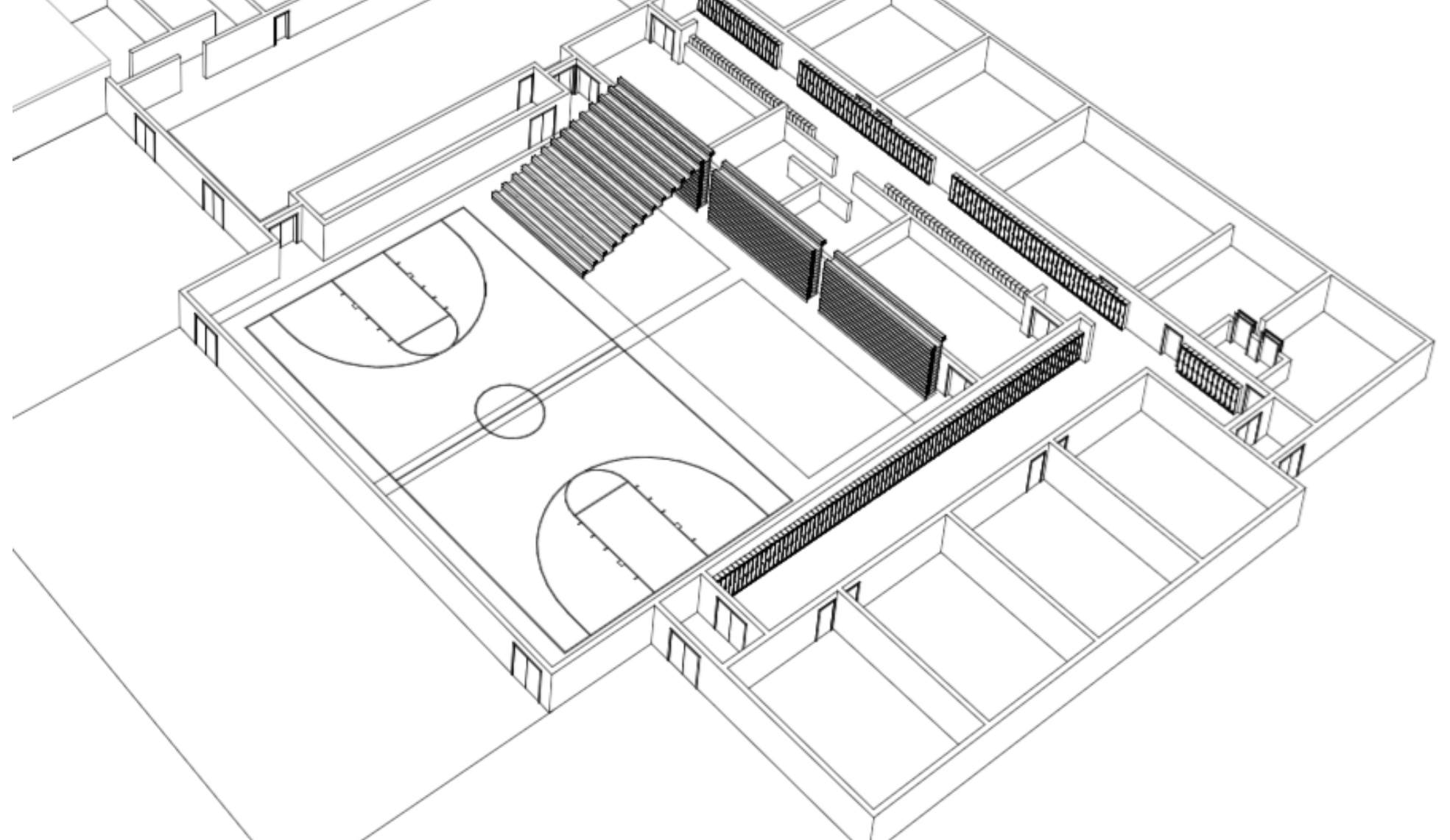


Community conflict and building construction: Stratification in a remote, consolidated local education agency (LEA)

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ABSTRACT

While much research has been conducted on both state-level stratification of LEAs and rural school reorganization, little attention has been paid to spatial conflicts of identity in local policy after consolidation. Using a dataset of (N=1974) survey instruments and (N=99) Facebook posts, this study investigates the explanatory variables to support or disavow Board of Education support for building construction that serves a subset of the consolidated LEA. Study participants: resided in a remote, 341-square-mile LEA; enrollment of 1,126 students that were 94.2% Caucasian-American; and had notable stratification between the 'North' [median \$53,750] and 'South' [median \$40,313] subsets of the LEA. This cross-sectional, triangulated study revealed quantitative significance at $p < 0.05$ for gender, $p < 0.01$ for geography, and $p < 0.001$ for age and children enrolled in LEA; qualitatively, it illustrated a 'divide' between the interests of the 'North' and the burdens of the 'South' that resulted in female grassroots action. Through this, the community challenged (a) a new community identity, (b) poor communication by the new LEA and Board of Education, and (c) the burden of aging, poorly-maintained facilities.



