

July 27, 2016

To: Board of Education of Oak Park and River Forest High School

From: Dave Fako and Sandy Kim, Fako Research & Strategies, Inc.

Re: Oak Park and River Forest High School Public Opinion Survey - Summary of Key Findings

The following is a summary of key findings of the public opinion survey conducted for Oak Park and River Forest High School.

Volunteered Educational Issue Concerns

Respondents were asked to provide their own response for what they believe is the most important issue or problem facing the High School. Respondents were not given options for choices, in order to evaluate their own views, and were allowed to provide more than one issue concern. These responses were then coded into logical categories.

Table 1
Educational Issue Concern by Region & Sub-groups

Most Important Issue Concern	Overall	Oak Park	River Forest	Other Sub-Groups
Education Quality / Achievement Gap / Equity of Education for All	15	16	13	Parents (21%) White Men (22%)
Taxes / Finances / Funding / Spending / School Administration	15	17	5	Independents (22%) White Men (22%)
Pool / Parking / Facilities	12	13	10	Independent Women (19%) Latinos (20%)
Race Issues: Racial Divide / Racial Gap / Racial Disparity / Diversity	9	10	5	Ages 50-64 (16%) African Americans (15%) Minority Men (23%)

Other, less cited issue concerns include: Overcrowding / Class Size / Students from Out of District (4%), Curriculum & Specific Programs / Special Education / Extracurricular Activities / College Readiness (3%), Safety / Crime / Drugs / Gangs (3%), Teachers / Teachers’ Salaries / Teacher Quality (1%), and non-categorized “Other” issues (6%).

One-fifth (21%) of respondents indicated they had no concerns or no opinion regarding OPRF. Fourteen percent (14%) of respondents were unsure of how to answer the question.

Opinions of Priorities for OPRF

**Table 2
Opinions of Priorities for OPRF by Region**

Statement [Total Priority¹ (High Priority) / Low Priority]	Overall	Oak Park	River Forest
Replace the school's existing pools with a new pool or pools.	39 (32) / 41	39 (31) / 41	38 (33) / 37
Add classroom space for band, orchestra, and choir to address a 20% enrollment increase in those programs.	65 (49) / 26	67 (52) / 24	53 (33) / 36
Improve classrooms with technology and more efficient designs.	74 (54) / 20	73 (54) / 21	79 (52) / 13
Prepare for a projected enrollment increase of 350 students, approximately 10%, by 2020.	69 (44) / 20	68 (43) / 19	71 (49) / 22

**Table 3
Opinions of Priorities for OPRF by Party ID**

Statement [Total Priority (High Priority) / Low Priority]	Overall	Democrats	Independents	GOP
Replace the school's existing pools with a new pool or pools.	39 (32) / 41	42 (35) / 41	31 (26) / 38	29 (24) / 52
Add classroom space for band, orchestra, and choir to address a 20% enrollment increase in those programs.	65 (49) / 26	69 (53) / 26	62 (45) / 24	55 (45) / 31
Improve classrooms with technology and more efficient designs.	74 (54) / 20	76 (56) / 19	76 (51) / 12	61 (51) / 32
Prepare for a projected enrollment increase of 350 students, approximately 10%, by 2020.	69 (44) / 20	72 (47) / 18	63 (41) / 21	61 (40) / 24

**Table 4
Opinions of Priorities for OPRF by Race**

Statement [Total Priority (High Priority) / Low Priority]	Overall	White	Latino	African American	Total Minority
Replace the school's existing pools with a new pool or pools.	39 (32) / 41	41 (32) / 39	41 (35) / 39	32 (25) / 43	37 (31) / 41
Add classroom space for band, orchestra, and choir to address a 20% enrollment increase in those programs.	65 (49) / 26	63 (48) / 29	83 (72) / 14	61 (42) / 32	71 (53) / 23
Improve classrooms with technology and more efficient designs.	74 (54) / 20	71 (52) / 20	81 (56) / 14	78 (58) / 19	79 (58) / 18
Prepare for a projected enrollment increase of 350 students, approximately 10%, by 2020.	69 (44) / 20	72 (49) / 19	59 (30) / 19	71 (46) / 15	68 (40) / 16

¹ Total Priority = Very High Priority + High Priority

Opinion of OPRF Board’s Fiscal Management

Residents view the fiscal management of Oak Park and River Forest High School’s Board of Education favorably with 42% rating its quality “Above Average,” which is comprised of 5% rating the District “Excellent” and 37% rating it “Very Good.” A quarter (27%) of respondents rate the District’s fiscal management quality as “Average,” and only 10% rate it “Below Average,” which is a combination of “Only Fair” or “Poor” grades. A fifth (20%) of residents were unsure how to rate OPRF’s Board.

