



CALIFORNIA DEBT AND INVESTMENT ADVISORY COMMISSION

K-14 Voter Approved General Obligation Bonds: Authorized, But Unissued – 2025 Update

By Darlene Medrano

In January 2014, the California Debt and Investment Advisory Commission (CDIAC) began reporting on the amount of general obligation (GO) bond authority approved by voters for California school and community college (K-14) districts as well as the amount of remaining unissued authority for those districts. In the first report, CDIAC identified over \$90 billion of K-14 GO bond authority that had been approved by voters between November 2002 and November 2013. By 2014, \$37.5 billion of this GO authority had yet to be issued.¹ Since the initial report, CDIAC has continued to annually report on the amount of K-14 GO bond authorization approved by voters, resultant bond issuance activity, and the amount of K-14 GO bond authorization that remains unissued.

In 2024, California voters approved 232 GO bond measures authorizing just over \$49 billion for K-14 districts. Since March 2001, voters have authorized about \$252 billion of local K-14 GO authority throughout the state.² Of that total, approximately \$97 billion – more than 38.4% of the total K-14 GO authorization – has yet to be issued (Figure 1).

Figure 1

CALIFORNIA SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT
VOTER APPROVED GO AUTHORITY VS. ISSUANCE PER ELECTION YEAR
(DOLLARS IN MILLIONS)

ELECTION YEAR ^a	NUMBER OF APPROVED ELECTIONS	VOTER APPROVED G.O. AUTHORITY	G.O. AUTHORITY ISSUED	UNISSUED G.O. AUTHORITY ^b	% UNISSUED
2001 ^c	50	\$4,413	\$4,395	\$18	0.4%
2002	151	15,567	15,489	78	0.5
2003	11	1,553	1,538	15	1.0
2004	112	11,561	11,547	15	0.1
2005	35	6,294	6,099	194	3.1
2006	93	10,301	9,273	1,028	10.0
2007	11	1,253	576	678	54.1
2008	142	28,001	22,001	6,000	21.4
2009	2	69	69	0	0.0
2010	62	5,015	4,753	262	5.2
2011	7	981	981	0	0.0
2012	116	15,287	14,170	1,117	7.3
2013	8	330	327	3	0.8
2014	127	12,598	11,587	1,011	8.0
2015	9	1,143	951	192	16.8
2016	219	29,641	23,654	5,987	20.2
2017	2	155	104	51	32.9
2018	128	17,865	14,130	3,735	20.9
2019	-	0	0	0	-
2020	92	18,793	8,706	10,087	53.7
2021	-	0	0	0	-
2022	86	22,198	4,494	17,704	79.8
2023	1	4	2	2	44.4
2024	232	49,320	529	48,791	98.9%
Total	1,696	\$252,341	\$155,375	\$96,966	38.4%

^(a) Calendar year: even years include both Primary and General election results; odd years include locally held elections during the year.

^(b) Amounts may not add due to rounding.

^(c) Calendar year 2001 includes data from March 1 through December 31 of that year to correspond with the first elections where bond measures were approved through Proposition 39.

Source: Original CDIAC analysis, data as of January 30, 2025.

¹ California Debt Investment Advisory Commission. K-14 Voter Approved General Obligation Bonds: Authorized, But Unissued, California Debt and Investment Advisory Commission, published January 2014.

² It is important to note that in the 2019 annual report, CDIAC expanded the authorized but unissued data set to include K-14 GO bond authority approved by voters in 2001 and elections held in 2002 prior to November, <https://www.treasurer.ca.gov/cdiac/publications/K-14-2019-19-04.pdf>.

This report relies on an annual process of cross-referencing unissued K-14 GO bond authorization approved by elections since 2001 with issuance information reported to CDIAC under Government Code section 8855(j) for K-14 bonds sold through December 2024. The cross-referencing process was validated by a review of official statements that are submitted to CDIAC under the requirements of the same Government Code section. Since 2001, 731 of 937 active K-12 school districts³ and 71 of 72 active community college districts⁴ have attained voter approval to issue GO bonds.⁵

California school and community college districts may construct or modernize school facilities using the proceeds of GO bonds repaid with local ad valorem property tax collections.

K-14 districts can ask voters within their jurisdiction for the authority to issue GO bonds under Proposition 46 (1986) or Proposition 39 (2000).⁶ If approved, voters authorize property taxes to be levied at a rate that is always sufficient to pay the principal and interest on the GO bonds as it comes due.

Under Proposition 46, districts are required to obtain at least two-thirds voter approval of a GO bond authorization. Proposition 39, the “Smaller Classes, Safer Schools and Financial Accountability Act,” was approved in November 2000 and amended portions of the California Constitution to provide school districts with an alternate legal path for obtaining GO bond authority with just 55% voter approval. However, GO bonds issued under Proposition 39 must adhere to specific tax rate limitations as well as additional accountability requirements. (Figure 2).