INTRODUCTION

A muggy, July afternoon in Illinois found more than 50 people packed into a bank turned senior-center to discuss the Bunker Ridge Board of Education's recent plans to construct new LEA buildings. The event was led by 'North' parents who deemed it to be nothing more than an opportunity for area residents to learn the 'facts' about the voted-on project. "We have a community worth fighting for," Judy told the crowd. "This is our children. This is our taxes. This is our home."

While those in attendance reiterated, especially to the local news media, that it was not a battle between the North and South sections of the consolidated LEA, empirical and contextual evidence found otherwise.

- The last decade's average found rural and urban institutions received half of the funding for buildings as suburban institutions, which has led to legal battles like Abbot v. Burke in New Jersey.⁵
- While the rural sector can be classified as a major US education constituency, multiple political and economic barriers prevent the deployment of funding— including perpetuated negative stereotypes of rural communities and schooling.^{10, 11, 12}
- Thinking spatially, at a sub-LEA level, allows a closer examination of forces that maintain 'stratification' in a post-consolidated LEA.⁹
- Spatial constructions in educational policy are formed through negotiated narratives of identity and its corresponding networks; these resulting actors, then, are constituted with authority in decision-making based on their status in the community.⁸

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Rural community, organized around commonly held interests and attributes, is a complex modality of power, contest and participation.^{2,3}
- Consolidation of LEAs, to the poor and working class, "represents an attempt to destroy what is often their only sphere of public influence and their last vestige of control over their children's education and socialization."^{7,13}
- America's small towns perceive that there is a classlessness in rural society, but differences in social and economic circumstances are very much empirical.^{12,13}
- Rural school boards, unlike their counterparts, must recruit people to run and thus, very few are effective.¹
- The most effective administration and school boards "stay close to their communities," communicate, and create trusted leadership.^{1,4}

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Within rural, consolidated local education agencies, what are the explanatory variables as to support or disavow school board for construction of a building to serve a sample of the entire taxed population?
 - H1— Gender explains support.
 - H2— Children in school district explains support
 - H3— Age explains support
 - H4— Geospatial location (served versus unserved) explains support.
- When faced with building construction, how do rural constituents organize to show support or disavow for the board of education?
 - Triangulation of H1 – H4

METHODOLOGY

- Triangulation and grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was utilized.
- Demographics of Sample
 - 6 individual K-12 LEAs consolidated into 1 LEA in 1995.
 - 350 square miles of land comprised of several rural villages.
 - Enrollment of 1,120 remaining constant.
 - 94.2% White (2014); Low-income rapidly increasing near 50%
 - Median Household Income: North \$53,750, South \$40,313.
- Time frame: July 10, 2015 (creation of Facebook Group) to August 26, 2015 (Results of survey released to public)

- Quantitative** – Secondary data analysis of survey research
 - IBM SPSS 23 – ANOVA, Tukey post-hoc HSD
 - 4552 administered to registered voters, 1974 instruments returned (43%). Demographic questions were optional, so N varied.

The Board also faces many challenges with the facilities currently serving as the South K-8, including the same reduced enrollment, staffing inefficiencies and significant building deficiencies as noted above. With these issues top of mind, the Board would like to know: Are you in favor of constructing a new pre-K through 5th grade elementary school at a location to be determined in the south end of the District?

- Qualitative** – Content discourse analysis of public Facebook posts
 - ATLAS.ti 1.0.29 (110) – Network Analysis
 - N = up to 600 in 99 documents; 793 quotations, 280 codes
- Independent Variables** - Gender, age, children enrolled, geographic location
- Dependent Variable** - Support for construction of new 'South' building



RESULTS

Fig. 1 – Network Analysis of Qualitative Data (ATLAS.ti)

