

Supporters, opponents seek to be heard

Vote yes and vote no groups working to sway voters on D86 referendum April 2

By Pamela Lannom
plannom@thehinsdalean.com

After spending more than \$100,000 on the Nov. 6 election, supporters and opponents of the Hinsdale High School District 86 bond referendum on the April 2 ballot are poised to exceed that total.

The D86 Vote Yes to Save our Schools group, formed in August 2018, has been hosting a variety of events, from fundraisers to town hall meetings, in an attempt to support the \$139 million referendum.

Protecting property values is one of the reasons the group supports the referendum to make needed improvements to Hinsdale Central and Hinsdale South high schools, Chairman Kari Galassi said.

"There are so many statistics and correlations between investment in schools and having a strong school ranking and property values," she said. "There is a direct correlation between the two."

Supporters also want to see the referendum pass so the school board will not have to implement \$3.2 million in cuts during 2019-20 to help pay for \$42 million worth of life safety, infrastructure and security projects that are part of the referendum. The board voted in December to cut nine sports and 33 activities at each school, for a total savings of almost \$1.2 million.

D86 Vote Yes is hosting information nights focused around several of the areas that will be cut. A meeting for swimming, diving and water polo held Feb. 7 at Hinsdale South drew about 70 people, said Lisa Lundgren. Members of the Vote Yes committee spoke for 30 minutes and then took questions.

"I think it's easier to come into a smaller group and ask questions that you really have," she said.

Additional evenings will be orga-

nized around football and wrestling, she said.

The meetings are part of a multi-pronged strategy for the group to get its message out. A website, weekly email blasts, a Facebook page, mailers, newspaper and digital ads all are being utilized.

"We are really trying to educate and market factual information," Galassi said. "We make sure that we fact-check everything with the district."

The group has a core committee of 10 individuals, half from Hinsdale Central and half from Hinsdale South, Galassi said. She pointed to endorsements from a variety of village officials, including Hinsdale trustees and the three candidates vying to be elected mayor of Darien.

All of the group's cash contributions listed in the last Illinois State Board of Elections quarterly report are for \$500 or less, with two exceptions. Linda and Allan Burke made two donations of \$1,000 each and the Hinsdale High School Teachers Association and its iPace Funds donated a total of \$17,400.

Although opponents have said the referendum is unnecessary, the Vote Yes group believes it is what is best for the community.

"We feel strongly that if this fails ... D86 is going to be a shell of what we all know it to be," she said.

Referendum opponents

The D86 Vote No on Tax Increase to Do Better — or Do Better 86 — group formed in September 2018 to oppose the Nov. 6 referendum. The committee has an informal group of volunteers from across the district offering financial support and advice, Chairman Zach Mottl said.

"We're a big tent," he said. "Some people are fiscal conservatives, some people are more on the liberal side of

the spectrum that see an educational inequality."

The group believes \$139 million is too much to spend.

"Our website talking points say it all. We believe it's wasteful, unfair and unaffordable," he said, adding he and his group would work to support a referendum in the \$40 million range.

In addition to the website, the group sends direct mail to supporters, is running online adds and making phone calls to spread its message.

The group's single biggest financial supporter, according to statements filed with the state board of elections, is Jorie LP in Las Vegas, donating \$17,600 since Sept. 18. Mottl's family business, Atlas Tool and Die Works, and he and his mother, Cindy, have donated \$15,850 in the same time frame.

Since Jan. 28, the group has reported four donations in excess of \$1,000: \$20,000 from Al Koplun, \$5,000 from Ed Corcoran, \$2,500 from Bob Bland and \$1,000 from David Marco.

"I hope, truly, this is the last time that we have to defeat a referendum before the district will work collaboratively with the whole community," he said.

One of the groups Mottl identified as agreeing with the "do better" message is Citizens for Clarendon Hills. The political action committee formed in 2011 to campaign against a referendum to grant home rule authority to the village of Clarendon Hills. Corcoran, a supporter of Mottl's committee and former D86 board member, is one of the group's founders.

The committee has been an outspoken opponent of the referendum and believes more than \$100 million of the \$139 million total is waste, according to an email response Corcoran said was from C4CH steering committee.

"Rather than spending money where kids will see the largest impact, the classroom, this referendum benefits



adults — architects, consultants, construction managers, attorneys and special interest groups," the email states.

The committee believes necessary work could be done at a much lower cost and that activities fees for sports and activities would prevent the elimination of those programs.

The committee's most recent statement with the state board of elections, for the fourth quarter of 2018, shows no contributions and no election-related expenses.

"C4CH continues to rely upon balanced press reporting, email and word of mouth," the email states.

Another group Mottl identified as supportive of the "Do Better" message is Fill South First.

"Many, many D86 taxpayers believe in filling South first," reads an email sent in reply to The Hinsdalean's request for an interview. "It is not an organization."

The Fill South First message, according to the email, is to "optimally utilize facilities at each school" and "adjust attendance boundaries as necessary," as called for in board policy, before asking taxpayers to foot the bill for an "unnecessarily, overly expensive referendum."

Fill South First does maintain a website and communicate with those who sign up for updates via email. It has not filed a statement of organization with the state board of elections and did not respond to additional requests for information.

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