

Effective Communication When Preparing for Referendum

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EMPATHY 

 2026
ANNUAL
CONFERENCE

Introductions

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STIFEL | Public Finance

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A District wins or loses a referendum before it ever votes to place it on the ballot.

Referenda most likely to pass are...

1. *Properly timed*
2. *Focused on needs, not wants*
3. *Community driven*
4. *Tested via public opinion research*

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1. Properly Timed

Key drivers to consider...



Voter Demographics



Board Elections



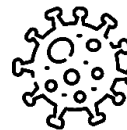
Trust of District (PR Issues)



Available Time to Do It Right



Competing Tax Measures

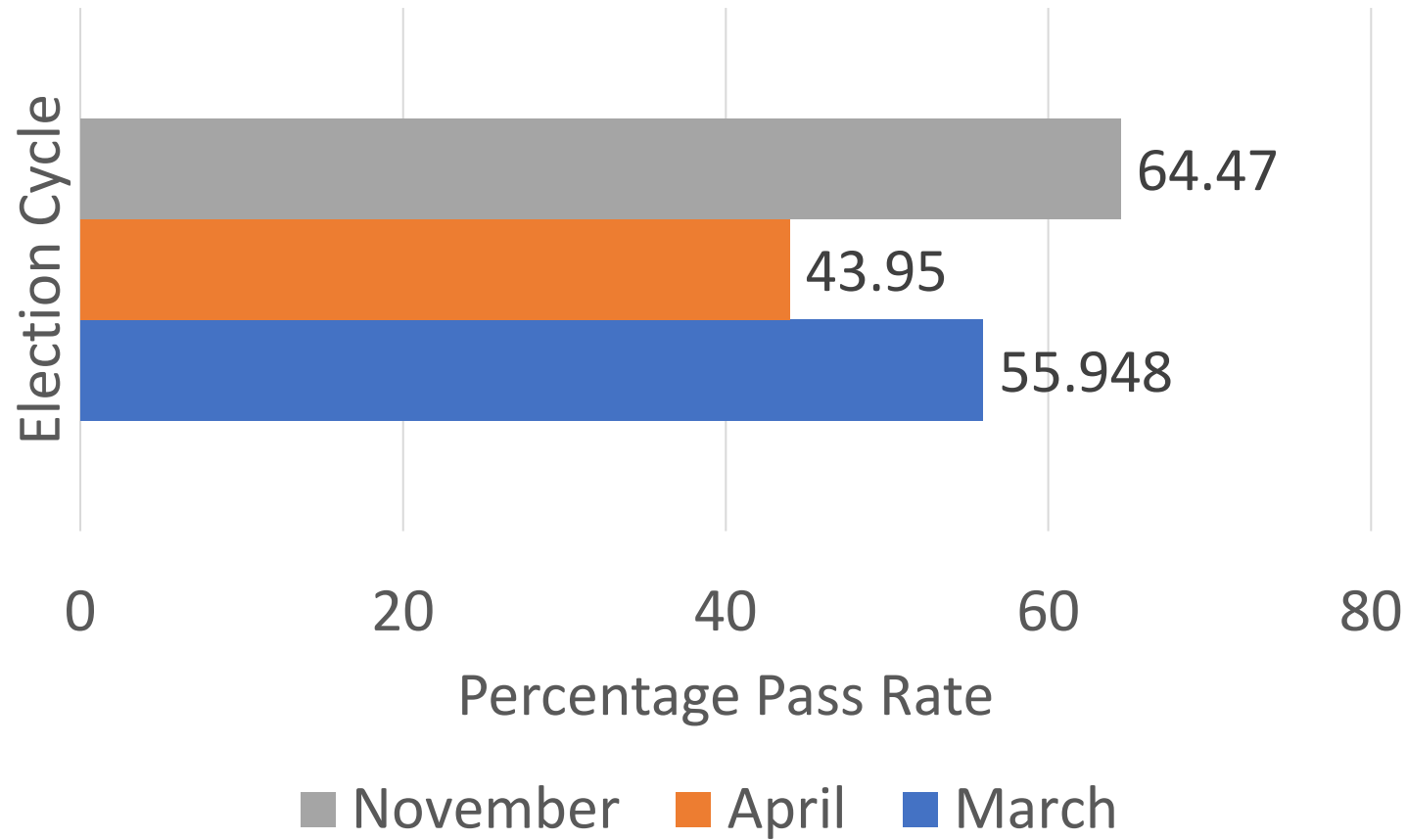


External Factors

Picking an Election Date

	Spring Elections	November
Voter Turnout	Low 7-15%	High 70-85%
Key Voter Turnout Drivers	Your Effort	National and Statewide Races
Outreach	Very targeted	Broader reach
Ballot Issues <i>Typically</i>	Limited	Local, Statewide and National

