

Facilities bond measure is under study by schools

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The Del Norte Unified School District is considering bringing a bond measure before local voters next November to finance at least a portion of the \$255 million it says is needed for repairs to the district's aging facilities.

The school board on Dec. 12 approved hiring Isom Advisors to conduct a survey of the community as to whether it would support a school improvement measure totaling between \$20 million and \$30 million, said district spokesman Michael Hawkins.

"We need to be able to build new buildings or renovate and maintain current buildings," Hawkins told The TriPLICATE by email last Friday.

"So, Director of Facilities and Construction Steve Morgan conducted a district-wide survey of the entire school district and its facilities, focusing on the current state of all of the schools. The survey determined that it would cost more than \$255 million to get the district facilities up to modern standards and fully functioning."

Hawkins said one of the tools the State of California has created is the ability for school districts to put a bond measure on the local ballot. If the measure is approved by at least 66% of the voters, the state will give that bond money to the school district to renovate and replace outdated and aging facilities, Hawkins said.

"Essentially, if it passes, voters are accepting a small property tax increase to slowly pay off that bond over a period of 15 to 30 years, depending on what finance options are chosen for the bond.

"So, if a \$30-million bond was passed, that would increase homeowners' property taxes about \$40 to \$60 dollars a year per \$100,000 valuation," Hawkins said.

A feasibility study is the first step toward getting a bond issue for the school board to approve.

Isom Advisors will conduct the community survey between February and March, in addition to interviewing local elected officials, community service groups and larger taxpayers.

If the study determines the measure could pass, the bond issue would eventually make it to next November's ballot, Hawkins said.

The next step is for the school board to review a list of potential projects the bond would fund, including upgrading HVAC systems at six schools for about \$250,000 each, Hawkins said.

The school board plans to review the survey results in April, with a capital and financing plan, project list, tax rate statement and ballot language ready to go by May.

In his report, Morgan said bond-measure dollars can also be used as a district contribution to receive state modernization dollars. He cited Bess Maxwell, Mary Peacock, Mountain, Redwood and Smith River schools as being eligible for modernization dollars.

Morgan said Mary Peacock is eligible for the most money - \$2.5 million - while the district's two oldest schools, Smith River and Redwood, are eligible for the lowest amount in modernization dollars.

Hawkins said that to help facilitate the bond process, the school district needs to reappoint three of its seats on the Citizen Oversight Committee. He said the committee's terms are for two years, basically the life of the bond.

"When a district passes a bond measure, it doesn't receive all of the money immediately. It comes in waves. After the first round of projects are finished that were assigned to the bond, then additional phases get approved by the state.

"The committee members walk it through that process. So a committee member can serve up to six years," Hawkins said.

He added there are strict guidelines that dictate the makeup of the Citizen Oversight Committee. One committee member must belong to a senior citizen organization, another must be a parent or guardian who is involved in parent organizations, and the third must belong to a "bona fide taxpayers' organization."