

Voters say no to \$166 million referendum

Board will hold special meeting Monday to discuss next steps to repair aging schools

By Pamela Lannom
plannom@thehinsdalean.com

Supporters of Hinsdale High School District 86's \$166 million referendum had expected a victory Tuesday.

"There was so much passion, so much support. It just felt like a groundswell. There was the anticipation it would pass," said Annie Kiperman, chairman of the Vote Yes for 86 committee. "It feels like it was a no-brainer. It feels like the time had come. It feels like it was so obvious, but that never materialized. People are not paying attention and it's a shame."

The measure failed 54-46 percent, with unofficial vote totals in DuPage and Cook counties at 17,461-14,731.

"To be extremely clear, every no vote that was cast was cast against the betterment of our community, against our children's future, against property values and against our rankings as top schools in the state and the nation," Kiperman said, acknowledging that emotions were still raw less than 24 hours after the vote.

Superintendent Bruce Law said Wednesday it might be too early to think clearly about the decision. But he pointed to successful referendums in Elmhurst Unit District 205 (\$168.5 million) an Maine Township High School District 207 (\$195 million) and wondered what made the difference.

"You look at all these referendum questions that were passing, but it doesn't pass in District 86. I'm not really sure what to make of it," he said.

"There seemed to be something going on besides, 'This is just too much money,'" he continued. "I'm trying to understand it. I think that's really important here. There's a mismatch here between what we're putting out, apparently, and what people want for their schools."

The school board will need to begin looking soon at options for making the needed repairs at Hinsdale Central and Hinsdale South, Law said.

"I'm very concerned about what is coming next," he said. "Costs continue to increase to make improvements and to fix the things that need to be

fixed and I don't know how we're going to do the things that need to be done without support from the community."

In October the board reviewed a list of \$6.5 million in possible annual spending cuts that could be made to cover mandatory life-safety projects in the event the referendum failed. Among the options were decreasing the number of credits a student can earn from 24 to 18.5 and reducing student services staff such as counselors, psychologists and social workers.

When those cuts are made, people know who to blame, Kiperman said.

"The owners of the cuts are the people who passed the no ballot," she said. "If anyone has a beef with that, they know who to go find and talk to."

She said she's frustrated with the opposition campaign, from its financing to its message — or lack thereof.

"The No side had no platform, no messaging, no faith in the community. They were nowhere. We asked to debate them," she said.

The message of the Yes

campaign required more than a soundbite, she said. The history of district finances — including the affect of the tax cap and a previous board's decision in 2013 to file a zero increase tax levy, causing the loss of \$5.6 million in revenue — takes time to understand, Kiperman said.

"Those take more than people have attention for and it's a shame," she said.

Working on the campaign with great people has been rewarding, she said. Now more people than ever are aware of the issues, she said, using the analogy of waking a sleeping giant.

"I don't know how the story will be written after today," she said. "I don't know what's going to happen. I do know that now that people are cognizant of the situation, we are in for a bumpy ride."

Calls to split the district and boycott businesses in Burr Ridge are among the ideas she's read on social media, she said. Another option would be to put the referendum right back on next April's ballot, as is.

"Everyone wants to roll up



District 86 referendum unofficial results

DuPage County
Yes 13,929 45%
No 16,775 55%

Cook County
Yes 802 54%
No 686 46%

Total
Yes 14,731 46%
No 17,461 54%

their sleeves now, which is awesome, but it's a day late," she said.

The board will hold a special meeting at 8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 12, at Hinsdale Central to discuss the results. Administrators hope to have an analysis of the geographic breakdown of the vote.



Referendum supporters and Hinsdale High School District 86 board members gathered at Stats Bar and Grill in Willowbrook Tuesday night to await results on the \$166 million ballot question. The board had dis-

cussed some options in the event the referendum failed, and administrators have been researching other measures they will present to the board soon, Superintendent Bruce Law said. (Jim Slonoff photos)