Illinois Referenda Pass Rates 2015-2025

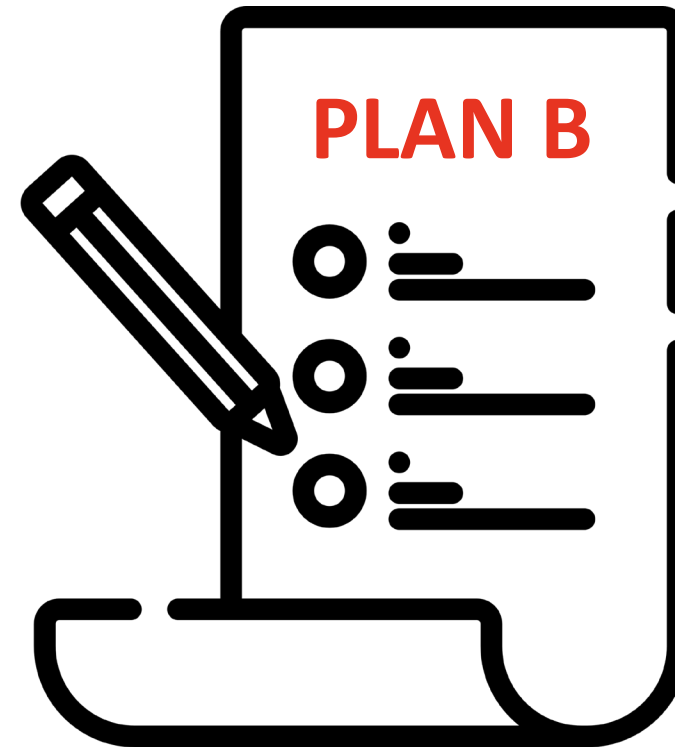
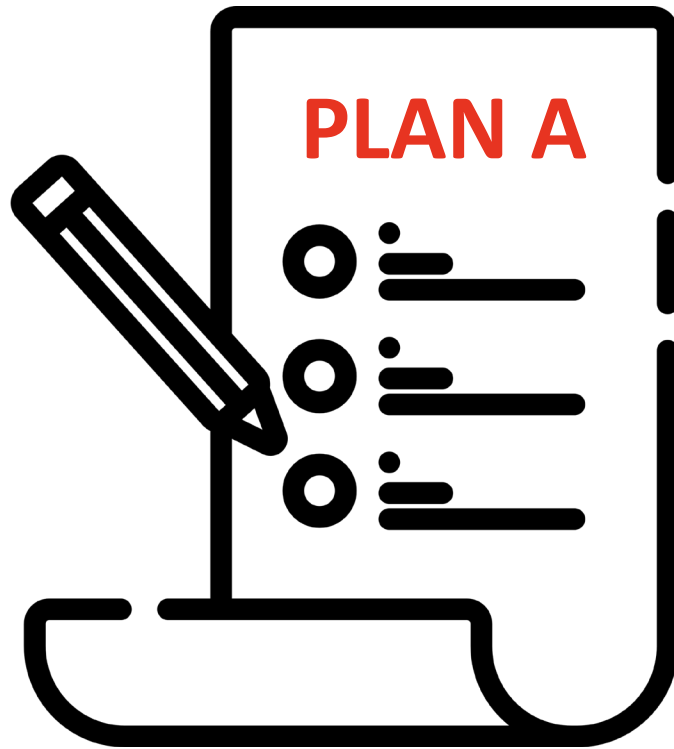


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2. Focused on Needs, Not Wants



Which of the following types of facility improvements do Illinois voters care most about?

