

Bloomfield Hills School Board Recall Effort is Over – Art Aisner - Patch

Organizers with Bloomfield 20/20 won't muster needed signatures in time, but pledge to be active in upcoming bond and school board elections.

Officials with Bloomfield 20/20 acknowledged Friday that their effort to recall the entire Bloomfield Hills School Board of Education has not garnered enough support to move forward.

In an email addressed to concerned residents and families in the district, Bloomfield 20/20 organizer Chris Fellin said although petitions continue to come in, the group will fall short of the certified 5,200 signatures needed to force a special election. Fellin said thousands of signatures were collected, but the group would not be able to reach the statutory minimum for a recall within the time window allowable by law.

Recall supporters began circulating petitions in earnest in August following ballot language approval by the Oakland County Elections Commission. The petitions accuse board members of not acting in the best interests of the students and taxpayers when they supported consolidation of Andover and Lahser high schools after a \$74 million bond proposal failed in November 2010. In June, the board unanimously passed a recommendation from Superintendent Rob Glass to merge Andover and Lahser high schools into Bloomfield Hills High School on two separate campuses in 2013.

State law allows petitions to circulate for 90 days, and in October, Bloomfield 20/20 organizers said the effort would continue into January, even if that meant some of the early recall supporters had to re-sign petitions to keep their signatures valid. Supporters collected signatures at public buildings, special events, by door-to-door canvassing and through direct mail. They were often met with resistance from supporters of the board at the public locations when those supporters also tried to speak with potential voters.

It is unclear if the presence of opposition or backtracking on signatures had a big impact on whether Bloomfield 20/20 could reach the signature goal. Other factors could have been the groundswell of recall opposition that mobilized at signing sites and board meetings, and the resignation of Board Secretary Kate Pettersen, who moved out of state. Fellin said the grassroots effort was successful in educating a voter base unaware that the combined high school initiative was still alive after the 2010 defeat at the polls. He also said they operated successfully despite "aggressive tactics deployed by board supporters." "Petition signers were grateful we took the bold step to initiate a recall effort and expressed thanks to volunteers who hit the streets," he wrote. He also supported a November election on the bond and cautioned against a "stealth" election in May or August, when turnout will not be as strong as the fall presidential decision.

The board has discussed a November election, but has yet to finalize a firm date. At its Dec. 15 meeting, however, Glass said a November election could jeopardize the timeline for opening the new unified high school facility in the fall of 2015. A May 2012 election would ensure the 2015 start date without increasing the cost, which could exceed \$65 million.

Board President Ingrid Day said it was nice not to have to worry about the distraction of a potential recall, but the board and district have much work ahead. She said she was fully aware that supporters of the recall could be formidable forces in a campaign against the critical bond, whenever the vote. They key, she said, will be appealing to residents that understand the issues with the decaying high schools and want a solution that doesn't compromise the district's academic expectations.

"I know we haven't hit it just right with the high school situation, but I think the community is looking for some middle ground, some compromise," she said.

They've also wanted a greater voice in the process, which is why the district will continue its use of town-hall style discussions and presentations about the high school consolidation process in January and February. A list of upcoming events sponsored by the district is in the attached PDF.