

SD Unified eyes energy funds

By [Michael Gardner \(/staff/michael-gardner/\)](/staff/michael-gardner/) 4:38 p.m. Jan. 24, 2013



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Work crews install solar panels on the roof of Adams Elementary School on Wednesday in San Diego in September.

SAN DIEGO — The San Diego Unified School District may be at a disadvantage when it comes to getting its share of \$2.5 billion in new state revenues for energy-saving projects.

Lawmakers hoping to stretch those dollars are currently drawing up a complex formula to determine which districts qualify for how much money. One of those factors under consideration is the availability of local school construction bond money along with need, wealth and climate.

Depending on the outcome, San Diego Unified may not get what it thinks it deserves because voters have approved school construction bonds, including the \$2.8 billion Proposition Z in November. The thinking is those local dollars would go to clean-energy on the natural, thereby freeing the state revenue for projects elsewhere.

A Senate fiscal subcommittee will be in San Diego Friday morning to hear suggestions from San Diego Unified officials and others on how to craft the measure, which will implement Proposition 39 approved by voters in November.

“We’ll have our two cents to say,” said San Diego Unified trustee Richard Barrera.

Barrera said the district may receive between \$4 million and \$5 million from the state, depending on the outcome of the legislation.

Proposition 39 closed a loophole that once saved some multistate corporations about \$1 billion a year in taxes, but it left it up to lawmakers to craft an allocation formula. About half of the \$1 billion in new tax revenues is dedicated for five years to helping school districts pay for energy-saving programs, from insulation to new boilers to timers.

Proposition 39 is one of two tax measures approved by voters for education in November. They also agreed to a higher sales tax and an increase in income taxes for the wealthy as part of Proposition 30. “The question for us is how Proposition 39 will connect with our local bond money,” Barrera said. “We obviously believe districts where voters have sacrificed their own pocketbooks should receive a fair share.”

In addition to Proposition Z, San Diego Unified voters in 2008 approved Proposition S to raise \$2.1 billion.

The challenge for Sen. Kevin de León, a Los Angeles Democrat carrying the legislation, is to construct a formula that achieves the most energy savings and creates the most jobs while trying to be fair to districts.

To do that, de León said in an interview, lawmakers will have to set priorities.

De León said the goal of the hearing is to consider local concerns and suggestions, such as those expressed by San Diego Unified. No decisions have been made.

Construction bonds are not the only calculus. De León’s measure also may take into account the relative wealth of a district, climate variations that push up heating or cooling bills, and unemployment numbers since a key goal is to provide more jobs, the senator

explained.

De León is likely to receive pressure to consider distributing the money based on the number of students in a district.

Lisa Berlanga, executive director the group San Diego United Parents for Education, prefers that method.

That way districts would have the flexibility to determine where to target the money, she said.

Berlanga hopes lawmakers establish two oversight committees — one statewide and one local — that would ensure the money is spent properly.

De León said communities and schools will benefit in a number of ways once the program is underway.

“My No. 1 focus is to create jobs for those who have been chronically unemployed or underemployed,” De León said.

He estimates that about 60,000 jobs could open up as districts begin retrofitting campuses.

“These are 60,000 jobs that cannot be exported to another state, or to Mexico or to China. These are labor-intensive jobs done on site by Californians,” he said.

That has drawn the attention of Tom Lemmon, business manager of the San Diego Building and Construction Trades Council. Lemmon said he will press the committee to assure local workers are hired for local jobs.

“We don’t want to see one contractor bringing in his workforce up and down the state,” Lemmon explained. “The money should be spent for the workers in the area.”

The bonds through Propositions Z and S have such provisions.

Jobs for those living in disadvantaged communities will also be stressed by the National City-based Environmental Health Coalition.

“The critical element for us is matching job opportunities that are being created with these investments,” said Nicole Capretz, the group’s associate director, adding many of them voted for Proposition 39. “They are vested in building a clean energy economy. They get it.”

De León also said districts will win in other ways. For example, the less they spend on heating and cooling the more money there is for teachers, books or other programs.

“The money we save can be reinvested in the classroom,” he said.

San Diego Unified’s utility bills run between \$12 million and \$14 million annually, according to local officials. De León said Los Angeles Unified spends \$105 million and schools statewide must budget about \$1 billion a year on energy.

Another battle looms down the road on a separate front. Renewable energy advocates are pushing to set aside money for wind and solar. They contend districts could sell the excess energy for a profit, but others question whether the initial outlay is worth the price given demand will outstrip the available money.

Sen. Ellen Corbett, D-Hayward, indicated she wants senators to honor Proposition 39’s commitment to voters to spend the money on energy efficiency and alternative energy projects.

“It’s important to have an open discussion about meeting schools’ energy needs and what are the best ways to do that,” she said.

Several lawmakers are carrying similar bills this session so a final formula will be the product of compromise.

The hearing will be at 2 p.m. Friday at Perkins Elementary School, 1770 Main St., San Diego.

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