- ✓ Safety & Security
- ✓ Cafeteria
- ✓ Gymnasium/Fieldhouse
- ✓ Auditorium
- ✓ Accessibility/ADA Improvements
- ✓ Career & Technical Education Spaces
- ✓ Classroom & Science Lab Improvements
- ✓ Art, Drama & Music Spaces
- ✓ Energy Efficiency
- ✓ Special Education Space
- ✓ Library Improvements
- ✓ Outdoor Learning Spaces
- ✓ Mechanical Systems & General Improvements
- ✓ Instructional Technology
- ✓ Student Support Spaces
- ✓ More Classrooms to Address Overcrowding
- ✓ Collaboration Spaces
- ✓ Playground
- ✓ Preschool/Early Education Learning Centers
- ✓ New Schools
- ✓ Air Conditioning/HVAC
- ✓ STEM Spaces
- ✓ Athletic Fields
- ✓ Learning Commons

3. Community Driven



Not a rubber stamp, but reasonable

Community Engagement

- Created “by the people for the people”
- Consensus on Key Issues
 - Greatest enemy of good is perfect

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Keys to Successful Engagement Activities

Organized

**Well Planned
And Rehearsed**

Data Driven

**Input Used
For Future
Activities**

**Understandable,
Jargon-Free
Information
Presented
(KISS)**

**Work Sessions
And Activities**

**Documented
And Shared**

Meaningful

Developing Understanding: Topics to Discuss

- Ask the community what they want to learn
- State of the school district
- Preparing students for the future
- History of the district - how we got here
- How facilities impact learning
- School finance 101
- Facility options

Community Engagement

Bringing your community together to

Learn about the challenges and opportunities facing your organization



Develop solutions

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Builds trust

Unites community
and district

**THE POWER OF
COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT**

Improves two way
communication

Identifies community
leaders and
volunteers

Why Community Engagement Works

- Public permission is needed for meaningful change
- Public won't support what it doesn't understand
- Public is resistant to top-down approach
- Make it their idea
- Builds supporter base for referendum

Community Engagement: Best Practices

Internal Support

**Clear Board
Direction**

**Community
Led**

**Involves A Large
Number Of
People**

**Meaningful
Dialogue
Resulting In
Consensus**

**Open, Honest
Communication
And
Understanding**

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Winning From The Inside Out

- Employees (ALL)
- Union Leadership
- Administrators
- Student Organizations
- All members of the Board of Education

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How To Gain Internal Unity

- Conduct research
- Involve internal people in the process (strategically)
- Keep internal audiences well informed throughout the process
- Identify and address issues that divide



Why do pre-referendum research?

- Intuition often wrong
- Vocal community members often not representative
- Language matters
- Determine impact of theme and messages
- Develop a plan
- Determine if you have a shot at success

Language Matters

Question A

Providing classrooms that accommodate

**BEST PRACTICES IN
CURRICULUM AND
INSTRUCTION.**

50% High Priority

Question B

MODERNIZE classrooms to provide
more **HANDS-ON LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES..**

35% High Priority

No need to guess

- ✓ Level of support
- ✓ Priority placed on parts of the proposal
- ✓ Persuasiveness of arguments for and against
- ✓ Level of tax sensitivity
- ✓ Ballot question

*Part Art
Part Science*

Deerfield D109 Story



Walden Elementary School
New Construction

Wilmot Elementary School
New Construction



Kipling Elementary School
Major Renovation & Addition

South Park Elementary School
Major Renovation & Addition



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District 109 serves a high-performing student base across a concentrated facility footprint.

Metric	Detail
Total Enrollment (2024-25)	2,709 Students
Total School Buildings	6 Buildings (4 Elementary, 2 Middle, 1 Preschool Program)
Student Demographics	~83% White; ~17% Minority Enrollment
Historical Precedent	0 Bond Referendums passed in the last 20 years (since ~2006).
Projected 20-Year Maint. Cost	\$177 Million (Estimated cost to maintain current buildings if referendum failed).

It Starts with Trust

- Trust is built before the referendum
- Transparency builds credibility
- “You said, we did”
- Bring the community in



Create a Clear Brand

- Simple, clear identity
- Consistent visuals & messaging
- Focus on the why
- Easy to recognize, easy to understand
- Use it everywhere, consistently



