects were generally higher among those younger than 45 years and thus more likely to have school-age children. People who were 45 years or older were also less likely to support a bond of any size.
- The most popular improvement projects among both supporters and opponents of a bond include: replacing HVAC system, replacing and updating plumbing lines and fixtures, replacing gym roof, and replacing west wing roof at Washington Grade School.
- The least popular improvement project among supporters and opponents was adding daycare facility/program, followed by replacing playground equipment at Washington Grade School.

Methodology

In October 2019, the Docking Institute of Public Affairs at Fort Hays State University contracted with Unified School District 388 (USD 388) to conduct a study to 1) measure District voter support for a variety of prospective improvement projects identified as high-need by USD 388 administrators, and 2) measure the size of school bond they would be inclined to support. The purpose of the study is to provide valid data to assist administrators in authoring a bond proposal that will best meet the educational needs of students in the District and have a high probability of passing in a bond election. The opinions and preferences for the various proposed improvement projects among registered voters residing within the District were measured using a self-administered survey delivered to respondents' mailing addresses of record via U.S. Postal Service.

The cover letter (Appendix A) and survey instrument (Appendix B) were constructed in cooperation with District administrators and designed to measure respondents' level of support for each individual improvement project and the size of school bond they would be willing to support. The sample data were obtained from the Ellis County Clerk and the Trego County Clerk, which included the most current official list of registered voters in USD 388 with their home mailing addresses. The Institute had the Post Office update the file to include recent moves, leaving a sample of 1,839 registered voters.

Questionnaires were mailed to each registered voter on October 29, 2019. Data collection was terminated on November 25, at which time 421 completed questionnaires had been returned, resulting in a response rate of 23%. Because there was no random sampling and instead all members of the target population were sent the survey, there is no sampling margin of error. However, because not all of the 1,839 registered voters responded, there may be a potential for response bias. The survey data were entered into an SPSS data file for analysis.

Responses to Survey Questions

The survey first asked respondents about their support or opposition level for a list of 20 proposed improvement projects, using an 11-point scale with -5 indicating “strongly oppose”, 0 indicating “neutral”, and +5 indicating “strongly support.” Figure 1 shows the proportional breakdown of ratings for those improvement projects. All proposed projects, except for adding a daycare facility/program, received more positive ratings than negative ratings. Almost half (46.8%) of respondents selected a rating lower than 0 for adding a daycare facility/program. The project that received the highest positive rating was replacing and updating plumbing lines and fixtures at Washington Grade School, with 84.2% of respondents giving a positive rating. Three other projects at Washington Grade School also received very high positive ratings. More than 70% of respondents gave a positive rating for replacing HVAC, replacing west wing roof, and replacing gym roof at Washington Grade School.

The proportional distribution is reflected by the mean ratings in Figure 2. The mean ratings for replacing and updating plumbing lines and fixtures at Washington Grade School was 2.73, whereas adding a daycare facility/program had a mean of -0.68. Most of the proposed project at Washington Grade School received high support, with four of them having a mean of 2.0 or above, however, replacing playgroup equipment at Washington Grade School had a negative mean of -0.11. The proposed projects at the football field/track facility received lower support than those at Washington Grade School and Ellis Jr./Sr. High School. The mean rating scores for those projects at the football field/track facility were all lower than 1.4. The mean rating scores for the projects at Ellis Jr./Sr. High School were all positive, ranging from 0.24 to 1.85.

Figure 1: Rating Distributions of Proposed Improvement Projects (All Respondents)

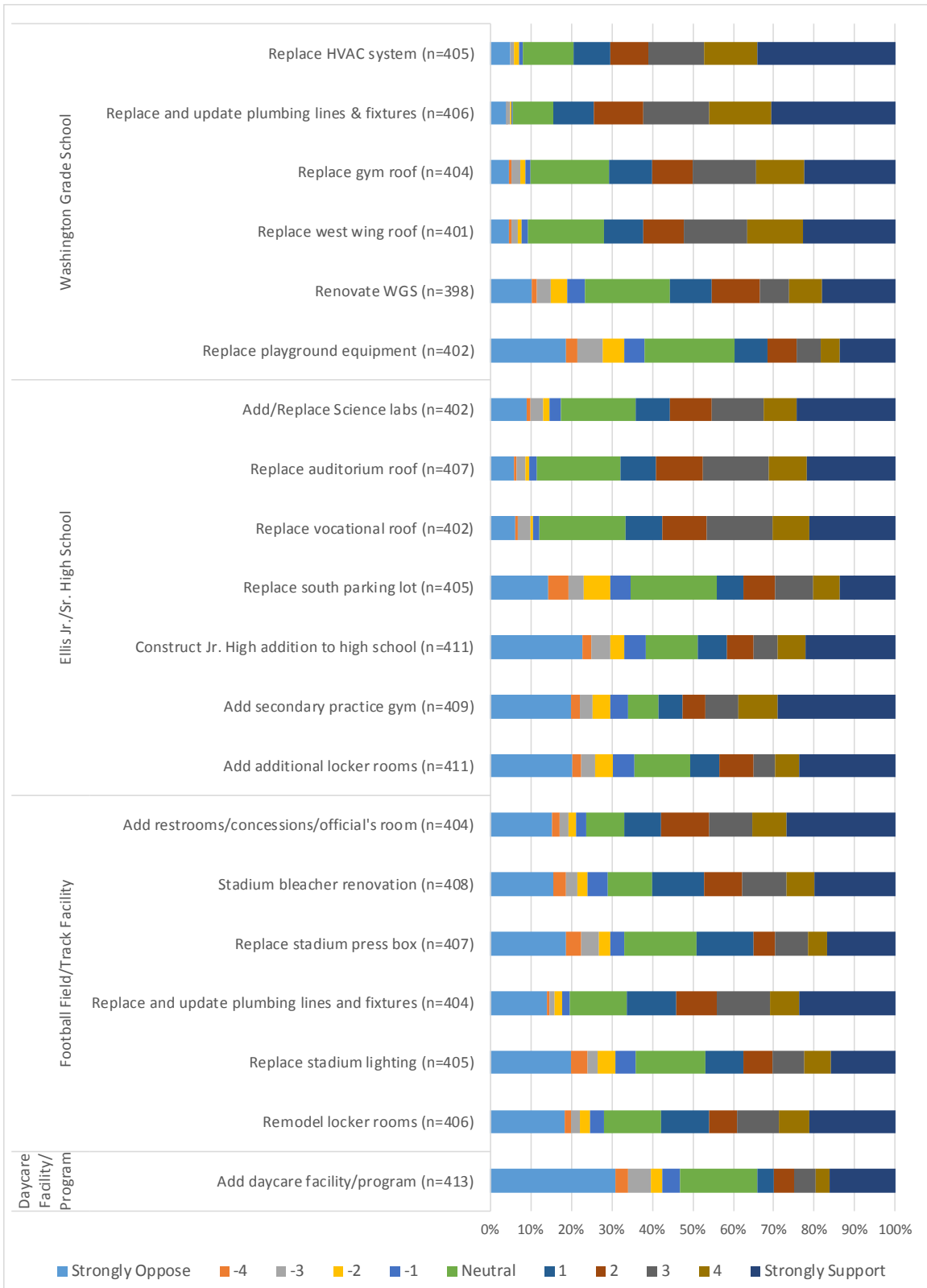
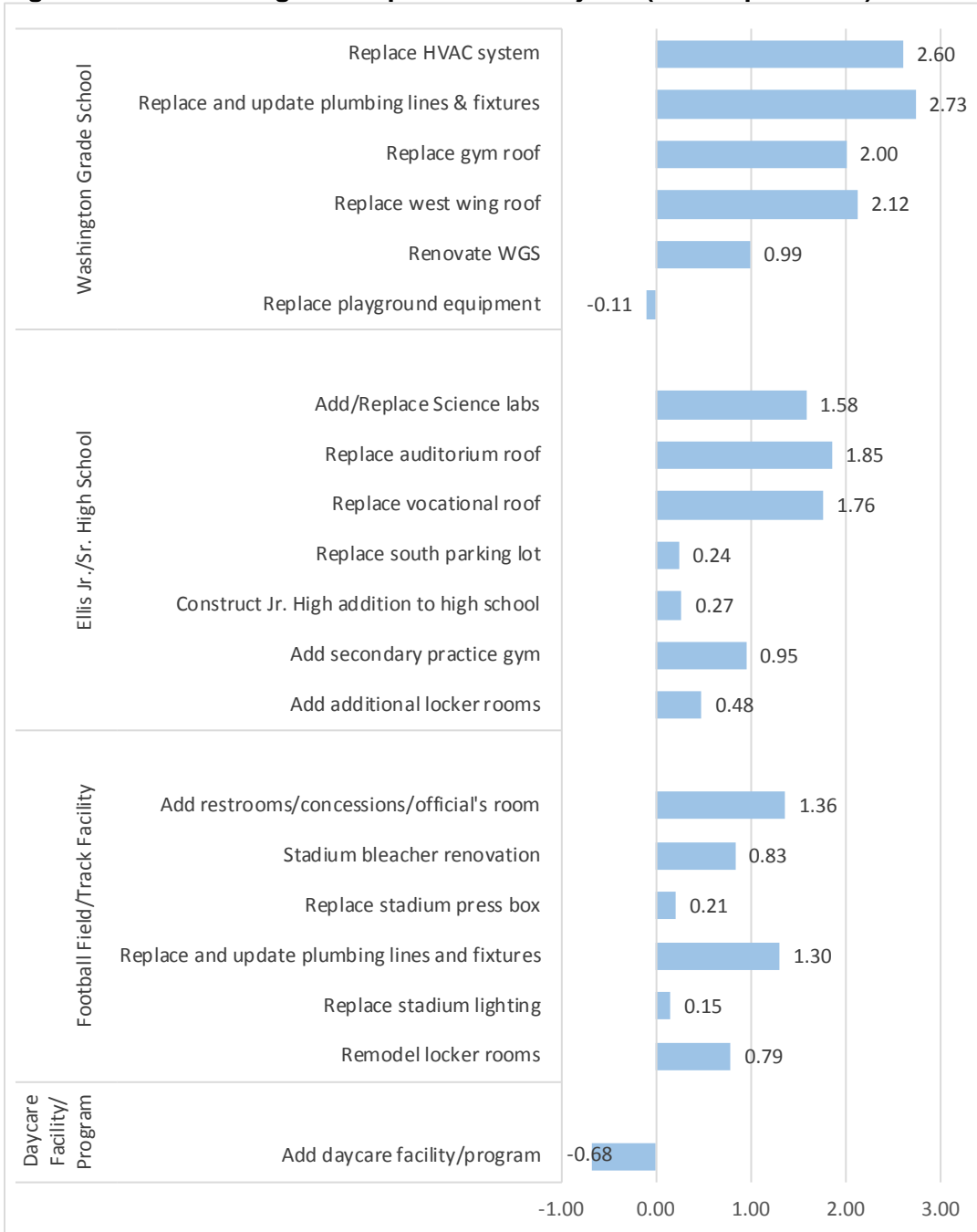


