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Measure A: Why Riverside Community College District wants a \$715 million bond



Ceramics instructor Damian Ross works with students in the ceramics building at Riverside City College on Friday, Feb. 21, 2020. (Photo by James Carbone, Contributing Photographer)

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The Riverside Community College District is asking voters to give it \$715 million, which officials say will allow the three colleges it runs to teach more students, modernize buildings and indirectly help the local economy.

If 55% of voters cast a ballot in favor of Measure A in the March 3 election, property owners will have to pay another 2 cents for every \$100 of assessed value on their homes. That's less than \$50 for the district's median house, which is assessed for \$274,888, according to the district.

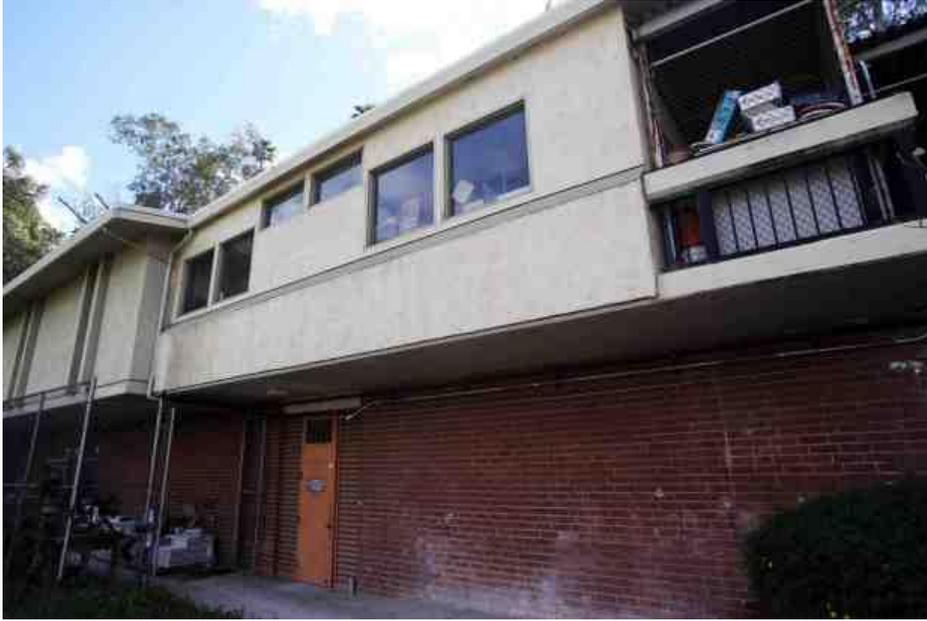
The money will help students at Riverside City College, Moreno Valley College and Norco College, and it will help the community, said Wolde-Ab Isaac, the college

district's chancellor. He pointed to a [study](#) that says the district supported nearly 13,000 jobs and added nearly \$1 billion in income to the region each year.

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The ceramics building at Riverside City College on Friday, Feb. 21, 2020. A \$715 million bond measure to fund facilities improvements at Riverside, Moreno Valley and Norco colleges will be on the Tuesday, March 3, 2020, ballot. The building would be torn down and replaced with a more modern building if the bond is approved. (Photo by James Carbone, Contributing Photographer)

“There’s a clear plan on how we will increase capacity to be able to create more affordable access to higher quality education, leading to workforce development,” Isaac said. “In the large scheme of things, this measure is going to enable Moreno Valley and Norco to become more comprehensive facilities as Riverside (is), and Riverside — a very large institution encumbered with buildings from the 1940s and ’50s and ’60s — will focus on modest growth but more on modernizing to bring (facilities) up to grade and be compliant with standards.”

The district promises to use the money on projects including replacing leaky roofs, rusty plumbing and outdated and faulty electrical systems, upgrading outdated classrooms and labs and expanding veterans centers.

But resident Jason Hunter said voters have no guarantee of how the money will be spent. He said he supports the colleges but not what he sees as an end-run around [Proposition 39](#), which lowered the threshold to pass school bonds in exchange for increased accountability requirements.

One of those [requirements](#) is “a list of the specific school facilities projects to be funded” by the bond.

The district provided a 22-page [project plan](#), which includes construction and renovation at all three campuses, but the document states that it is subject to change. “None of it is guaranteed,” Hunter said during a forum hosted by Residents for Responsible Representation. “The part that really bugs me is it violates the spirit of Prop. 39.”

Hunter, who sits on a board that oversees how the Riverside Unified School District uses bond money approved by [Measure O](#), has battled that district over his allegations that it's spending bond money in a way voters didn't specifically approve. Isaac said voters should look to the district's track record to see that they spend money responsibly and recognize that administrators need flexibility within the project list to focus on projects that can receive matching funds from the state and adjust as educational needs change.

"There are very firm constraints — it is within the work we have described," Isaac said. "The specifics need to be modified. ... We live in a rapidly changing world, especially in education, and technology is changing the nature of work itself. We need the flexibility to adjust and spend the money in the most relevant way."

Hunter said he understands that officials might learn something in 10 years that would change how they want to spend the money. The solution is to ask for less money, then request more when future needs are known, he said.

"You don't need to get the whole \$715 million enchilada in one fell swoop," he said.

Community college district voters last approved a bond measure in 2004. [Measure C](#) authorized \$350 million in bonds, which was used for projects including a Dental Education Center and science lab remodels at Moreno Valley College, Industrial Technology Facility and ADA and infrastructure upgrades at Norco College, and the School of Nursing and Science and Math Complex at Riverside City College. Bond funds cannot be used for faculty, staff or administrator salaries.