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Bond money fuels construction boom

The passage of Prop 51. in November has increased school construction all over the state

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When California voters approved a statewide school construction bond in November, it set off a boom in construction around the Bay Area, even though none of that money has even been raised yet – and Sacramento is still debating which projects will be funded.

A school district does not necessarily receive the state money at the time a project is approved, or when construction begins, leading some districts to spend money on the assumption that state funding will back fill some amount at a later time.

“In the 30 years of doing schools, I don’t think I’ve seen this much work,” said Mark Quattrocchi, lead architect at Quattrocchi Kwok Architects. “Since Prop. 51 passed, there has been a tremendous uptick in construction.”

Within the next five years, Quattrocchi expects his firm to grow from 50 employees to 60 or 70 and it recently signed a new lease to expand its office space in Santa Rosa, where the firm is located.

The November passage of Proposition 51 authorized the sale of \$9 billion in bonds to facility construction and improvements at K-12 schools and community colleges. That money will go to projects like new school construc-



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School construction and improvements pick up

Right: Renderings of Quattrocchi Kwok Architect's planned improvements at Alameda High School.



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tion and to facility upgrades at existing schools. In addition, Bay Area voters approved \$7.1 billion in local bonds for school construction in 2016 elections. The bond was placed on the ballot thanks to political spending by the construction industry.

The California Chamber of Commerce, State Building and Construction Trades Council and California Building Industry Association all pushed the measure.

The first Prop. 51 bonds will be sold this fall.

The anticipated capital spending has set off a wave of school facility construction across the region. For school facility funding in California, state bond money is spent in conjunction with local spending, usually at a dollar-to-dollar rate,

with a provision for low-income districts that serve to receive state funds without matching local dollars.

In Alameda, a long-gestating project to refurbish the shuttered Alameda High School broke ground in late April. It is expected to cost \$43 million, funded in part by a local bond for \$180 million that passed this fall. That bond will also help pay for new windows at classrooms in Maya Lin Elementary and ADA accessibility improvements at Bay Farm Elementary.

"They're great meat-and-potato projects," said Quattrocchi, whose firm worked on each.

Some of that local spending is dedicated to constructing new schools in parts of the Bay Area where the population is burgeoning. In Fremont, a \$50

million elementary school is now under construction near the Tesla plant, which when opened is planned to serve 1,100 K-5 students. Developers will pay \$40 million of the total. The school district expects to eventually be compensated for its \$10 million share via state bond money.

Some Prop. 51 funding is dedicated to community colleges, and could include a planned \$33 million upgrade to STEM classrooms and laboratory space at Santa Rosa Junior College that would combine two 50-year old buildings plagued by leaky sewage, falling ceiling tiles, and insufficient public restrooms into one state-of-the-art building. That project's state funding is awaiting approval in Sacramento.