Figure 2: Mean Ratings for Improvement Projects (All Respondents)



After rating potential projects, respondents were asked to select the largest school bond they would consider voting for, assuming that a proposed bond contained projects they rated highly. To facilitate respondents' decision making, estimated property tax increases were provided for different types of properties. Figure 3 shows that the lowest bond option (\$4 million) was most popular, selected by 26.8% of respondents. The highest bond option (\$7.5) received a little higher support than the second highest option (\$5 million). More than 20 percent (22.6%) of respondents said they would not support a bond of any amount, and 2.6% did not answer this question.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of respondents that “should” vote for school bonds of varying size, assuming that respondents would vote for school bonds that were equal to or smaller than the maximum bond they indicated they would vote for. To be conservative, those respondents who did not answer the question were categorized with those who would not support a bond of any amount. The results suggest that 74.8% of voters would support a bond of \$4 million, and 48.2% would support a bond of \$5 million. The support for \$7.5 million stays at 24.5%. Since over 50% is required for a bond to pass, these results suggest that a bond of at least \$4 million, but not approaching \$5 million, should pass in a bond election, assuming the bond did not include any of the projects with high negative mean ratings among likely supporters.

Figure 3: Largest School Bond Respondent Would Support (Assuming Highly Rated Projects, n=421)

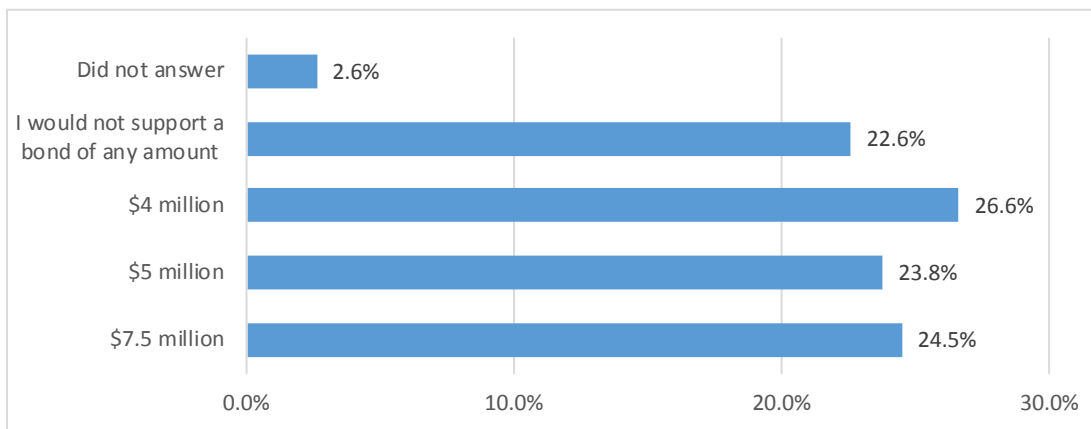
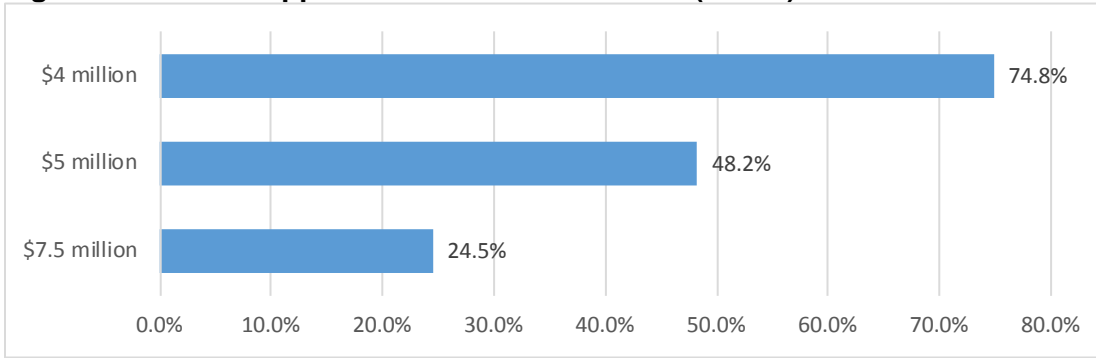


Figure 4: Overall Support for Various Bond Sizes (n=421)



The survey continued by asking respondents to select the largest school bond they would be willing to support if the school district were able to raise \$1.5 million in private money. As shown in Figure 5, the highest bond option (\$5.5 million plus \$1.5 million in private donations) received the highest support, with 42.8% of respondents selecting this option. Assuming that respondents would vote for school bonds that were equal to or smaller than the maximum bond they indicated they would vote for, Figure 6 shows that if \$1.5 million private money were raised, 66.7% of respondents would support a bond of \$3 million, and 85.7% would support a bond of \$2 million. These results suggests that, if \$1.5 million private donations were raised, a bond of at least \$3 million, but not approaching \$5.5 million, should pass in a bond election, assuming the bond did not include any of the projects with high negative mean ratings among likely supporters.

