



A Community of Learners

Informational Item: Referendum Community Engagement Partner

TO: School Board

FROM: Trisha Kocanda, Superintendent
Kate Hughes, Communications & Community Relations Coordinator

February 25, 2020

Background & Overview

At the January 22, 2020 Board Meeting, a presentation was shared by the Board detailing work that has occurred since April 2019 to advance the Educational Master Facility Plan (EMFP). This includes the approval of a Redistricting Plan to balance enrollment among the three elementary schools, selection of a new architect (Perkins and Will), approval of a three-year critical priority/needs facility plan, and the development of a 2019-2021 implementation timeline for advancing the EMFP facility work.

The Board affirmed its commitment to high-quality education and fiscal responsibility and noted that another referendum is being considered, which would be centered on meeting the critical facility priorities and needs indicated in the EMFP. The Board is currently contemplating the most appropriate timeline for pursuing a referendum with scope, cost, and timing aligned with community priorities.

At the January meeting, it was discussed that Nat Roberts and Emily Rose would serve as School Board communications liaisons. Since that time, they have worked with Superintendent Kocanda and Communications Coordinator, Kate Hughes, on determining the recommended timeline for the referendum and the preferred communications firm to advise the District as it pursues another referendum.

Referendum Timeline Recommendation

The District and Board asked for a proposed timeline as well as insight from the preferred communication firm into whether it would be preferable to have a referendum on the ballot in November 2020 or April 2021. After much discussion, it is advised to move forward with an April 2021 referendum for reasons that include:

- ❑ Necessity to thoroughly re-engage the Winnetka community and develop a communication plan that reaches all demographics and prioritizes more personalized conversations and community coffees to share information
- ❑ Intensity surrounding the 2020 presidential elections posing challenges with clearly communicating referendum information in the midst of voluminous state and national political messaging
- ❑ Uncertainty with state issues may preoccupy some voters who want to wait on these outcomes in November before deciding on any local issues

Communications Firm Recommendation

In order to ensure that the community is effectively included and informed throughout the referendum decision-making process, the District recommends engaging a polling and communications consulting team to help guide the outreach process. Based on references from other Districts and following an extensive search process for the most appropriate partner, most recently interviewing three firms, it is recommended the Board approve *Beyond Your Base* and *Public Opinion Strategies* to provide community engagement services from July 2020 through April 2021. It is worth noting that New Trier worked with these entities leading up to their successful 2014 referendum.

The recommended community communication and engagement timeline is as follows:

- ❑ Spring/Summer 2020
 - ❑ Develop public outreach timeline
 - ❑ Conduct voter analysis
 - ❑ Prepare Citizen Task Force communication materials
- ❑ Fall/Winter 2020
 - ❑ Launch Citizen Task Force (including three facilitated meetings) to help determine scope, cost, and ballot language (if advised)
 - ❑ Conduct mail survey and phone poll with Winnetka residents and share results with the School Board and Citizen Task Force

- ❑ Support communications efforts and outreach including but not limited to public information meetings, FAQ documents, and community mailings

Next Steps

- ❑ It is recommended that the Board affirm the referendum target of April 2021 versus November 2020 given the above rationale
- ❑ It is recommended that the Board approve [Beyond Your Base and Public Opinion Strategies](#) as the District's community engagement partner as presented in the proposal