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## West Contra Costa Schools Face Tough Choices as Bond Money Runs Out

Dec. 13, 2016 | By Karina Ioffee | [www.eastbaytimes.com](http://www.eastbaytimes.com)

**EXCERPT:** RICHMOND- When Nystrom Elementary School students returned to school this fall, they walked into a gleaming new campus filled with spacious, well-lit classrooms and colorful gym structures in the yard. ...

But several miles away at Wilson Elementary School, children are still being taught in portable classrooms with bars on the windows and where, some parents say, there is occasionally no heat in the winter. When it rains, water seeps through the windows, and the fence around the perimeter of the campus is full of holes, allowing anyone to access the campus day or night.

Both schools were the intended beneficiaries of a massive bond program approved by voters in the West Contra Costa Unified School District starting in 1998. But after years of cost overruns and elaborate spending on new campuses that sparked audits and outside investigations, most of the money has been spent or committed. Meanwhile, 10 schools are still awaiting improvements, and it's not clear where the money will come from to finish the program.

The district, which has about 29,000 students, many from low-income families, says it has learned its lesson and is committed to stronger oversight of funds. ...

... For many, that's a refreshing change from the controversy that has clouded the bond program in recent years, punctuated by complaints about a lack of transparency and runaway costs that were largely rubber-stamped by school officials. The Securities and Exchange Commission and FBI have launched investigations. A forensic audit of the program released earlier this year found that cost increases for construction projects were not properly signed off and noted a lack of general accounting principles, along with conflict-of-interest concerns involving school board members and contractors. ...

... At least five schools have been contract as needing critical seismic repairs. Wilson and Lake elementary schools appear to be scheduled next for total rebuild, but after they are done, there will only be enough cash for piecemeal improvements at many schools. The district has also considered closing or consolidating at least three schools, including two that are awaiting repairs in light of declining enrollment, but has yet to announce any changes. ...

*To read the complete article visit:*

<http://www.eastbaytimes.com/2016/12/13/west-contra-costa-schools-face-tough-choices-as-bond-money-runs-out/>

## Gov. Brown Exploring if New \$9 billion Bond Can be Divvied up Equitably

Dec. 18, 2016 | By John Fensterwald | [www.edsource.org](http://www.edsource.org)

**EXCERPT:** ... Brown opposed Proposition 51. He said the bond measure, which will add about \$500 million to the \$2.4 billion the state is already paying annually in interest and principal payments on past school bonds, was too large, and the process for divvying the money is too convoluted and stacked against small school districts and low-income communities.

Now that what he called a "blunderbuss effort" has passed, Brown wants to revise the funding distribution system to make Prop. 51 more efficient and fairer to districts that wouldn't get a share of the money under the current first-come, first-served basis. That prospect is worrying the coalition of school districts and the construction industry behind Prop. 51; they believe Brown might use his influence to sit on the money or not release bonding for Prop. 51 at all. ...

... (Brown) outlined his objections in the past several budget messages and reiterated them this year in [the five-year state infrastructure plan](#) (see pages 50-53). Criticisms include:

- "Cumbersome" bureaucracy adds expense; more than 10 state agencies provide "fragmented oversight."
- The first-come, first-served process gives "substantial competitive advantage for large school districts with dedicated personnel to manage facilities."
- Funding eligibility is based on standardized building standards that discourage innovation.
- Current rules were put in place when the state was expecting substantial enrollment increases; now, statewide forecasts project a slight decline in enrollment over the next decade.

Brown said the system should be changed to target districts most in need, giving priority to those with severe overcrowding. Funding should be on a sliding scale to help districts whose small tax bases can't support their projects, he said. ...

*To read complete article please visit:*

[www.edsource.org/2016/brown-exploring-if-new-bond-measure-can-be-divvied-up-differently/574440](http://www.edsource.org/2016/brown-exploring-if-new-bond-measure-can-be-divvied-up-differently/574440)

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**SAVE THE DATE**  
**6th Annual**  
**CaLBOC**  
**Statewide**  
**Conference**  
**April 25, 2017**  
**Tuesday**  
**Sacramento**

**Los Angeles Civil Grand Jury Report:**  
"Capital Appreciation School Bond Debt: Consequences of Poor Financial Practices" Final Report 2015-2016 .  
[PDF](#)

**CaLBOC:**  
**CBOC Operation Guidelines**  
Provides a basis for the BOC to perform a self-assessment of their operations and identify training needs. Could use as outline to develop a training program for committee members.  
[PDF](#)

**Mission Statement**  
To promote school district accountability by improving the training and resources available to California's Proposition 39 School Bond Oversight Committees and educating the state legislature, local school boards and the public about the oversight and reporting powers these Citizens' Bond Oversight Committees (CBOCs) have, and to advocate on a state level, where appropriate, on issues of common concern to all CBOCs.

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