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dps109.org/redefine

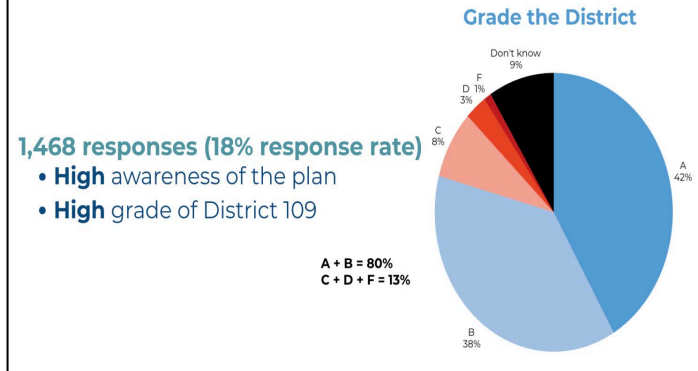
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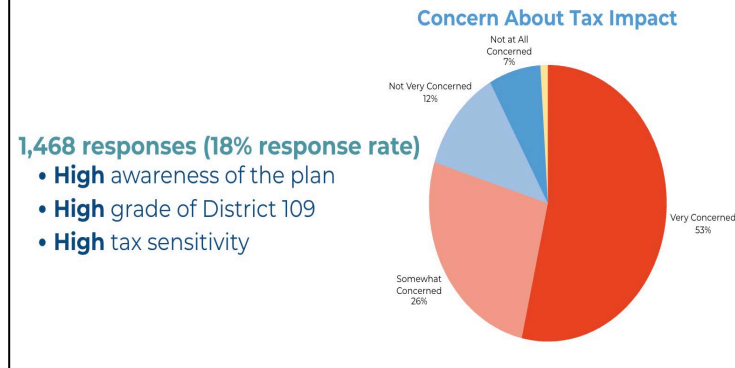
Ask. Listen. Act.

- Survey the community
- Listen with intention
- Share results
- Act on feedback
- Close the loop

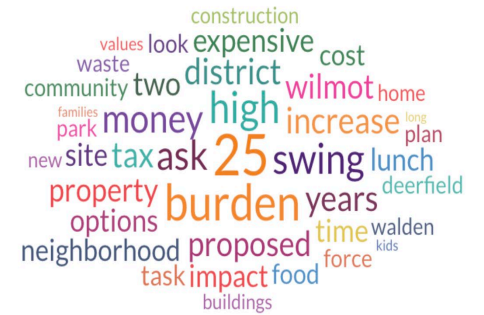
We Asked for Input: Quantitative Feedback



We Asked: Quantitative Feedback



We Asked for Input: ThoughtExchange Survey



Website & Video Are Essential

- Website is the Hub
 - Clear + accessible
 - Builds understanding
 - Tells real stories
 - Reaches more people
- [Dps109.org/define](https://dps109.org/define)
 - <https://youtu.be/RmoHm0kgGKA>
 - <https://youtu.be/r-xRATAAy5s>
 - [Why Now?](#)
 - [We Listened](#)

Be Clear, Be Everywhere

- Create a comprehensive presentation
- Offer virtual options
- Attend community events



Fall		Winter	
Date	Session	Date	Session
September 10, 2025	Wilmot, 6:30-8pm	Wednesday, Jan 14, 2026	109 Caucus Members Walden Elementary Library
September 17, 2025	Walden, 6:30-8pm	Tuesday, Jan 20, 2026	PTO Presidents Council District Center
September 25, 2025	Kipling, 6:30-8pm	Tuesday, Jan 20, 2026	Walden Elementary MPR
October 7, 2025	Patty Turner Center, 9am	Saturday, Jan 24, 2026	Early Learners / Other Preschool Families, South Park Library
October 8, 2025	South Park, 6:30-8pm	Tuesday, Jan 27, 2026	South Park Elementary Library
October 11, 2025	D109 booth at Deerfield Farmer's Market, 8am-noon	Thursday, Jan 29, 2026	Virtual "Lunch & Learn" (will be recorded and shared) Registration Link
October 18, 2025	Wilmot, 10:30am-noon	Thursday, Jan 29, 2026	Wilmot Elementary Cym
October 24, 2025	Chamber of Commerce/Realtor Lunch & Info Session - Walden, 11:30am-1pm	Thursday, Feb 5, 2026	Kipling Elementary Cafeteria
October 28, 2025	Virtual Information Session (will be recorded and shared)	Monday, Feb 9, 2026	Shepard Middle School Library
October 29, 2025	Walden, 6:30-8pm	Wednesday, Feb 11, 2026	Walden Elementary - Early Session Library (Tour First)
		Thursday, Feb 19, 2026	Virtual "Lunch & Learn" (will be recorded and shared) Registration Link
		Saturday, Feb 21, 2026	Wilmot Elementary Cym
		Tuesday, Feb 24, 2026	Caruso Middle School Auditorium
		Wednesday, Mar 4, 2026	South Park Elementary Library
		Saturday, March 7, 2026	Walden Elementary MPR
		Tuesday, Mar 10, 2026	Kipling Elementary Cafeteria

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A Trusted Face Matters

- People trust people
- Consistent, visible leader
- Authentic & accessible
- Reinforces credibility




Social Support

Deerfield Public Schools District 109
Published by Deerfield SocialMedia · January 29 ·

Community members are invited to attend tonight's Redefine 109 information session at Wilmot. The evening begins with a building tour at 6:00pm, led by Principal Jessica Hutchison and Director of Buildings & Grounds Tim Ryan, followed by a presentation at 7:00pm.