Figure 5: Largest School Bond Respondent Would Support if Private Money Were Raised (Assuming Highly Rated Projects, n=421)

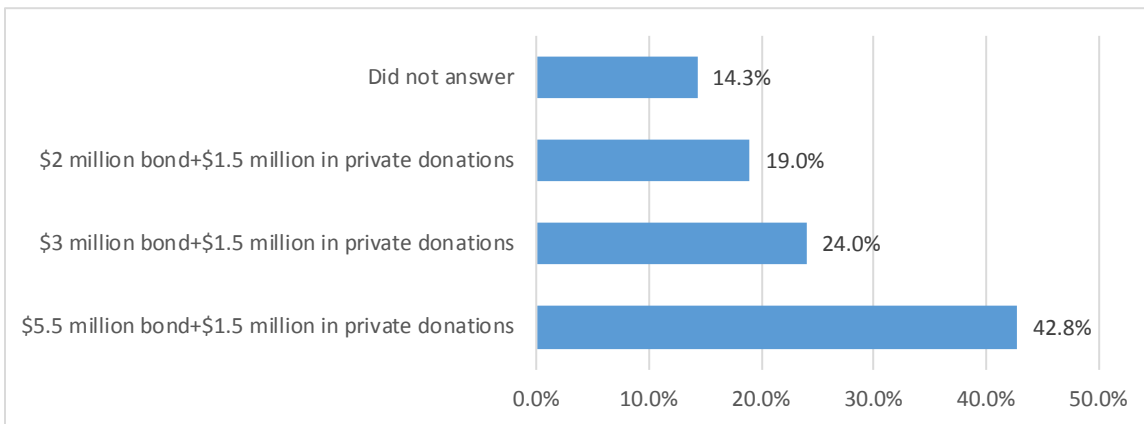
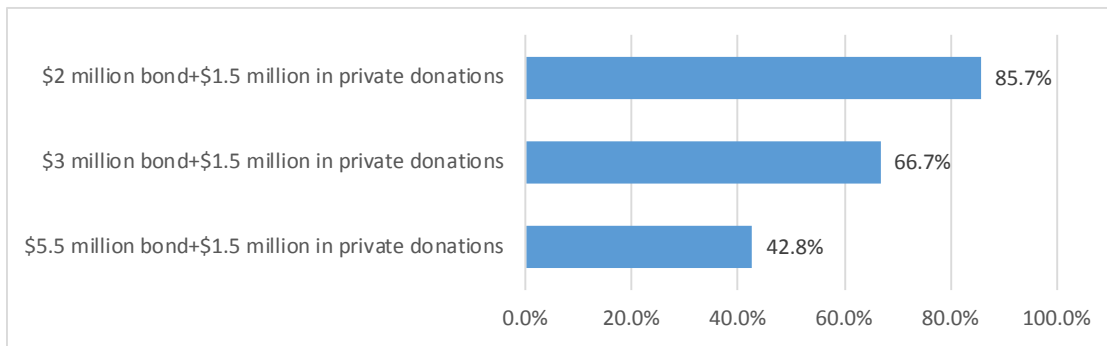


Figure 6: Overall Support for Various Bond Sizes if Private Money Were Raised (n=421)



In order to get a better idea of project priorities for only those respondents who would tend to support a bond, the previous analyses were replicated for only those indicating support for a bond of some size. The rating distribution among those respondents indicating support for a bond without private money being raised is shown in Figure 7. The rating distribution among those respondents indicating support for a bond with \$1.5 million being raised privately is shown in Figure 8. The mean scores are shown in Figure 9.

As compared with Figures 1 and 2, there were decreases in the proportions of negative ratings for all the proposed projects and increases in the mean scores among those respondents who indicated they would support a bond of some size. For example, without private money being raised, 91.1% of respondents who would support a bond of some size selected a score higher than 0 for the item “replace and update plumbing lines and fixtures” at Washington Grade School (Figure 5); with private money being raised, the percentage for the same item was 89.4; while 84.2% of respondents selected a positive rating for that item in Figure 1. All the projects had higher means scores in Figure 9 as compared with Figure 1. The comparison suggests that those indicating they would not support a bond of any size were also highly likely to rate the projects with extreme negative values. The increase in mean scores results from exclusion of the negative scores of those opposing any school bond.

Although the mean scores of all respondents and only of supporters are quite different, the resultant priorities do not change. The first four items at Washington Grade School remain the highest four priorities. The lowest priorities of the bond supporters are similar to those who would not support a school bond of any size.

Figure 7: Rating Distributions of Proposed Improvement Projects (Only Respondents Indicating Support for a Bond of Some Size without Private Money)

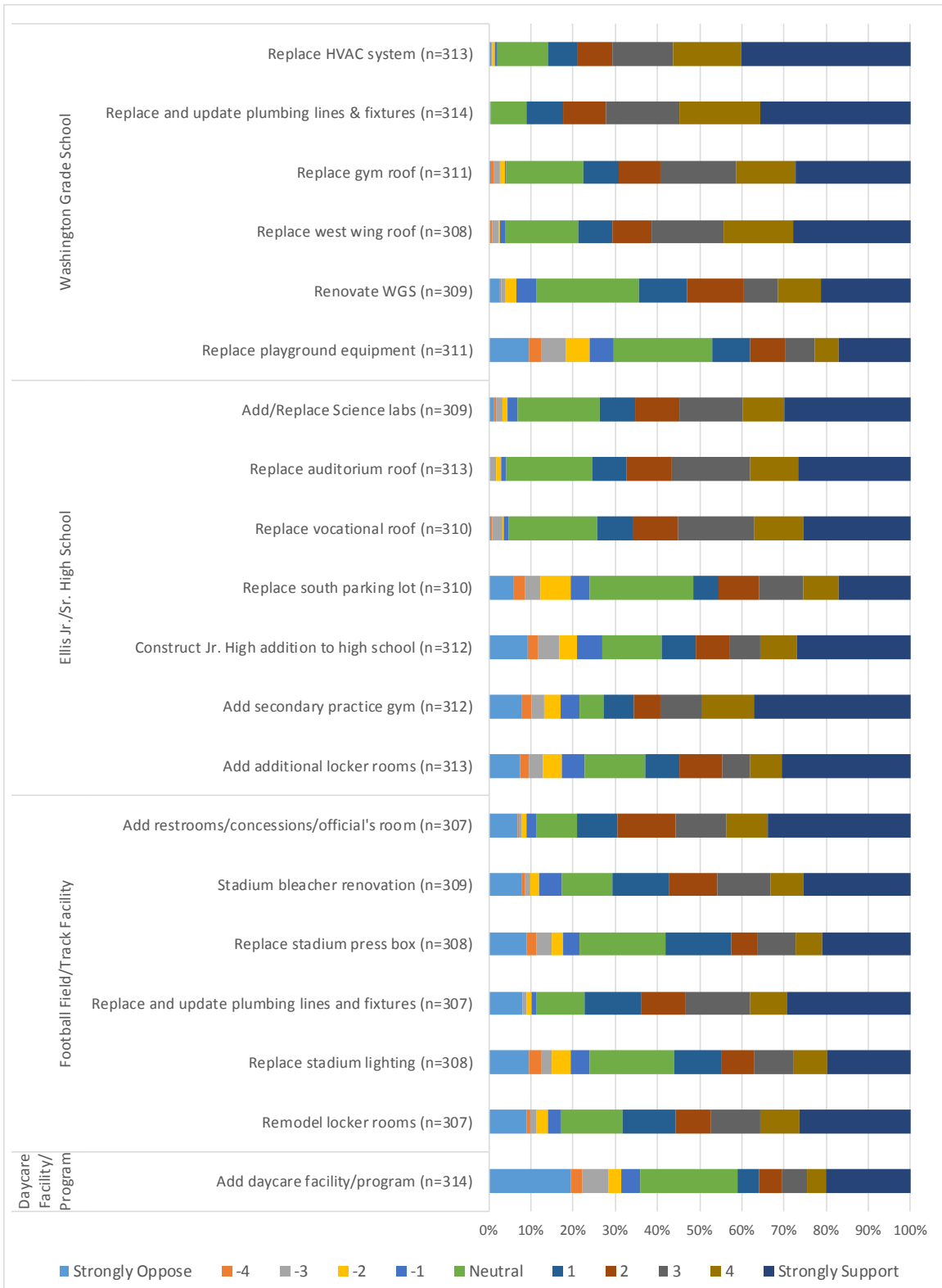


Figure 8: Rating Distributions of Proposed Improvement Projects (Only Respondents Indicating Support for a Bond of Some Size with Private Money)

