

-- Important Bond & Taxpayers Message --

At GUHSD there is an estimated \$12 million in education funding expected from the State that will likely not materialize because of State budget cuts. School districts throughout California are facing a State fiscal crisis that has forced them to cut budgets and plan for potential teacher and staff layoffs. Concurrently, districts are looking to raise money through bond initiatives for use at its' campuses to modernize and make necessary repairs and renovations.

Many school districts have already sought bond money, announced plans to seek more, or are in the planning process for doing so. GUHSD Superintendent Robert Collins is expected to unveil such a proposal to the GUHSD Governing Board soon. There is a way that a small portion of new bond money can save a substantial amount of operating expenses and maybe save peoples jobs in the wake of this budget crisis.

That way is by investing some bond money in solar power generation. Bond money for solar electric systems will not erase the budget shortfall but it can offset a large chunk. We know money can be saved because in Alpine we have experience and data with the solar electric systems that were installed at Alpine Elementary School (AES) and Joan MacQueen Middle School (JMMS). Alpine's solar system cut the net electrical power consumed through SDG&E by 100% at AES, and about 50% at JMMS.

Potential reduction from larger systems can exceed 50% and full design-integrated state of the art systems installed with other "green" features could potentially eliminate net consumed power. We hope that every GUHSD school campus gets a retro-integrated solar system, and that the new Alpine High School is designed with an integrated solar system.

What could all this mean for our Grossmont Union High School District? Currently the district pays about \$3 million annually for electricity. A mere 50% savings alone could cut \$1.5 million from operating expenses. Investment in solar electric could potentially save more. This savings could mean fewer staff layoffs, including teachers.

So why haven't school districts already gone solar? The problem was the rate structure charged by SDG&E for schools. Until recently, schools with solar systems could substantially cut their power usage, but not their power bill. Unlike rates charged to residential consumers, schools pay a commercial rate imposing something called a demand charge. This fixed charge is based on the highest 15 minutes of usage during a peak period.

For example, on a cloudy day, when there is no solar power generated, all electricity is supplied by SDG&E. Even if it's sunny every other day and solar provides 100% of the power, a substantial portion of the electric bill would be based on the cloudy day. Also, schools were penalized for days such as weekends, and summer when schools are closed and the solar electric system is actually feeding the power grid. Schools would get a credit in the following year for that surplus power but none of it could offset the demand charge.

The good news is a recent rate change in which schools with well-designed solar systems can drastically reduce consumption and now their power bill also. This dramatic rate change is even

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more favorable when bond money is used for the system. The Grossmont District has used Prop H money to invest in better insulation, double paned windows, and more efficient A/C systems in refurbishing our older schools, it makes sense to use bond money to greatly reduce our power bill.

By using bond money the district would not be taking funds from its operating budget to pay for the solar system, the new bond money would do that. The bond investors get paid their interest and principal and the taxpayers' bond money is put to good use improving our schools and the learning environment for our students. The economic benefits are great.

With solar investment of bond money we can get the triple benefit of substantial savings from ever increasing power bills, we could save GUHSD teaching and other staff jobs, and help the environment by reducing both power consumption and greenhouse gases. This is a powerful example for our kids on how to spend our tax dollars wisely. ♦

For more info on solar energy systems and the SDG&E rates charged against solar credits go to:

http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20080425/news_lz1e25mcallis.html