

LAUSD officials weigh \$7B bond measure

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Article Launched: 07/28/2008 11:03:26 PM PDT

Los Angeles Unified school officials are considering a \$7 billion bond measure for the November ballot, more than twice as much as previously discussed and nearly half of it set aside for unspecified future projects.

LAUSD's board is set to vote Thursday on whether to support the measure, which would allocate more than \$3.2 billion for future "repair and safety," "modernization, repair and technology," "green technology" and to "attract, retain and graduate more students," according to a draft summary of the bond funding distribution.

Meanwhile, district and charter officials are wrangling over exactly how much charter schools will get from the bond measure, which requires a 55 percent vote for passage, and whether the charters would own any properties and schools that are developed with the funds.

The measure outlines several projects in the South Bay and Harbor Area that would be carried out if the district receives state matching funds.

Included in the "bond project list" are two 810-student high school campuses in San Pedro - one already proposed adjacent Angels Gate Park and another without a stated location that would relieve overcrowding at San Pedro and Narbonne high schools. Projects that are under way - the K-8 span school in Wilmington and a new high school in Long Beach on the Carson border - are mentioned as well.

Also on the list are a new middle school and elementary school in the Gardena area and a new elementary school in Playa Vista.

The bond language additionally identifies specific upgrades and modernization that officials say is needed at existing campuses.

While district officials and others defended the bond measures, critics Monday cited concerns over the unspecified funding and note it is the fifth bond in the past decade for the district's \$12.6 billion construction program.

"Any time a bond is vague in how it'll spend public money, it raises a red flag," said Kris Vosburgh, executive director of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association.

But district officials and a representative for Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said the future "priority" funds are smart policy that allows for flexible spending.

Spending those funds would be subject to a bond oversight committee and approval by the Board of Education, said Glenn Gritzner, a policy and political strategist for L.A. Unified.

"The question comes down to whether the district should have to go back to the voters to address future priorities," said Caprice Young, president of the California Charter Schools Association.

Meanwhile, charter and L.A. Unified officials are still negotiating the terms of charter funding under the bond.

Under a preliminary proposal, charters would receive a portion of \$700 million to build or reconfigure classrooms and could keep the property themselves.

Another \$300 million is set aside for charter school construction if 32,000 seats are not made available for charters and other education partners, such as the Partnership for LA Schools.

"None of that has been resolved," Gritzner said. "The ownership question is still in flux."

That has raised objections from A.J. Duffy, president of United Teachers Los Angeles.

Duffy said UTLA will oppose any bond measure that provides funds to build or otherwise prop up charter schools.

While UTLA has not taken an official position yet, he said, it is a difficult spot for the union - which has long supported improving decades-old school buildings, but not charter schools.

Still, Young said charters are pushing for stronger bond language to ensure 10percent of the bond funds and property for the schools.

"The most important thing is that there is dedicated funds for charter schools," Young said. "Right now, we have zero confidence."

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Staff Writer Melissa Palmer contributed to this article.