



Monday, September 25, 2006

## **Today's editorial: School bond burden shouldn't be increased**

### **Rancho Santiago college district's second bid in four years should be denied.**

The Orange County Register

Measure O on the November ballot would raise \$393 million in construction bonds for Rancho Santiago Community College District. It's a 25-year bond that follows on the heels of Measure E, a \$337 million bond passed in 2002.

The cost to taxpayers in the district for Measure O would be about \$149.94 a year for a home assessed at \$600,000. That's slightly more than the \$147.78 a year that Measure E tacks on to the same house.

Measure O would fund upgrades, repairs, science and computer labs, instructional facilities and other construction on district campuses. And it would, in the ballot's language, provide "additional classrooms to allow greater access to two-year degree programs and expand transfer opportunities for the completion of bachelor's degree programs."

Some of the funding is for projects that were included in Measure E but were not built because of the great increases in land prices and construction costs over the past four years. This is not explained in Measure O.

We have several objections. First, as noted Sunday, after the Measure E was passed, the district instituted a project labor agreement – which limits construction labor only to union members – increasing labor costs. Measure O should have included promises to not have a PLA.

Second, Measure E and Measure O would combine for a nearly \$300-a-year tax bite on a representative home. That's not a small sum.

Third, as we have noted on all such bonds in recent years, we are skeptical when school

districts avail themselves of Proposition 39, passed statewide by voters in 2000. Prop. 39 dropped to 55 percent from two-thirds the threshold for approving a local school construction bond measure.

That's just too low, making it much too easy to pass such bonds. According the EdSource, during 2001-2005, 86 percent of bonds using Prop. 39 have passed. By comparison, from 1986-2005, just 55 percent of bonds not using Prop. 39 passed. In essence, Prop. 39 allows almost instantaneous approval for tax increases – something especially onerous in a state that already suffers from the nation's highest sales and income taxes.

The bottom line is that "taxpayers will have to decide if the additional facilities are wanted, or can be obtained less ostentatiously," Steven Frates, senior fellow at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College, told us.

We recommend a No vote on Measure O.



What's your opinion?

Want to comment on what you've just read? Fill in the form below. Your comments will be considered for publication online or as a letter to the editor in The Orange County Register.

NAME:  CITY OF RESIDENCE:  E-MAIL ADDRESS:

SUBJECT:

COMMENT: