

OPINION

EDITORIAL

Best way to do better? Pass a referendum in April

The message to the Hinsdale High School District 86 Board since Nov. 6 has been loud and clear: Do what we want, and we'll pass your referendum. More than one parent from Maercker Elementary District 60 either implied or downright stated Monday that if school boundary lines were changed so no D60 students would go to Hinsdale South, they would make sure the \$166 million measure passed next time around.

Ed Corcoran and his Citizens for Clarendon Hills sent an email saying if a board member would sit down with his group — behind closed doors, we can only assume — a referendum amount could be negotiated that would pass with a “super majority.”

Who knows what the Vote No for 86 group wants, other than their vague claim that the district “can do better.”

But opponents of the \$166 million referendum aren't the only ones who are making their voices heard. More than one resident came up to the podium at Monday's special meeting, asking the board to please give them another chance to pass a referendum similar to this one in April.

These residents have a message worth hearing. Despite more than doubling the amount of the

\$73 million referendum that failed in April 2017 and despite an aggressive and sometimes misleading campaign from opponents, supporters were able to slice 20 percent off the no vote this time around. Opposition fell from 74 percent in 2017 to 54 percent.

High voter turnout — at almost 57 percent — certainly helped the referendum's cause. The figure shows, however, that 43 percent of district residents could be potential supporters. Even in Hinsdale, where the referendum had its strongest showing, more than 3,200 people voted no.

If supporters redoubled their efforts and began work on an educational campaign immediately, they'd have almost five months to convince voters of the schools' dire needs before the April 2 election.

We know board members are focused now — as they should be — on figuring out how to squeeze \$3 million a year out of the budget to pay for critical life-safety work, security measures, increased accessibility and classroom improvements. The \$3 million would be combined with \$2 million a year earmarked for summer construction projects and a \$15 million bond issue. They can't wait to see if voters will change their

minds in a future election.

But we think they should take the time to vote on another referendum now, rather than waiting for the results of a phone survey or the Jan. 14 deadline.

It's catchy to say the district “can do better.” But it's an empty phrase, considering the \$166 million list of projects was developed with the input of hundreds of people over the course of more than three years.

People who don't want their taxes to go up for any reason at all — along with those who are clinging to the hope the district will create grade level centers or change boundary lines — aren't going to be convinced. They are more interested in their own agendas than addressing the schools' needs.

Focus energy and attention on those who are interested in learning more and who might be persuaded to change their no vote to a yes or even get out and vote at all.

We urge board members to vote Monday to put a referendum on the April ballot so supporters can get back to work. The district can do better — by passing this referendum next time around.