- Residents of River Forest were more likely to be unsure of how to rate the Board’s fiscal management abilities (32% Don’t Know) than the general population, and slightly less favorable of the Board (40% Above Average / 22% Average / 5% Below Average). Oak Park residents rate the Board’s management in alignment with the total population (42% / 28% / 11%).
- Men are more likely to feel the Board’s fiscal management abilities are just “Average” (33%) more than the general population, as are Independents (35%) and Republicans (36%).
- Those who rent their homes (52% Above Average / 8% Below Average) rate the Board much more favorably than the general population or those who own their homes (39% / 11%).

Table 5
Opinions of Board’s Fiscal Management by Party ID

Fiscal Management Rating	Overall	Democrats	Independents	GOP
Above Average	42	47	37	29
Average	27	23	35	36
Below Average	10	10	8	13
Don’t Know	20	20	18	22

Table 6
Opinions of Board’s Fiscal Management by Race

Fiscal Management Rating	Overall	White	Latino	African American	Total Minority
Above Average	42	38	32	59	47
Average	27	28	16	30	27
Below Average	10	13	10	--	4
Don’t Know	20	21	42	11	20

Opinions of Proposed Plans

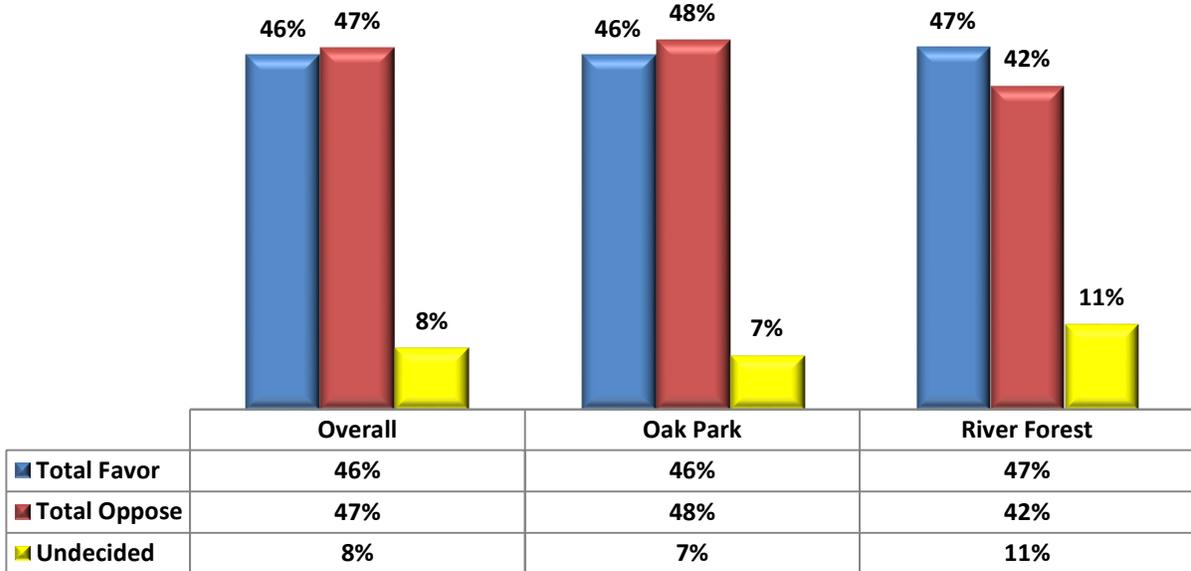
Respondents were provided general descriptions and approximate costs for three (3) different plans under discussion to improve OPRF’s facilities and swimming pools.

\$40 Million Plan

Figure 1

A plan that includes two new pools, a 25-yard competition pool and a smaller physical education pool. The current parking garage would be repaired. The estimated cost of the pools, improved learning spaces, and expanded performing arts space is \$40 million dollars.

**Graph 1
Opinions of \$40 Million Plan by Region**



Residents are split on the \$40 million plan – 46% **Favor** (15% Strongly / 31% Somewhat) v. 47% **Oppose** (25% Strongly / 22% Somewhat).

