

# Ed-Tech bond: Measure I is a sensible approach to funding technology

By Chris Funk and Muhammed Chaudhry | Special to the Mercury News

POSTED: 09/24/2014 10:00:00 AM PDT  
UPDATED: 09/24/2014 07:17:57 PM PDT

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Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan's education foundation, Startup: Education, should be applauded for pledging \$120 million to address the technology needs of underserved schools in the Bay Area. However, many readers would be surprised to know how many schools are actually in need.

Startup: Education has already provided Ravenswood City School District in East Palo Alto with \$1 million to help improve access to technology in classrooms through tablets, wireless connectivity and educational software. But why would a school district located next to affluent Palo Alto Unified School District and around the corner from Facebook, now worth \$200 billion, need so much for educational technology?

Answer: The state of California does not fund technology for public education.

Ravenswood is not unique. School districts across California struggle to fund technology, regardless of ZIP code. Public education has been unable to fully integrate technology into teaching and learning in our schools, and each school district is left to fend for itself.

Some have set aside a portion of their construction bonds to help finance technology. While improving the infrastructure of a school district may be a prudent use of funds, it makes no sense to fund soon-to-be-obsolete equipment, such as iPads or educational software, over 30 years. The need is for a source of ongoing revenue, which would allow school districts to implement, train, monitor and adapt to rapidly changing technology needs.

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East Side Union High School District is taking an innovative approach to this challenge by funding ongoing technology needs with an Ed-Tech bond on the November ballot.

East Side is working closely with the Silicon Valley Education Foundation, a nonprofit focused on STEM education for disadvantaged youth, to increase student achievement through leading-edge learning methods and technologies. This is important for students to enhance their standard of living and be part of the knowledge-based economy.

The foundation also works to leverage public funds for Ed-Tech and STEM education. It currently has a leadership Ed-Tech program at East Side, which serves 26,000 students in San Jose, including 55 percent of those who live below the federal poverty level.

East Side and the Silicon Valley Education Foundation have worked together to put Measure I on the November ballot. If approved by voters, it will authorize \$113 million in bonds to be used as an ongoing source of funding for technology in all of East Side's high schools over the next 18 years.

What makes these bonds different is that they will be issued through a series of sales every three to five years in order to match the useful life of the technology being funded. In other words, the principal and interest for each series of bonds are paid off in full before the next series is sold. This will save taxpayers significant dollars: If this same \$113 million were financed with conventional construction bonds, taxpayers would pay \$58 million in interest. Using the Ed-Tech bonds, total interest will be less than \$5 million.

At a cost of less than 10 cents per day for the average family, Measure I will prepare East Side students for the economy of tomorrow and the jobs of the future. This measure could be a model for other districts in California to follow -- but only if our voters decide in favor of Measure I this November.

Chris D. Funk is superintendent of East Side Union High School District. Muhammed Chaudhry is president and CEO of the Silicon Valley Education Foundation. They wrote this for this newspaper.



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Mercury News Editorial

POSTED: 10/03/2014 05:35:03 PM PDT | UPDATED: 6 DAYS AGO

The quandary of how to finance technology in public schools is confounding. Or was. The East Side Union High School District is floating the first ever Ed-Tech bond. It's not just the name that's new. It's set up as an ongoing resource to buy technology and, most important, upgrade or replace it as needed, all at a lower-interest cost than bonds.

Measure I will pay for technology infrastructure and for keeping it up to date without shortchanging basic classroom needs -- including teachers, without whom the classroom can be useless. It was developed with the Silicon Valley Education Foundation, which hopes it will be a model for other districts. Vote yes.

\*\*\* When school funding mechanisms were set up, education technology was but a gleam in Steve Jobs' eye. Replacing roofs or building new schools are investments that make sense over that time, but paying for them over that time makes sense, like your home mortgage. But computers? Would you take out a 30-year loan for a laptop?

Measure I is simple. It's a \$113 million bond to help cover technology needs for 18 years -- but bonds will be sold only as money is needed for upgrades, and they'll be sold before the computers they've bought are obsolete. As a result, the total interest cost of this measure will be only \$5 million, compared to \$58 million for a similar size conventional measure.

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One advantage to a long-term funding plan is that grants from companies and foundations are easier to win if money is available. While many of East Side's students are disadvantaged, Measure I can put the district on a par with wealthier districts that can compete for grants or charitable funding. East Side can go from playing catch-up to setting the pace on tech funding. It should win in a landslide.

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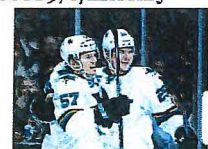
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