

Where does D86 rank in pay, tax rate?

Referendum would provide funds for facilities, but some question other district costs

By Ken Knutson

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As debate continues between opponents and proponents of the \$139 million Hinsdale High School District 86 referendum leading up to the April 2 election, some have leveled criticism regarding the use of funds the district already has.

Under the law, proceeds from a successful ballot measure can be used only for safety work and facility improvements at Hinsdale Central and Hinsdale South high schools. The district has not passed a referendum since 1962, when voters approved the construction of South. Central is now 69 years old and South is 53 years old. Pro-referendum advocates say the schools are overdue for the scope of upgrades proposed.

Those who say the amount

being requested is excessive argue that the district's tax rate is already too high and that school boards have been too generous in teacher contract negotiations, resulting in among the highest compensation levels in the state. Data collected for the annual Illinois Report Card shows the district does rank among the top tier of districts with comparable student performance results. Domenic Maniscalco, the district's chief human resources officer, said there's good reason for that.

"There's an advantage to being competitive. We want to recruit good teachers, and a competitive salary schedule attracts good teachers," he said.

When comparing District 86's average annual teacher salary in 2018 to 12 other suburban high school districts

considered peer districts, such as New Trier, Lyons Township and Stevenson, the district ranks eighth at \$101,000 (see sidebar for full listing).

Academically, Central and South were ranked 7th and 14th, respectively, among public schools in Illinois in the most recent U.S. News and World Report high school rankings. Maniscalco said the district must battle to keep its lofty status by incentivizing career longevity.

"We want to make sure that the ones that start here end here," Maniscalco said, noting the alternative is the proverbial revolving door. "We definitely don't want to be one of the districts that keeps losing teachers to higher paying jobs."

The current four-year contract, which runs through 2019-20, provided a base pay increase of .8 percent but no

step (experience) increases for teachers the first year. The next year gave no base increase but did feature a .8 percent step increase average. The final two years have a base increase of .75 percent of CPI (no less than 1 percent, no more than 2 percent) and a step increase average of 2.9 percent.

Andy Laux, Hinsdale Central social studies teacher and co-president of the Hinsdale High School Teachers Association, said competitive compensation is certainly a factor in attracting and retaining quality educators.

"Just as any industry, competitive paying districts have the best chance of hiring and retaining the best teachers," Laux stated. Asked if the union worked with the district during negotiations to be responsive to teachers and taxpayers, he answered with "Yes."

Maniscalco said, from his experience, the top teachers are not in the field for the money but because they love to teach. And just as in the private sector, they will go where they feel most supported in their work.

"Being competitive is to Hinsdale's advantage. You have people who stay here because of that. We don't want to give them a reason to leave," Maniscalco said. "If districts two miles away from us are paying more, Hinsdale will not be a district that will retain good teachers. Would you stay in the same job if down the street you could do the same thing and get paid more? That's not the way the world works."

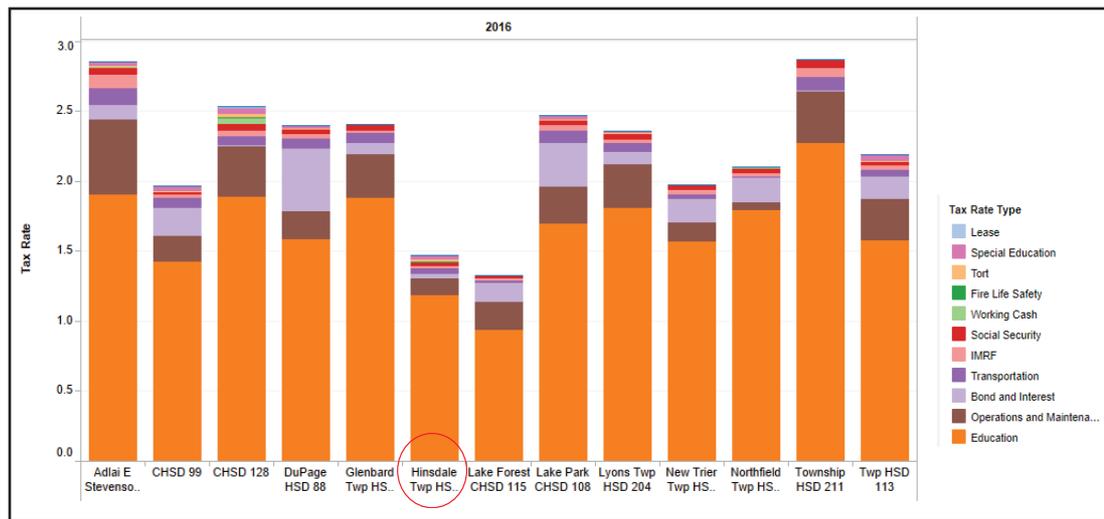


Teacher salaries

This listing of average teacher pay levels from 2018 shows where District 86 ranks among its peers, the same districts included in the tax rate graph.

New Trier Dist. 203	\$114,000
Highland Park Dist. 113	\$113,000
Northfield Dist. 225	\$112,000
Libertyville Dist. 128	\$109,000
Lyons Township Dist. 204	\$109,000
Glenbard Dist. 87	\$106,000
Lake Forest Dist. 115	\$102,000
Hinsdale Dist. 86	\$101,000
Palatine Dist. 211	\$99,500
Stevenson Dist. 125	\$99,300
DuPage Dist. 88	\$97,600
Lake Park Dist. 108	\$95,400
Downers Grove Dist. 99	\$92,800

Source: Illinois School Report Card



Salaries and benefits dominate the expense side of the district's balance sheet. On the revenue side, the district relies primarily on property tax revenue to fund its budget. District 86 has the second-lowest tax rates among peer districts. (art provided by District 86)



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