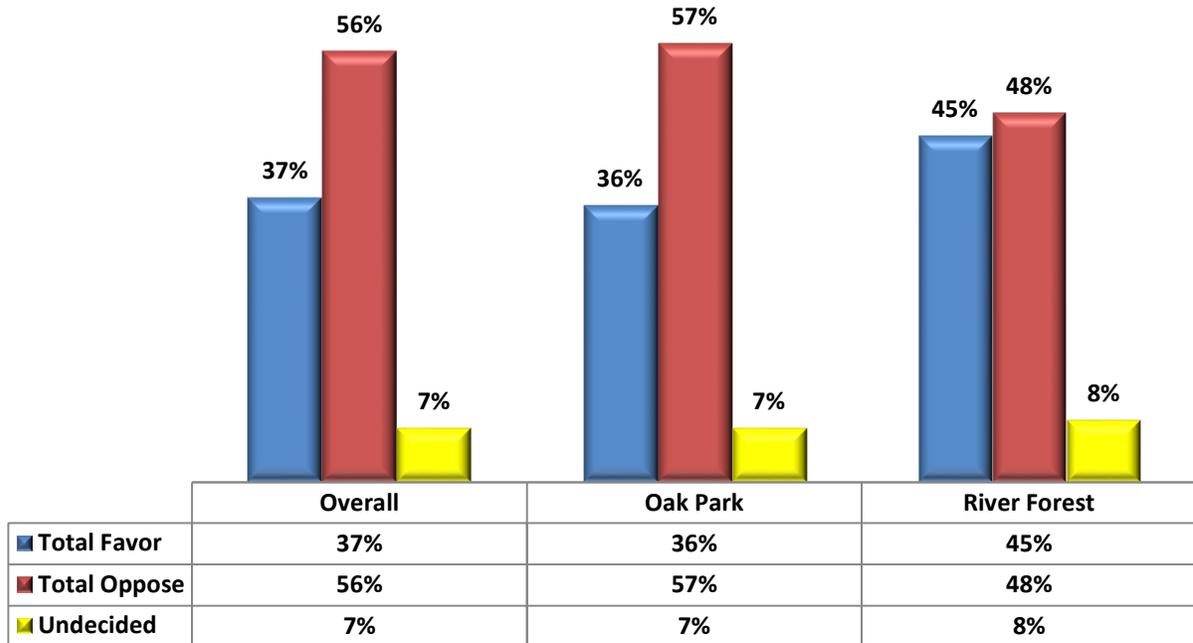
- Those more likely to favor this plan include: District residents under the age of 35 (52% Favor), Democratic men (58%), Latinos (58%), and minority men (58%).
- Groups more likely to oppose this iteration of the plan include: District residents between the ages of 50 and 64 (56% Oppose), Independents (66%), Republicans (56%), and renters (55%).

\$54 Million Plan

Figure 2

A plan that includes a single 40-meter pool that will be used for competition and physical education, and a new parking garage. The estimated cost of the pools, improved learning spaces, and expanded performing arts space is \$54 million dollars.

**Graph 2
Opinions of \$54 Million Plan by Region**



When presented with the \$54 million plan, opposition increases: 56% **Oppose** (32% Strongly / 24% Somewhat). Just under two-fifths of residents (37%) **favor** this version, though support is lukewarm with 28% only somewhat in favor of the plan and 9% strongly in favor.

