



June 15, 2017

Hello. I'm Brenda Warren, School Board President for the Green Bay Area Public School District. Today I'm **speaking against Assembly Bill 282 (and AB 268 below).**

This past April, the Green Bay Area Public School District passed two referendum questions. The first was a non-recurring, \$16.5 million operational referendum for ten years so that we will have the resources to continue the programs, services and course offerings that have shown to be successful and necessary for the success of our diverse student population. This was our district's very first operational referendum.

The second question asked voters to support a \$68.25 million referendum for a variety of construction projects in 18 of our school buildings to address overcrowding, security, and adequate space for programs.

I want to describe for you the process we used to successfully pass these referenda. After conducting a facilities master plan over the course of 2016, our work began in earnest last September. Board members, District administration and staff held four community listening sessions attended by several hundred people. This was followed by a citizen-led Facility Task Force that met through the months of October and into November. The results of both the listening session feedback and citizen led task force were posted on our website. In January we held three widely publicized school board meetings which were preceded by an open forum. At these meetings our board discussed all of the options pertaining to both referendum questions. These meetings were very much working meetings and all of our discussions were held in open session.

Two of these meetings were our regularly scheduled January board meetings and then we held a special board meeting on January 23 to vote on the final resolutions. We did this so that we would have ample time earlier in January to discuss all our options and get timely community feedback on the options put on the table after each meeting. Again, this final board meeting was very well publicized throughout the month of January and all three were very well attended.

Beginning in February, Board members, district administration and staff spent countless hours providing tours for community members, conducting interviews with the media, and attending many community and school functions. In addition, we presented details and answered questions about our 2 referendum questions at more than 70 community meetings.

In addition to this work, our community members and parents worked tirelessly to support the referenda. In the end, our community supported both questions by 63% (operational) and 70% (facilities).

I've provided a link below to an April 2017 editorial by the *Green Bay Press-Gazette*. The editorial takes a position against the proposed legislation that would limit and/or modify successfully passed referenda and points to Green Bay Area Public Schools as an example of why the changes are unnecessary. The editorial states, "Green Bay School Board did an excellent job of letting the public know that it was interested in putting a school referendum on the April ballot. It discussed the matter with the public for over a month, adjusting ~~what~~ [sic] the details of the referendum before the School Board approved it. There was no surprise... vote."

School districts across the state have been managing school district finances and facility needs under the rules set by the Legislature. The requirements placed on school districts (not on cities or counties) to have to seek voter approval to increase revenue or for borrowing to address major facility projects have made the work of school boards and administrators more challenging as evidenced by my description of the hundreds of hours of work (and resources) it took to educate and convince our community to support our referendum questions.

We request to be allowed to make decisions that are best for our local school district. We know that our referenda will not pass without extensive community engagement especially in a large district like ours, so limiting when we can make these decisions will have no impact on our voter participation. We made sure we had excellent voter engagement throughout our process.

Thank you.

Assembly Bill 268—speaking against

I would also like to briefly comment on Assembly bill 268. I hope my testimony about the enormous effort it takes to get referenda passed, and the financial and human resource investment that is required, has helped you understand why we are opposed to AB 268. Our community very clearly supported our District referenda and supported our operational referendum for 10 years. It does not seem right that the legislature in Madison should have the power to usurp our community's voice, especially when going to referendum more often (every five years) just takes resources out of our classrooms.

Thank you very much for your time.

Brenda Warren
bbwarren@gbaps.org
(920) 246-1503

Link to Green Bay Press Gazette article April 22, 2017:

<http://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/story/opinion/editorials/2017/04/22/keep-school-referendum-decisions-local/100763680/>