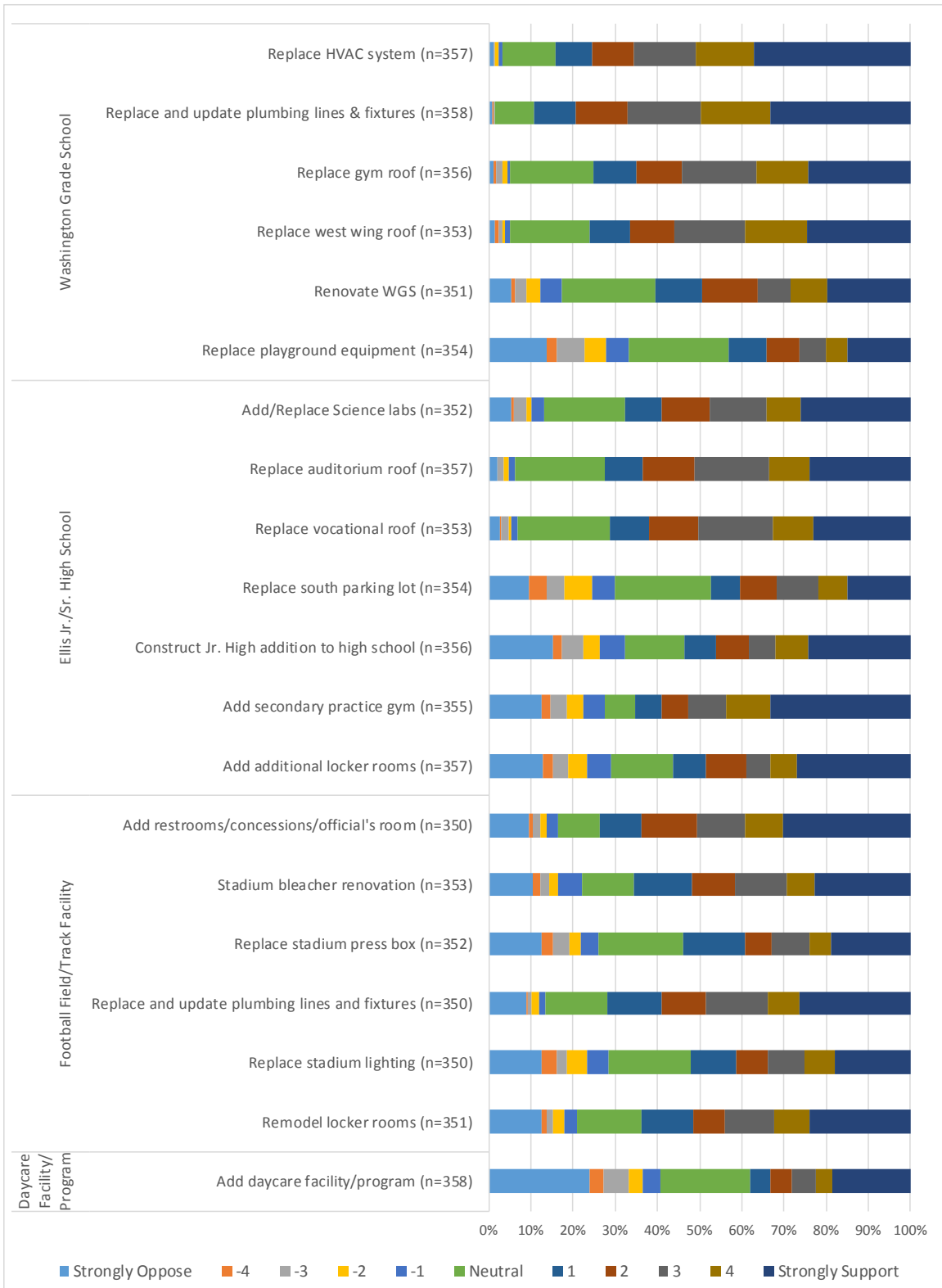
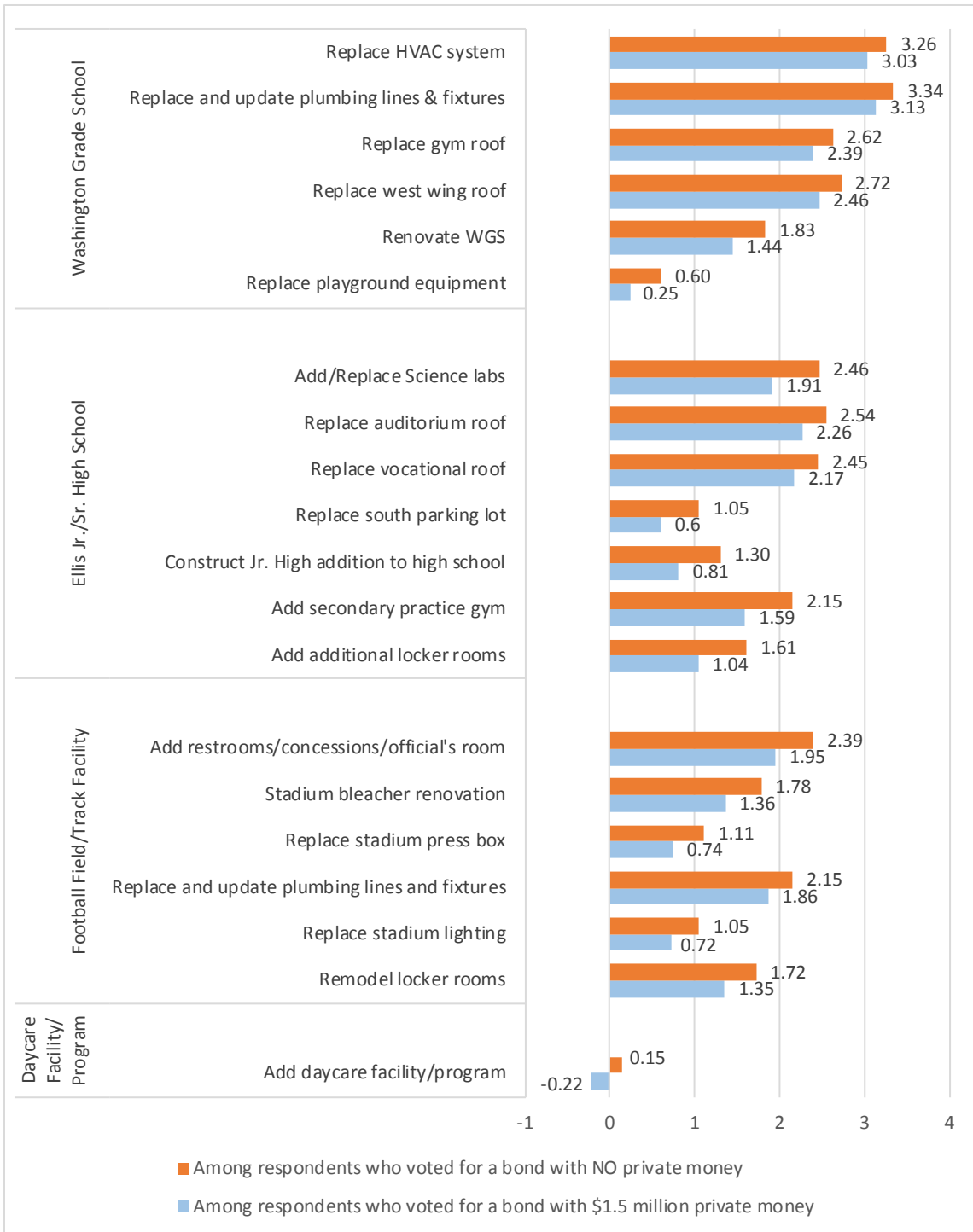


Figure 9: Mean Ratings for Improvement Projects (Only Respondents Indicating Support for a Bond of Some Size)



The survey lastly asked about respondent's gender and age. Among those registered voters who responded to the survey, 47.6% were male and 52.4% were female (Figure 10). Almost one third of respondents were older than 64 years, and only 5.1% were between 18 years and 24 years old (Figure 11).