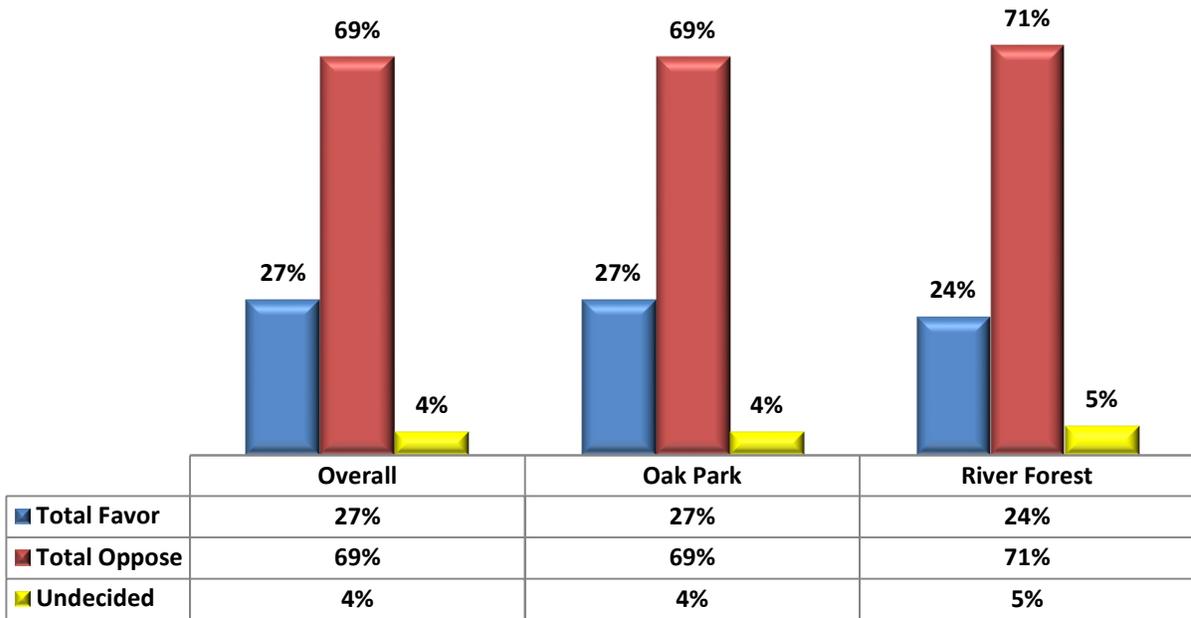
- Groups more likely to favor this iteration of the plan include: residents of River Forest (45%), residents under the age of 35 (47%), Latinos (44%), minority men (43%), and renters (44%).
- Opposition to this plan increases among: residents between the ages of 50 and 64 (67%), women over the age of 50 (65%), and Independents (73%).

\$68 Million Plan

Figure 3

A plan that includes a single 40-meter pool underground below the baseball field that will be used for competition and physical education. The current parking garage would be repaired. The cost of the pools, improved learning spaces, and expanded performing arts space is \$68 million dollars.

**Graph 3
Opinions of \$68 Million Plan by Region**



An overwhelming majority of residents (69%) **oppose** the \$68 million plan (45% Strongly / 24% Somewhat). A quarter of residents (27%) **favor** this iteration of the plan (7% Strongly / 20% Somewhat).

- Those more likely to favor this version of the plan include: men over the age of 50 (37%), African American residents (34%), and minority men (39%).
- Groups even more opposed to this plan include: residents between the ages of 50 and 64 (76%), women over 50 (77%), Independents (74%), and minority women (74%).

Opinions of Costs Associated with the Plans

Respondents were asked how reasonable or unreasonable various cost options were based on a median home value of \$400,000. These costs were presented as additional yearly taxes that would be used in combination with available cash on hand to fund improvements to OPRF's pools and learning spaces.

Table 7
Opinions of Cost Options by Region

Cost Option (Total Reasonable / Total Unreasonable)	Overall	Oak Park	River Forest
\$50 per year	68 / 31	67 / 31	71 / 28
\$75 per year	53 / 45	53 / 46	55 / 41
\$100 per year	36 / 62	35 / 64	44 / 54
\$125 per year	25 / 73	24 / 75	33 / 66
\$150 per year	18 / 80	17 / 81	23 / 76

Table 8
Opinions of Cost Options by Party ID

Cost Option (Total Reasonable / Total Unreasonable)	Overall	Democrats	Independents	GOP
\$50 per year	68 / 31	73 / 26	61 / 39	63 / 37
\$75 per year	53 / 45	57 / 42	47 / 48	51 / 45
\$100 per year	36 / 62	39 / 59	30 / 67	35 / 62
\$125 per year	25 / 73	26 / 72	26 / 72	22 / 76
\$150 per year	18 / 80	20 / 79	19 / 76	7 / 91

Table 9
Opinions of Cost Options by Race

Cost Option (Total Reasonable / Total Unreasonable)	Overall	White	Latino	African American	Total Minority
\$50 per year	68 / 31	70 / 29	67 / 30	63 / 37	68 / 31
\$75 per year	53 / 45	55 / 43	49 / 48	47 / 51	53 / 45
\$100 per year	36 / 62	39 / 60	27 / 71	36 / 60	34 / 63
\$125 per year	25 / 73	27 / 72	13 / 84	30 / 68	24 / 74
\$150 per year	18 / 80	21 / 77	3 / 95	17 / 81	14 / 84

Opinions of Aspects of the Plans

After offering their opinions on the proposed plans and potential costs, respondents were asked to provide, in their own words, what they liked **best** and **least** about any of the plans under discussion. Respondents provided open-ended responses to these two follow-up questions and their responses were coded into logical categories.

