

# OPINION

## EDITORIAL



## Plenty of reasons to vote 'yes' on D86 referendum

“Shall the Board of Education of Hinsdale Township High School District Number 86, DuPage and Cook Counties, Illinois, improve the sites of, renovate, alter, repair and equip and replace portions of the Hinsdale South High School Campus and Hinsdale Central High School Campus, including, but not limited to, installing school safety and emergency response systems and equipment; making facilities Americans with Disabilities Act accessible to persons with disabilities; repairing 60-year old infrastructure; and improving the electrical capacity and lighting in older classrooms, and issue bonds of said School District to the amount of \$139,815,983 for the purpose of paying the costs thereof?”

✓ Yes  
No

There are so many reasons to vote “yes” April 2 on the Hinsdale High School District 86 \$139 million bond referendum, it’s hard to know where to begin.

First and foremost are the safety and well-being of students at Hinsdale Central and Hinsdale South high schools, who attend classes in buildings that do not have up-to-date safety and security systems, are not accessible to people with disabilities and need significant repairs (for leaky roofs, outdated electrical equipment, aging boilers, cracked tennis courts and more).

These expenses alone account for more than \$40 million of the referendum total.

Some opponents have argued that is where the spending should stop, but we — like the board members who approved the referendum and the scores of district residents representing both Central and South who worked on two task forces identifying the schools’ needs — disagree. A \$42 million outlay would address the most

serious issues on the project list. But significant areas of both facilities would remain in need of repairs and updating. And at Hinsdale Central, the swimming/diving and water polo teams and swimming instruction will exist only as long as the Dectron air handling unit — which is on its last legs — holds out.

Instead, the board chose to pursue a list of projects that brings the two high schools into the 21st century.

The referendum earmarks \$8.7 million for STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) improvements, \$7.9 million to renovate the cafeterias, \$6.2 million to modernize the libraries and \$15.86 million to improve fine and performing arts space.

Special education and student services spaces will be renovated at a cost of \$24 million to provide appropriate, convenient and private spaces for students who need support or want to talk to a counselor, social worker or psychologist.

Another \$24 million will allow instruction and competitive swimming, diving and water polo to continue at both schools. A new 6-lane, 25-yard pool will be built in a new location at Central, and the existing 6-lane, 25-yard pool at South will be replaced in its current location.

These improvements are not extravagant. They will simply bring the facilities at Central and South closer to the standards set by other high schools in the Chicago area.

Residents in many of these other school districts already have approved referendums to improve their facilities. Voters there recognized that with the tax cap in place, districts can’t really keep up with the cost of aging facilities on an annual basis. And so they’ve passed ballot measures to address many of the same items District 86 has on its list right now.

The difference in those communities? They haven’t had to contend with organized opposi-



tion groups willing to spend more than \$100,000 — or 173 times the annual cost of the referendum for a \$1 million home — to try to convince others the referendum is unfair, wasteful and unaffordable.

Their tactics have been misleading and divisive, certainly not qualities we want to instill in our young people. Even those who are not part of the organized opposition — who simply “aren’t sure” the repairs are needed but have never set foot in the schools — are doing a disservice to the students, other taxpayers and ultimately themselves by refusing to support one of the community’s most important assets.

District 86 has two award-winning, nationally ranked high schools that educate 4,300 students. Alumni have competed in the Olympics, earned perfect ACT scores, won athletic scholarships to Ivy League Schools, started businesses, served as U.S. ambassadors and broken ground as pioneers in their field. It seems shortsighted to say that \$1.54 a day is too much to spend on the schools in which these future leaders spend four significant years of their academic careers.

It’s easy to say the district can do better. It’s easy to cite a per student cost and say that should be enough money to pay for teachers and facilities and extracurricular activities and sports. It’s easy to point fingers and make accusations. Especially when you don’t have any actual responsibilities to act on what you say.

It’s also easy to go to the polls Tuesday, April 2, and vote “yes.” We encourage voters who want to preserve the stellar reputation of Hinsdale Central and Hinsdale South to do just that.