

## Larkspur school board plans tax strategy

[John Dugan](#)

Article Launched: 06/20/2008 03:46:31 PM PDT

Larkspur School District officials are hoping to put a \$23 million bond measure up for voter approval, but not till next year.

The district board Wednesday discussed results of a survey on the popularity of a bond measure. The phone survey of 400 people, conducted by San Francisco public relations firm Solem & Associates, showed 51 percent of respondents would support a bond.

That number excited board members but did not convince them they had the time to launch a campaign in time for the Nov. 4 election.

"There seems to be ample support in the community, even without all the information and education about what we need," Trustee Bruce Friedrichs said. "Are we going to be ready to put this on the ballot in six weeks? I highly doubt it. I don't see how we could be."

The trustees agreed that organizing a campaign committee and producing educational information was not possible before the Aug. 8 election filing deadline. Officials from Solem & Associates discouraged trying to get on the Nov. 4 ballot. Officials are now looking toward November 2009.

The district is wrestling with increased enrollment and lack of space, and administrators say they need to make major upgrades to Neil Cummins Elementary School in Corte Madera. Enrollment in the district, which includes Neil Cummins and Henry C. Hall Middle School in Larkspur, will be approximately 1,240 this fall. Officials estimated enrollment could reach 1,400 by 2012, with more than 800 of those students at Neil Cummins.

A tentative plan from the Facilities Master Plan Committee recommended building a new campus on the Neil Cummins site to house half of the elementary school students and ease class sizes. The facilities committee estimated the two-campus project would cost \$24 million.

The bond measure tested in the survey would cost taxpayers \$23 per \$100,000 of assessed property value, or an average of about \$125 per homeowner per year for 35 years.

Bond measures need 55 percent approval to pass. The survey indicated 51 percent approval of a bond, with a 5 percent margin of error, and 8 percent undecided.

"I'm very encouraged by these numbers and I think it shows we are very capable of getting a bond passed," Trustee Sheri Mowbray said. "I would like to see us try for it in 2009. I do not want to rush things right now and risk the bond failing."

The district is also considering renewal of its parcel tax, which expires in July 2011 and can be renewed on any ballot before then. The survey indicated 63 percent of those asked supported renewing the parcel tax with a \$50 increase, to \$369 per year, and a 5 percent increase annually.

Trustee Kevin Mangan said the district might benefit by tying the parcel tax and bond measure campaigns together as separate portions of the same improvement plan.

"If we can convince voters about what our schools need and where we want them to be, we can come with a one-two punch," Mangan said. "We can wed these two measures together as equally important."

The board asked Superintendent Valerie Pitts to come up with a cost analysis for the increased staff that would come with the new Neil Cummins campus. The board will discuss Pitts' report and other issues in July.