When asked which aspect of the plans they liked **best**:

- 16% offered generic support for new or renovated pools(s) or generic support for the plans.
- 11% indicated they liked plans for a new parking garage or repair of the existing garage.
- **11% liked the \$40 million plan best – as the one with the lowest cost, two pools, and repair of the parking garage.**
- 9% liked the inclusion of performing arts spaces and support for the arts.

When asked which aspect of the plans they liked **least**:

- 39% indicated they disliked the cost, seeing the plans as too expensive and not wanting tax increases.
- **16% stated they liked the \$60 (68) million plan least – as the most expensive plan with an unnecessary underground pool.**
- 13% offered concerns about the parking issue and the tearing down of the parking garage.
- 10% felt money should not be spent on unnecessary pools, or should be repaired instead of replaced, and that the focus should be on education.

Opinions of Oak Park and River Forest High School Issues

**Table 10
Opinions by Region & Other Sub-groups**

Statement (Total Agree / Strongly Agree)	Overall	Oak Park	River Forest	Other Sub-groups (Strongly Agree)
A high school with diverse academic classes, athletics, and extracurricular activities has a positive impact on property values in our community.	91 / 70	90 / 69	94 / 75	Men <50 (77%) Democrats (78%) Dem. Men (83%) Parents (80%) White Women (76%) Minority Men (79%)
Participation in extracurricular activities enhances academic performance.	92 / 64	94 / 66	83 / 57	Men <50 (70%) Dem. Men (71%) Parents (71%) White Women (71%) Minority Men (75%)
Performing arts classes, including band, orchestra, choir, and theatre, are an important part of the High School's offerings.	94 / 72	95 / 72	94 / 74	Dem. Men (80%) White Women (80%) Minority Men (86%)
Financing projects by selling bonds spreads the cost out over many years and among current and future taxpayers.	75 / 31	75 / 32	76 / 27	Ages 50+ (37%) Men 50+ (43%) African American (47%) TTL Minority (38%)
The High School's pools are close to ninety years old and leaking 3,000 gallons of water per day and should be replaced.	75 / 45	76 / 45	72 / 45	Dem. Men (52%) African American (51%) Minority Men (51%)
I am aware that the District has provided tax relief to the residents of Oak Park and River Forest by reducing taxes by \$28 million over the past three years.	37 / 14	39 / 15	26 / 11	--
Students develop lifelong fitness habits through water sports instruction in physical education.	78 / 40	79 / 40	73 / 39	Minority Men (49%) Renters (53%)
Water sports, including swimming, diving, water polo, and synchronized swimming, are an important part of the High School's athletics program.	74 / 37	74 / 36	72 / 43	Men <50 (43%) Democrats (43%) Dem. Men (47%) Minority Men (44%) Renters (44%)
Community members should have opportunities to use the school's pool for lap swimming and recreation.	76 / 47	76 / 48	74 / 45	Ages <35 (54%) Independents (57%) Minority Men (55%) Renters (53%)

Information Sources for District Residents

Respondents were asked which of the following has been a source of information about the facilities and swimming pools at Oak Park and River Forest High School. Respondents were allowed to provide more than one information source.

Table 11
Information Sources by Region

Information Source	Overall	Oak Park	River Forest
Attending a Community Meeting	26	26	24
High School District Website	28	28	28
Social Media	31	31	33
Village Newsletter	57	60	44
Newspaper Article	61	61	59
Friends, Neighbors or Relatives	55	57	46
High School Staff or Official	15	16	11
Post Card Invitation Sent by the High School	22	20	33

Table 12
Information Sources by Party ID

Information Source	Overall	Democrats	Independents	GOP
Attending a Community Meeting	26	24	34	19
High School District Website	28	27	28	31
Social Media	31	30	33	34
Village Newsletter	57	56	65	57
Newspaper Article	61	61	59	65
Friends, Neighbors or Relatives	55	55	51	56
High School Staff or Official	15	17	9	16
Post Card Invitation Sent by the High School	22	22	21	23

Table 13
Information Sources by Race

Information Source	Overall	White	Latino	African American	Total Minority
Attending a Community Meeting	26	23	28	34	32
High School District Website	28	26	35	26	28
Social Media	31	36	32	11	24
Village Newsletter	57	61	58	50	55
Newspaper Article	61	64	59	54	54
Friends, Neighbors or Relatives	55	55	42	59	56
High School Staff or Official	15	14	8	22	15
Post Card Invitation Sent by the High School	22	23	27	14	23

Conclusion & Assessment

Oak Park and River Forest High School (OPRF) operates in an engaged community that shows awareness of various issues regarding OPRF. Residents have generally positive feelings, and few hold negative opinions of the District's Board's fiscal management, although these positive sentiments are not particularly intense.