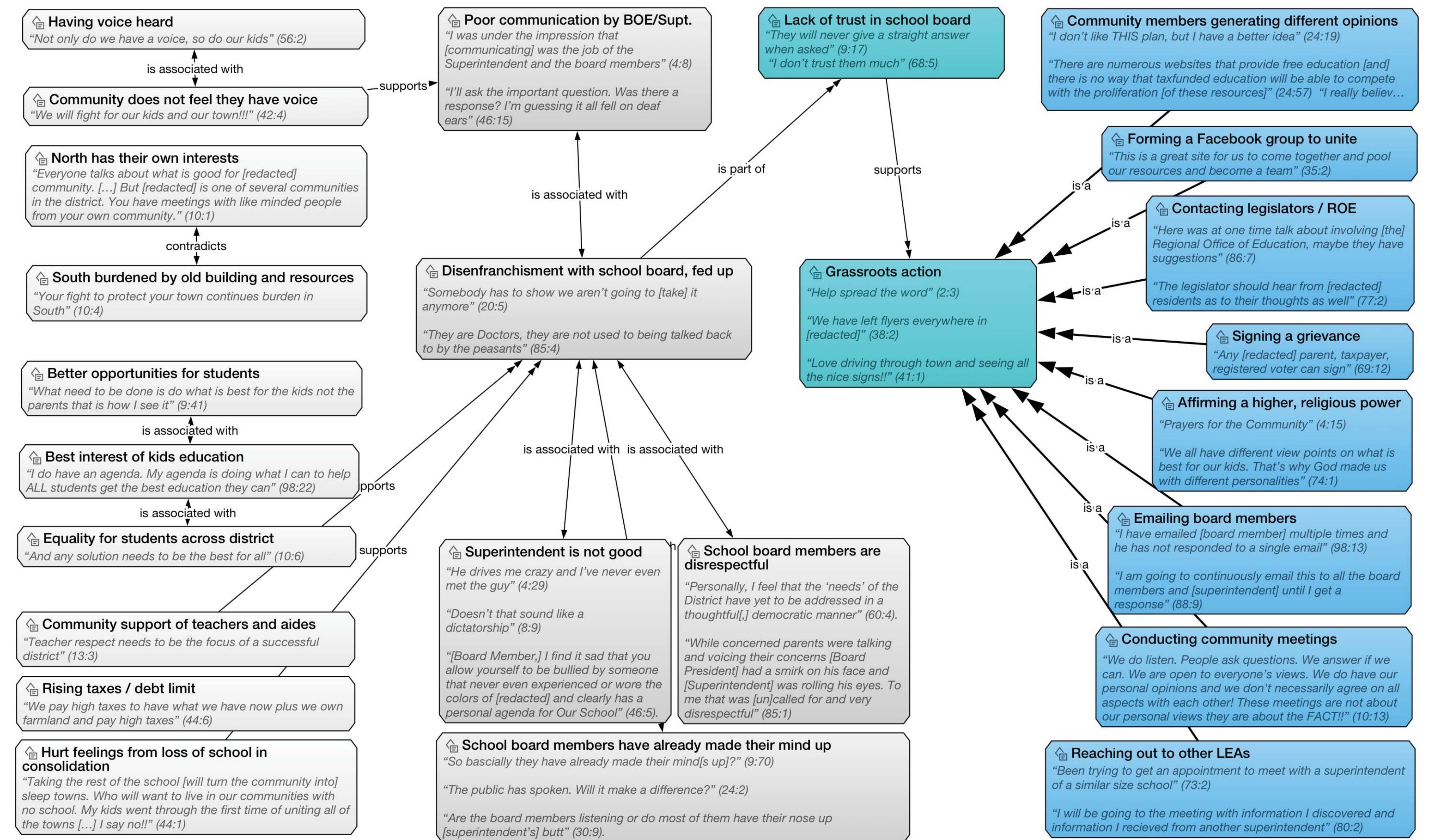


Fig. 2 – Cross-analysis of variables based on A/B

Variables	\bar{x}	A \bar{x}	B \bar{x}
Gender (A Male/B Female)	.6452	.6714 (N = 837)	.6201 (N = 874)
Children enrolled (A Yes/B No)	.6033	.5479 (N = 491)	.6386 (N = 772)
Age (A 21-50/B 51-100)	.6386	.5712 (N = 590)	.6845 (N = 840)
Geographic (A North/B South)	.6425	.6588 (N = 894)	.6230 (N = 748)

Coding: 0 'Yes', 1 'No'

Fig. 3 – Analysis of Variance

Variables	N	Df	F
Gender	1710	1, 1709	4.925*
Children enrolled (Model II)	1262	1, 1261	10.394***
Age	1436	1, 1434	16.956***
Geographic (N/S)	1642	1, 1640	7.596**

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

- Analysis of variance indicated significant differences ($p < 0.001$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$) on all four independent variables. A Tukey post-hoc HSD test indicated the following:
- Male** survey respondents were statistically less likely to support building construction (.6714) than **Female** survey respondents (.6201)
- Survey respondents **with children at school** were statistically more likely to support building construction (.5479) versus survey respondents **without children** (.6386).
- Survey respondents between the ages of **21 – 50** were more likely (.5712) to support building construction over respondents between **51 – 100** (.6825). A sample of **18-21** was not large enough to draw a conclusion (N = 6).
- The **southern half of the LEA** (which the building would serve) was statistically more likely (.6230) to support building construction than the **northern half of the LEA** (.6588).

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

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Michael Lotspeich, graduating senior at the University of Illinois-Springfield, studies Sociology and Geographic Information Systems. His research involves measuring how inequalities shape development, demography, and opportunities at the rural-suburban-urban nexuses using both spatial and quantitative methods. After graduation, Lotspeich will be starting his Ph.D. in Applied Sociology at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