Figure 10: Gender

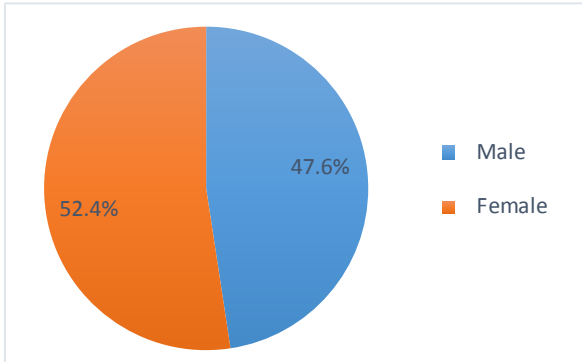
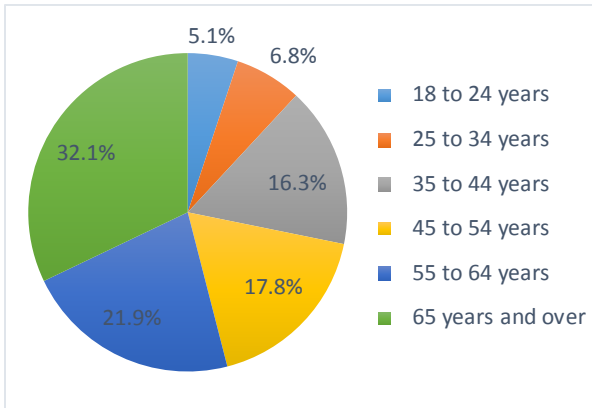


Figure 11: Age



T-test analysis found no differences between female respondents and male respondents regarding their support of all the proposed projects and their selection of bond options. ANOVA analyses were conducted to compare the mean scores of different age groups. At Washington Grade School, the mean scores for “renovate WGS” and “replace playground equipment” in general decreased as age increased. The mean scores for the other four items were highest among those who were between 25 years and 44 years old (Figure 12).

The youngest age group (18 to 24 years) gave the highest support to “add secondary practice gym,” “add additional locker room,” and “replace south parking lot” at Ellis Jr./Sr. High School. The support for other projects at Ellis Jr./Sr. High School were higher among those who were younger than 45 years (Figure 13).

In general, the means scores were highest in the age groups 18 to 24 years and 35 to 44 years for all the projects proposed for the football field/track facility. The support for those projects was the lowest among those respondents who were older than 64 years (Figure 14).

People who were 25 to 34 years old were most supportive of the proposed daycare facility/program, with a mean score of 2.32. The second highest support was among the youngest age group (18-24 years), but the mean score of the youngest age group was only slightly above zero (0.05). The mean scores of other age groups were all negative (Figure 15).

Figure 16 shows the support for bond options without private donations among different age groups. People who were 45 years or older were more likely to say they would not support a bond of any amount. All respondents in the youngest age group supported a bond of some size. Those who were 35 to 44 years old were more likely to support a bond of at least \$5 million, with a total of 77.6% saying they would support a bond of at least \$5 million. The support for bond options with \$1.5 million private donations had the same pattern among different age groups (Figure 17). All respondents in the youngest group selected one of the bond options. People who were 35 to 44 years old had the highest support of a bond of at least \$3 million plus \$1.5 million in private donations. The support of a bond of any amount was the lowest among those who were 55 years or older.

Figure 12: Mean Ratings for Improvement Projects by Age-Washington Grade School

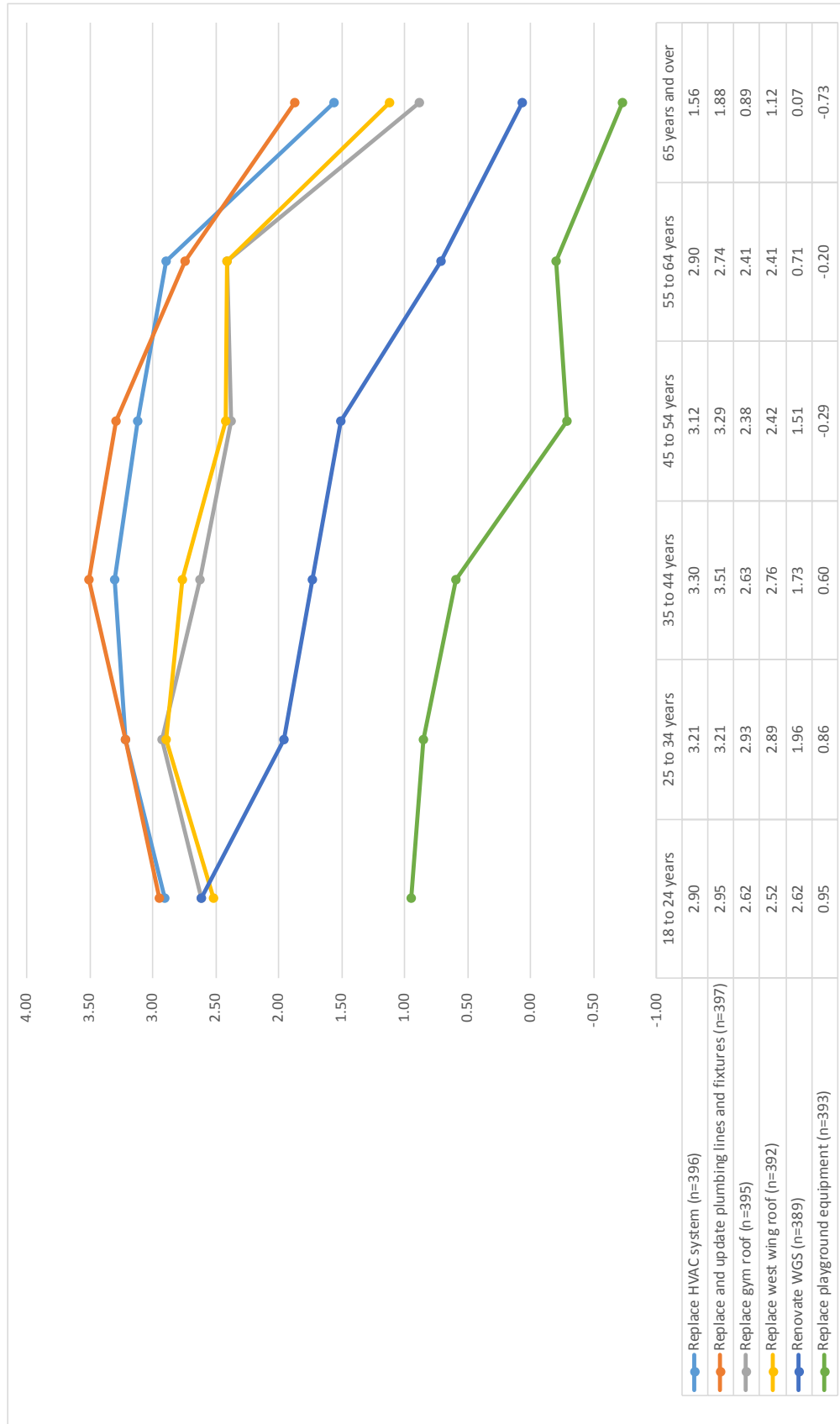


Figure 13: Mean Ratings for Improvement Projects by Age- Ellis Jr./Sr. High School