GO bonds approved under Proposition 39 may not be issued if the amount of principal and interest scheduled to become due on the bonds will require a tax rate, when applied to current and projected AV in the district, that exceeds specific limits based on the type of district issuing the debt. Elementary and high school districts are limited to 0.03% (\$30/\$100,000 AV), unified school districts are limited to 0.06% (\$60/\$100,000 AV), and community college districts are limited to 0.025% (\$25/\$100,000 AV). The tax rate limitations are intended to keep the debt service requirements of issued bonds from overburdening property owners especially during periods when actual assessed value growth falls below what was projected.

Notwithstanding tax rate limitations and additional accountability requirements, the lower threshold for voter approval causes the vast majority of

Figure 2
SCHOOL GO AUTHORITY COMPARISON

PROPOSITION 46	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Two-thirds voter approval. ❖ Outstanding GO debt shall not exceed 2.5% of assessed valuation (AV) for unified school districts and community college districts. ❖ Outstanding GO debt shall not exceed 1.25% of AV for elementary school districts and high school districts
PROPOSITION 39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fifty-five (55) percent voter approval. ❖ Proposition 46 outstanding GO debt limits (above). ❖ Tax rate limits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$30 per \$100,000 of district (AV) for elementary school districts and high school districts. • \$60 per \$100,000 of AV for unified school districts. • \$25 per \$100,000 of AV for community college districts. ❖ Project specificity in ballot initiative. ❖ Annual performance and financial audits. ❖ Citizens' oversight committee.

³ The California Department of Education’s school district directory lists 937 active elementary, high school, and unified school districts. Source: “California School Directory,” *California Department of Education*, Accessed February 27, 2025, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/schooldirectory>.

⁴ The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) reports 72 active community college districts operating in California. This was confirmed with a CCCCCO representative in March 2021 and reaffirmed online in March 2024.

⁵ Included in the dataset are 19 elections for K-14 districts that have merged and/or closed since receiving voter approval of GO bond authority.

⁶ In June 1986, Proposition 46 restored the authority to issue GO bonds to counties, cities, and school districts and included a limit on the amount of debt that could be issued.

California school and community college districts to obtain GO bond authorization through elections held under Proposition 39 rather than Proposition 46.

Following the passage of Proposition 39 in November 2000, K-14 districts began presenting GO bond ballot measures to local voters seeking 55% approval by March 2001. Since 2001, 96.2% of K-14 GO bond elections have been approved under Proposition 39 (Figure 3).

Figure 3
CALIFORNIA SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT GO BOND ELECTIONS USING PROP 46 VS. PROP 39

ELECTION YEAR	PROP 46 2/3	PROP 39 55%	% OF PROP 39 ELECTIONS
2001	22	28	56.0%
2002	6	145	96.0
2003	1	10	90.9
2004	2	110	98.2
2005	4	31	88.6
2006	2	91	97.8
2007	4	7	63.6
2008	3	139	97.9
2009	-	2	100.0
2010	1	61	98.4
2011	-	7	100.0
2012	1	115	99.1
2013	1	7	87.5
2014	1	126	99.2
2015	2	7	77.8
2016	8	211	96.3
2017	-	2	100.0
2018	4	124	96.9
2019	-	-	0.0
2020	1	91	98.9
2021	-	-	0.0
2022	-	86	100.0
2023	1	-	0.0
2024	1	231	99.6
Odd Year	35	101	74.3
Even Year	30	1,530	98.1
TOTAL	65	1,631	96.2%
Odd Year Elections		136	8.0%
Even Year Elections		1,560	92.0%
TOTAL		1,696	

Under Proposition 39, bond elections may only be held on the same day as statewide general, primary, or special elections, or at regularly scheduled local elections. This causes most school GO bond elections to be held in even numbered years. Of the 1,696 school bond measures approved by voters since 2001, 1,560 (92.0%) have been passed in elections in even-numbered years (Figure 3).

More recent K-14 GO bond authorizations tend to have higher percentages of unissued bond authority, because districts often issue their bonds over several years following an election (Figure 4). K-14 districts obtain voter

authorization with the intent to issue the full amount authorized, but various factors affect the pace and timing of issuance, including the district's facility construction schedule, the availability of matching funds under the State Facility Program⁷, the state of the bond market, economic conditions, and Proposition 39 tax rate limitations, among others. Due to the complexity of factors affecting a district's ability to issue GO bonds, a dollar of unissued authority does not equate to a dollar immediately available for building or remodeling schools. This report provides the volume of authorized but unissued school and community college district GO bonds; however, it is not an assessment of the current ability of districts to issue GO bonds.

⁷ A State funding program administered by the Office of Public School Construction. See also SB 50 (Greene), Chapter 407, Statutes of 1998.

Figure 4

CALIFORNIA SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT G.O. BOND AUTHORITY
PERCENTAGE UNISSUED BY ELECTION YEAR