The residents of the District express a variety of feelings and concerns about the District, with a typical concentration on iterations of education issues, taxes, and finances. However, the volunteered expression of statements related to the pools indicates, even at only 12%, there is at least some general awareness of this particular topic, even if it lacks detail, and it is not a passive issue to the population.

The community expresses opinions that policies and issues related to ***band, orchestra, etc., technology,*** and ***addressing the anticipated enrollment increase*** should be a high priority for the District. This is consistent with other opinions expressed by District residents, showing that they feel various extracurricular activities, including performing arts, are important to education. The OPRF community understands that these are important and offering such activities to those interested in them adds value to the community and the educational experience for the students at OPRF.

The community diverges on their unprompted response to the priority of replacing the pools, giving it a relatively low priority rating. **This opinion changes as issues related to the pools are put into the context of their age and the inability to repair them. Once they know the age and unreparable condition of the pools, they understand that replacement may be the only option.** *As indicated earlier, there is general awareness of this issue, but this indicates the community remains somewhat unfamiliar with the details of this issue. OPRF has done a good job so far of raising awareness of the issue, but more details about it need to be communicated and embedded in the community.*

Opinions of the plans and costs show the expected more favorable response as the size and cost of the plan is lower. The \$40 million plan has nearly evenly divided opinions, but is near majority support. It has support from a range of sub-groups, with nearly equal support from Oak Park and River Forest. The two other plans tested were opposed by a majority of the District's residents. Generally, the lower cost (\$40M Plan) and inclusion of "non-pool" components of the plan are what the community reacted most favorably to. The size of the plans, cost, and what they feel are unnecessary aspects (pools, parking garages) are what residents do not like about the plans. This is clearly expressed in the "reasonableness" of the potential cost impacts on property taxes, with anything exceeding \$75 a year viewed as unreasonable.

As discussed earlier, there is strong and generally intense agreement that various athletic, performing arts, and other extracurricular activities are valuable and important. They also feel the community should have use of a school pool. Also, to reiterate, residents understand the need to replace the pools once put into the context of their age and condition. It is very important to ensure these aspects of the plan, regardless of the path chosen, are communicated as part of the plan.

Generally, OPRF has a challenging but not impossible task to achieve in terms of public opinion. The community has some awareness of the issues with the pools, although more details need to be embedded in the minds of District residents (taxpayers). Once the reality of the pools' condition is brought to their attention, the community understands that something must be done. Residents have strong favorable opinions of the performing arts, and technological and space needs for increased enrollment, aspects of the potential plans. They are divided, but close to majority favorable, on the smaller scale plan, and any plan that would actually cost the residents under \$100 a year is viewed as reasonable. A plan on this scale and cost range, and beyond a plan for "just pools" – with components that include performing arts, technology, and additional space for enrollment increases – would have the best chance of earning the most favorable public opinion among the three plan iterations and the various aspects of them that were tested.

Methodology: Oak Park and River Forest High School commissioned the survey. Fako Research & Strategies, Inc. (FR&S) of Lemont, Illinois conducted the survey by telephone on July 19 – 21, 2016 using professional interviewers. FR&S interviewed a random sample of n=300 adult (age 18+) residents of Oak Park and River Forest who are registered to vote within the District. A strict screening process was used to ensure that only adult (age 18+) residents of the District that are registered to vote participated in the survey. The interviews lasted an average of 13 minutes. Scientific sampling techniques using a listing of households with at least one registered voter were used to give all residents within this group living in a telephone-equipped household, or with a listed cell phone number, an equal chance of being interviewed. Cellular phones were included within the sample and accounted for 46% (139 Completed Interviews) of all weighted interviews. The interviews were conducted in proportion to gender and regional shares of the population based on known demographics. Weighting was applied to Age and Race to bring these groups into closer proportion to known demographics. The survey has an overall margin of error of +/- 5.62% at the 95% level of confidence. This means that if the survey were replicated the results would be consistent for 95 out of 100 cases. The margin of error is higher among the various sub-groups.

Glossary:

Regions

- **Oak Park (83% of Sample)** = All of Oak Park.
- **River Forest (17% of Sample)** = All of River Forest.