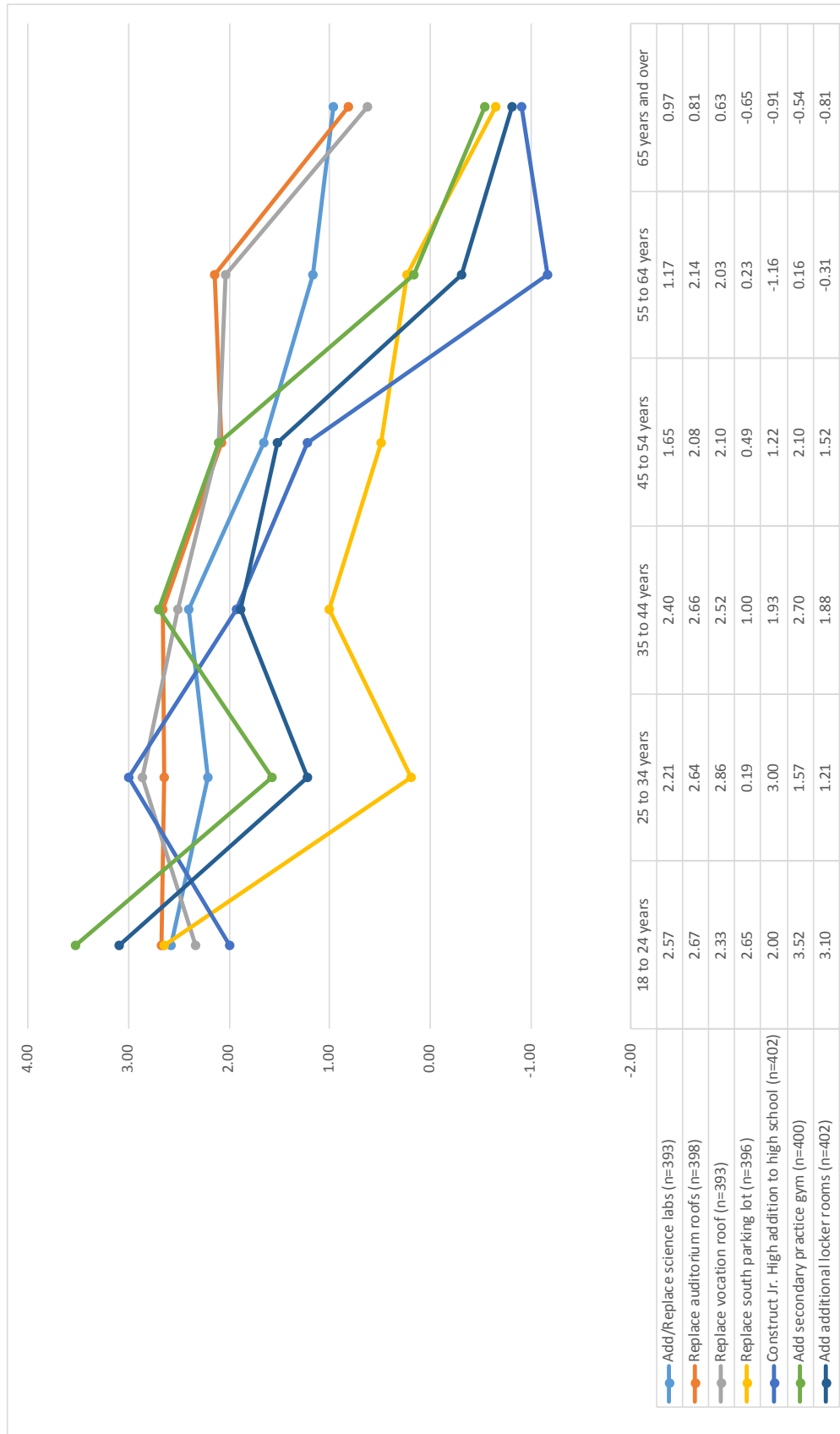


Figure 14: Mean Ratings for Improvement Projects by Age- Football Field/Track Facility

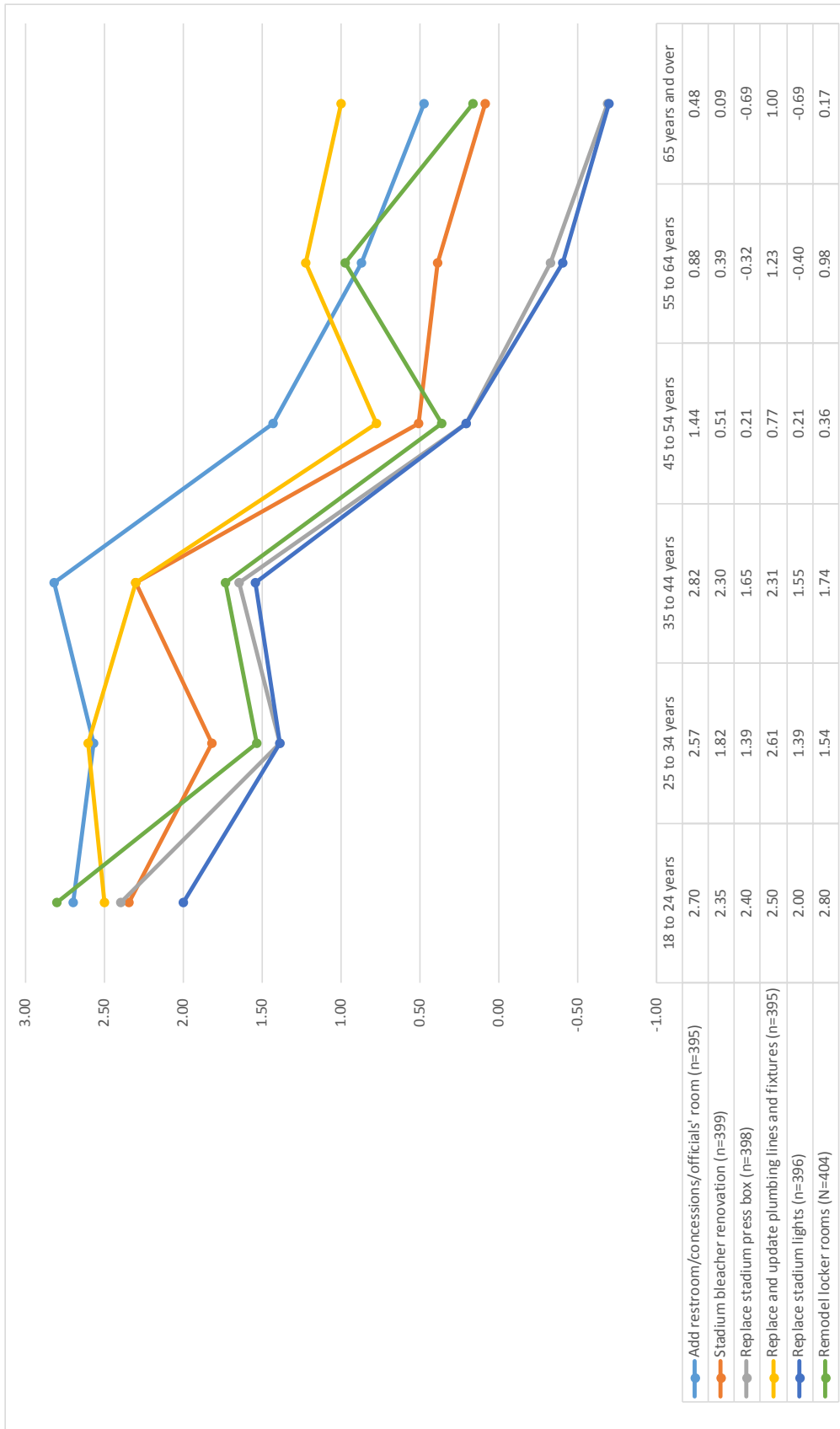


Figure 15: Mean Ratings for Improvement Projects by Age- Daycare Facility/Program