Wilmot Elementary School includes 11 different floor levels and a two-story elevator with four stops, highlighting the building's unique layout and accessibility aspects discussed as part of the revised proposal.


Visit dps109.org/redefine to learn more and find additional information sessions.



The graphic features a photograph of a group of people at an information session. Overlaid on the photo is a circular logo with the text "Redefine 109 Facilities for Our Future". Below the logo, the text reads "Information Session" in large white letters. At the bottom, it lists the event details: "Wilmot School, January 29, 2026, 6pm Building Tour, 7pm Presentation".

Deerfield Public Schools District 109
Published by Deerfield SocialMedia · February 26 at 10:25 AM ·

Be an informed voter! Learn about District 109's facility needs and the proposal to address them, then make sure you're registered to vote! Check your voter registrati... [See more](#)



The graphic has a yellow background. At the top, it says "Stick to Your Plan to Be an Informed Voter!". Below that, a blue button contains the text "Check Your Voter Registration Status with the Lake County Clerk". In the center is a large "I VOTED" sticker with a red checkmark in a box. A small "Redefine 109 Facilities for Our Future" logo is in the bottom right corner.

Lean on Trusted Voices

Families Trust Principals



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The "Redefine 109" Referendum

The "Ask": Financing a Generational Infrastructure Shift

- Total Referendum Request: \$87,780,000**
- Leveraged Funding Model:** The \$87.8MM request represents only **39.4%** of the total project costs; the District committed to funding the remaining **60.6%** (~\$135MM+) through existing resources, including fund balances and alternate bonds, to minimize the taxpayer burden.
- Taxpayer Impact:** Estimated at **\$359 annually** per \$10,000 of property taxes paid.

Tax Impact of Referendum Bonds

Amount of Property Taxes Paid in 2025 <small>(2024 levy year)</small>	\$ <input type="text" value="10,000"/>
Est. Annual Tax Increase Due to \$87.78M Bonds	\$358.80

Values update automatically as you type

The Big News!

Redefine 109

March 17, 2026 Election Results

YES: 63.62% NO: 36.38%*



**based on unofficial election results*

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The logo for the 2026 Annual Conference features a stylized '2026' in blue and green, with 'ANNUAL CONFERENCE' written below it. To the left is a small circular emblem with a building icon.

The District categorized the \$220MM+ capital program into three distinct tiers of work:

Category	Primary Locations	Scope of Work
New Construction	Walden Elementary, Wilmot Elementary	Complete replacement of aging facilities with new, modern school buildings.
Full Renovations	Kipling Elementary, South Park Elementary	Comprehensive building renovations plus significant additions for capacity.
Targeted Upgrades	Caruso Middle School, Shepard Middle School	Safety, security, HVAC, and targeted learning space modernizations.

Key Drivers: Resolution of aging mechanical systems (to avoid closures), ADA accessibility compliance, and security hardening.

Responsive Governance and Fiscal Stewardship

The final ballot question was the result of a multi-year engagement process designed to align facility needs with community tax sensitivity.

- **Referendum Task Force:** A representative group of residents and stakeholders spent over three years planning the facility roadmap.
- **Scope Realignment:** Following community feedback and polling in Fall 2025, the Board **reduced the tax impact by 33%** compared to initial proposals by increasing the District's direct financial contribution.
- **Transparency Initiatives:** The District held **14+ public information sessions** and tours across every school building between January and March 2026 to ensure voter education.
- **Cost of Inaction:** The District clearly communicated that construction escalation was adding **~\$9MM per year** to the project's cost, incentivizing a "now or never" approach.

The **CCS Capital Program Report** provides the financial and technical justification for the total \$222.8 million spend, contrasted against the risk of the "Status Quo."

Metric	Program Detail
Total Program Budget	\$222.80 Million
Median Facility Age	~68 Years (Oldest: Kipling at 76 years)
Maintenance Liability	\$177 Million (Estimated 20-year cost if referendum failed)
Escalation Risk	\$9MM - \$10MM per year in added construction costs for every year delayed.
Safety Upgrades	Hardened exterior access points and modernized fire protection systems across all sites.

Questions and Answers

We thank you for your time!

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Presenters:

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