

Why some are opposing Walnut Valley schools' \$208 million bond



By [Steve Scauzillo](#)

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Walnut Valley Unified School District is going back to the voters this November for a third bond measure in eight years in an effort to raise \$208 million to continue campus improvements started in 2008.

Measure O gives the school district the authority to assess properties \$48.50 per \$100,000 in assessed value, but the district says it will not go above \$115, the current tax rate paid by Walnut and Diamond Bar homeowners, said board member Cindy Ruiz.

At \$115 per \$100,000, and with the average single-family home in the district assessed at about \$500,000 (Walnut, \$507,050; Diamond Bar, \$474,565, according to the Los Angeles County Assessor), each homeowner already pays about \$575 per year for WVUSD school improvement bonds adopted by voters in 1991, 2000 and 2007 (measures S, Y).

In comparison to other high-ranking K-12 districts, Walnut Valley's tax assessment is higher than San Marino Unified (\$74.36), La Cañada Unified (\$64.77) and Arcadia Unified (\$76.53). However, some have parcel taxes and Walnut Valley does not, according to district records.

The school board voted July 15 to put the \$208 million bond on the Nov. 3 ballot after two separate polls conducted by pollsters hired by the district found support for the bond reached 60 percent. Under Proposition 39, the approval percentage was lowered from 66.67 percent to 55 percent.

However, Ruiz said the district made a promise to voters not to raise their tax rate above \$115. To accomplish this, the district will sell bonds from Measure O after its 1991 measure falls off the tax rolls. Additional taxes will "backfill" the rate.

"We will not exceed the \$115 per \$100,000 assessed value," she said.

Most of the materials describing Measure O list the usual kinds of repairs such as new wiring, plumbing, roofing and classroom modernization.

Ruiz said the money from Measure O will be used to build separate science wings on the middle schools and a new music new music building at Diamond Bar High School that is similar to the one put in at Walnut High School. New funds will also be used to upgrade all school libraries.

All of the district's 16 schools will receive benefits from the bond, she said.

A small but vocal opposition says the district spent too much money on projects such as a [new aquatics center](#) at Diamond Bar High School (\$10.7 million) and was unable to finish promised improvements on Walnut campuses.

"When you compare what the district said eight years ago with the current measure, you have to ask why the taxpayers are being asked to pay for the same things again," said Richard Michael, a Walnut resident.

One project that was never built included coverings for outside stairwells at Westhoff Elementary in Walnut. He said children have to navigate slippery stairs when it rains. Also, portable classrooms remain at Collegewood Elementary, despite promises made under Measure S in 2007 to replace them.

But Ruiz said the district did not run out of money from measures S and Y and accomplished many improvements, including a new science building at Chaparral Middle School in Diamond Bar and new track fields at both high schools.

The Committee To Support Outstanding WVUSD Schools raised \$66,750 between July 1 and Sept. 19, according to records filed with the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder. Large donations were received by construction, architectural and engineering firms from the Silicon Valley to the Inland Empire, including: E.S.R. Construction Inc., Sunnyvale, \$5,000; P-Line Consulting & Inspections SVCS, Buena Park, \$10,000; and D.C. Architects, Upland, \$15,000.

Michael said many large firms are giving to the campaign in an effort to get in line for future projects. Also, the committee paid a consultant from San Francisco \$17,612 for voter data, campaign materials and travel expenses.

"It's just another load of debt for our kids and grandkids by a school district that won't stop spending what it doesn't have," he said.