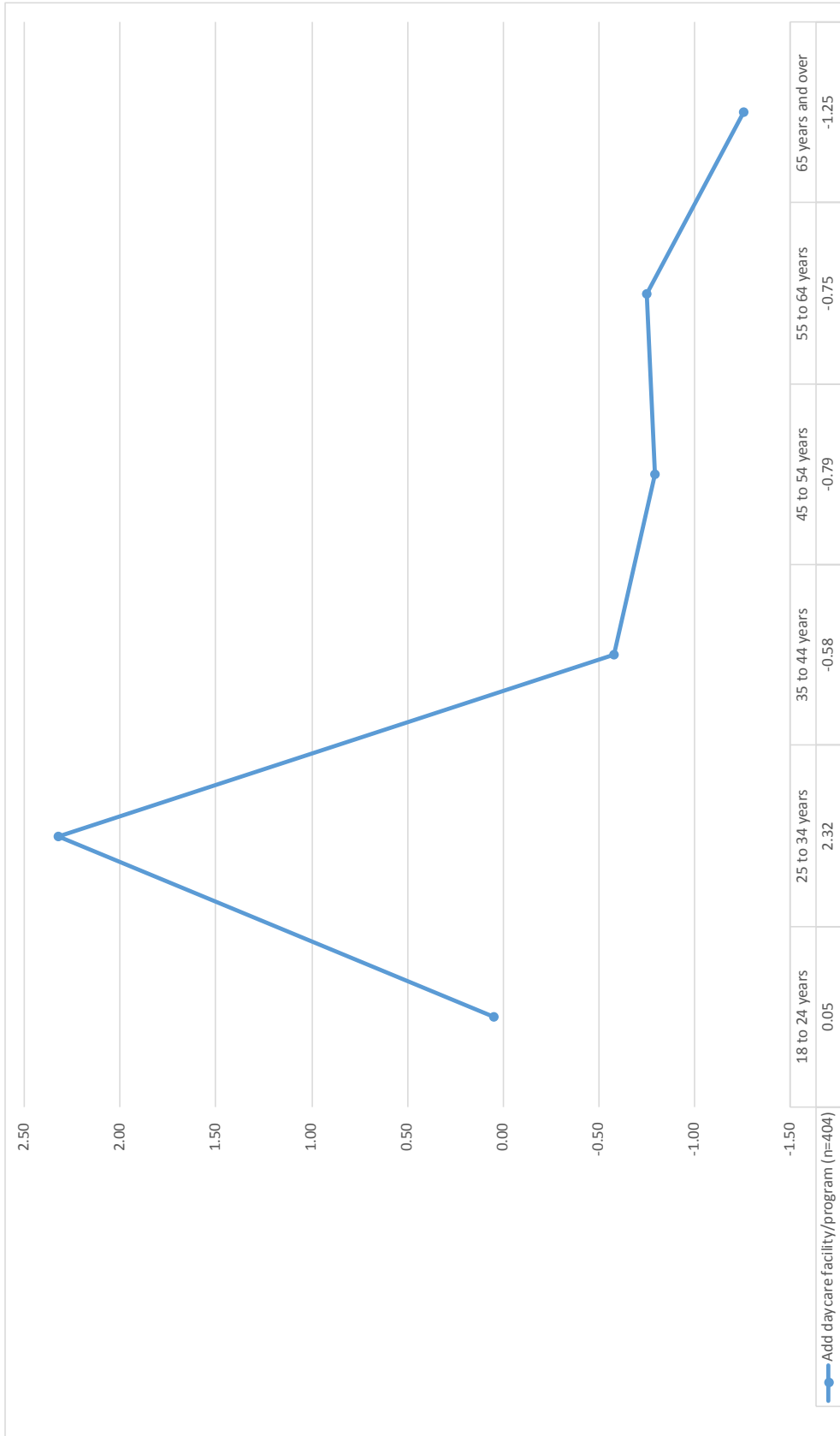


Figure 16: Largest School Bond without Private Money Respondent Would Support by Age

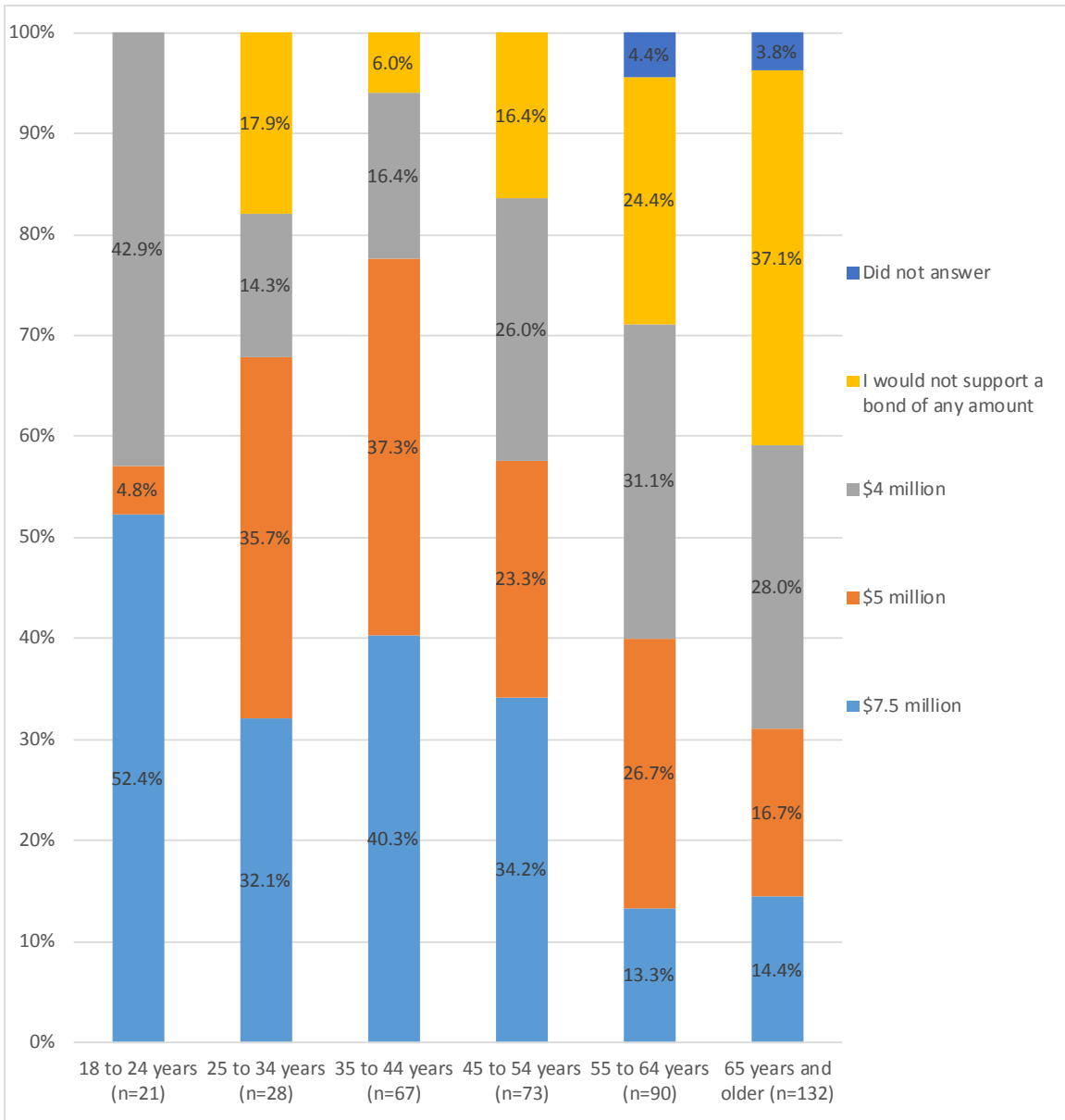
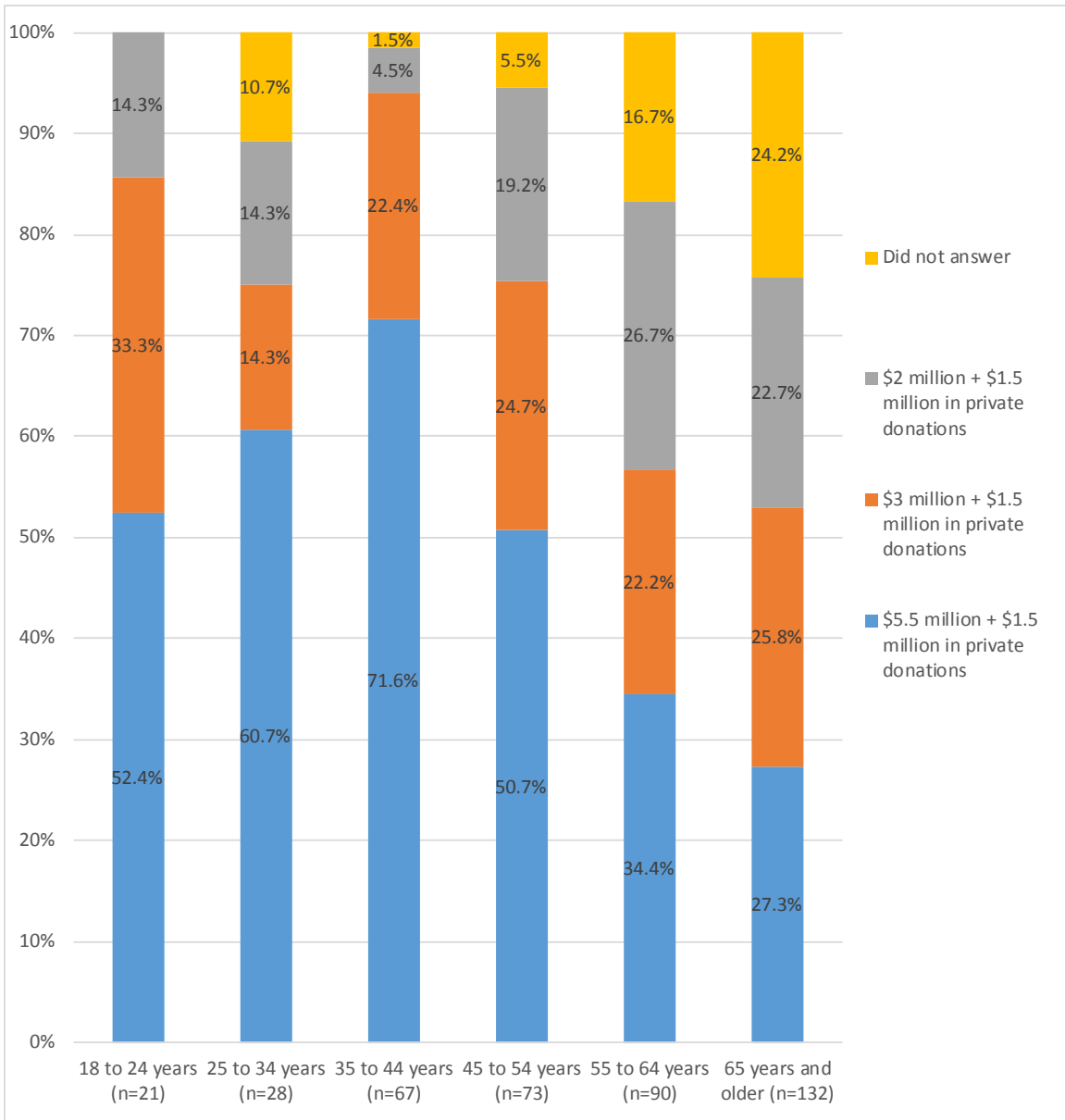


