

# El Rancho district seeks \$200 million bond issue

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PICO RIVERA — The El Rancho Unified School District is asking voters to approve a \$200 million bond issue on the upcoming Nov. 8 ballot.

The school board voted 4-0 to approve school bonds and a parcel tax to modernize El Rancho High School, which hasn't seen any large-scale renovations since it opened in 1952.

The \$200 million bond would go toward the construction of a new math and science building as well as a sports complex that will include a new football field, stadium, locker rooms and a weight room.

Half of the proposed parcel tax, if voters approve it, would supplement the current district funding of arts education. The

other half would raise teachers' salaries and improve instruction in science, technology, engineering and math.

To obtain these funds, each land parcel within the district would be taxed a yearly flat rate of \$99 for nine years.

"We agreed not to nickel and dime this thing," Superintendent Martin Galindo said. "Our kids and staff deserve some awesome new buildings."

The overall plan is to rebuild the entire high school in three phases. An earlier blueprint included just the construction of a pool and locker rooms, but Galindo decided not to make the pool a first priority after working with a consultant to draw up a master plan for school improvements.

"We decided to put a hold on that since part of the plan was to create more athletic fields," he said. "I would hate to spend the

money putting it together and have it hamper us later on."

Last year, the state distinguished El Rancho High as a Gold Ribbon school for outstanding education. Schools applied based on a model program their school has implemented that includes standards-based activities, projects, strategies and practices that other local educational agencies can replicate.

"If you looked at the school, you wouldn't be able to tell," school board Vice President Jose Lara said. "We have state-of-the-art programs and less than state-of-the-art facilities."

Lara said an investment in the area's schools is also an investment in the community as a whole.

"As a homeowner, better schools bring up the property values," he said. "El Rancho High is the heart of the community. Most, if not all, residents went through it."

"My son is there and I want him to have better facilities. He may not be able to see them, but it's also for my neighbors' kids."

The bonds would also fund repairs to bring other district schools up to current academic and safety standards, as only one

campus was built after the 1950s.

"I'm assuming it was beautiful when it was built, but time takes its toll," Galindo said of El Rancho High.

The board previously passed another bond, for \$52 million, in 2010 for school repairs and improvement projects, which included upgrading science labs, career/technical and vocational classrooms as well as implementing safety, security and energy efficient changes at the district's 15 schools.

This spring, three board members, including Lara, faced controversy as a group of parents led an effort to recall them after a decision to open a new magnet school, rather than use the funds to improve El Rancho High.

Lara expressed confidence that the proposed changes would make the recall proponents happy.

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