Figure 17: Largest School Bond with Private Money Respondent Would Support by Age



Conclusions

The study has found majority voter support for a \$4 million school bond among a sample of registered voters residing within the boundaries of USD 388. A bond of at least \$4 million, but not approaching \$5 million stands a good chance of passing in a bond election. If the board were able to raise \$1.5 million in private money, a bond of \$3 million (plus \$1.5 million), but not approaching \$5.5 million (plus 1.5 million in private money) stands a good chance of passing in a bond election. Although highly rated improvement projects can be readily included in a bond proposal, a successful bond initiative would likely not include projects that rated most negatively among bond supporters. These include replacing playground equipment at Washington Grade School, and adding a daycare facility/program. It is impossible to say which combination of projects will or will not garner majority voter support, but it is safe to assume that the more projects with negative or very low positive rating are included in the bond, the less chance that it will pass.

Appendix A: Cover Letter



**FORT HAYS STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Forward thinking. World ready.

THE DOCKING INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Dear USD 388 Registered Voter and Patron,

As a registered voting member of the community, Ellis Unified School District 388 earnestly seeks your opinions on the current needs of our public-school facilities. USD 388 needs to know what the voters feel are the most important elements of a vibrant, efficient school system in order to prioritize future improvement projects. Working together as a Board of Education and Community, resources can be appropriated to the projects identified as the most critical for providing the safety, education, and all-around success of children.

The Board is weighing multiple improvements to USD 388 public schools that meet the needs of students and staff. Many features of buildings need upgrading, including heating and air conditioning, roofs, classrooms, parking lots, and other interior and exterior features. Future planning and proper allocation of resources will attempt to address all of these issues.

Board of Education members understand that voters will ultimately decide what resources will be appropriated for public education. To help the Board learn more about what voters feel are the most important building projects, they have asked the Docking Institute at Fort Hays State University to conduct a study to assess the opinions of local voters. The Institute is attempting to collect preferences from all registered voters residing within the District, which is why you have received this letter and survey questionnaire.

This survey is voluntary and anonymous. Nothing on the survey form or return envelope identifies you. Please give your honest opinions. All survey responses will be combined and presented to the USD 388 Board to help them develop a plan based on the will of the voters. Your participation in the survey along with other voters in the district is critical to ensure that the information we provide to the Board will be highly reflective of community sentiments. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the study. Please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to the Docking Institute in the postage-paid business reply envelope provided by **November 8, 2019.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jian Sun". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jian Sun, Ph.D.

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Fort Hays State University
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Appendix B: Survey Instrument

USD 388 VOTER PREFERENCE SURVEY

Next to each potential project listed, please *circle the number* on the scale indicating your personal level of opposition or support.

	Strongly Oppose				Neutral			Strongly Support			
<u>Washington Grade School</u>											
Replace HVAC system	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Replace and update plumbing Lines & fixtures	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Replace gym roof	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Replace west wing roof	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Renovate WGS	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Replace playground equipment	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

	Strongly Oppose				Neutral			Strongly Support			
<u>Ellis Jr./Sr. High School</u>											
Add/Replace science labs	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Replace auditorium roof	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Replace vocational roof	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Replace south parking lot	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Construct Jr. High addition to high school	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Add secondary practice gym	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Add additional locker rooms	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

	Strongly Oppose				Neutral			Strongly Support			
<u>Football Field/Track Facility</u>											
Add restroom/concessions/ officials' room	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Stadium bleacher renovation	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Replace stadium press box	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Replace and update plumbing lines and fixtures	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Replace stadium lighting	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
Remodel locker rooms	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

	Strongly Oppose				Neutral			Strongly Support			
<u>Daycare Facility/Program</u>											
Add daycare facility/program	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

Please continue on the back →

Assuming that a proposed bond contained the projects you rated highly, what is the largest school bond you would consider voting for? A successful bond issue would be paid for by the residents and property owners within the USD 388 service area. Estimates of the changes in residential, commercial, and agricultural property taxes are provided below for each bond amount, based on the current property valuations, which are updated every July. Please check the box for the **one** bond amount that you would support and vote for in a bond election.

	Est. Property Tax Increase <u>per Year:</u>				Length of Bond
	\$100,000 House	\$100,000 Commercial	160 Acre Cropland	160 Acre Grassland	
Check only 1 box:					
<input type="checkbox"/> \$7.5 million bond	\$167	\$363	\$124	\$30	20 years
<input type="checkbox"/> \$5 million bond	\$113	\$244	\$84	\$21	20 years
<input type="checkbox"/> \$4 million bond	\$90	\$195	\$67	\$17	20 years
<input type="checkbox"/> I would not support a bond of any amount	(Bond interest rates and property valuation will affect tax rates.)				

The board has considered attempting to raise private money to offset the total bond size necessary to yield the same funding for USD 388 improvements. The table below shows that if \$1.5 million in private money can be raised and then be combined with certain bond amounts, it would reduce the amount of estimated property tax compared to the scenario above. Please select **one** bond amount that you would be willing to support if the board were able to raise \$1.5 million in private money.

	Est. Property Tax Increase <u>per Year:</u>				Length of Bond
	\$100,000 House	\$100,000 Commercial	160 Acre Cropland	160 Acre Grassland	
Check only 1 box:					
<input type="checkbox"/> \$5.5 million bond plus \$1.5 million in private donations = \$7 million in improvements	\$120	\$260	\$89	\$22	20 years
<input type="checkbox"/> \$3 million bond plus \$1.5 million in private donations = \$4.5 million in improvements	\$68	\$147	\$50	\$13	20 years
<input type="checkbox"/> \$2 million bond plus \$1.5 million in private donations = \$3.5 million in improvements	\$44	\$95	\$33	\$8	20 years

What is your gender? Male Female

What is your age? 18 to 24 years 25 to 34 years 35 to 44 years
 45 to 54 years 55 to 65 years 65 years or over

Thank you for completing the survey. Please place the questionnaire in the postage-paid envelope provided and drop it in any US Post Office mailbox.