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350 Berkeley is on the right course to try and extend school bond

IN YOUR recent editorial regarding Bay Area school bond measures, you suggested that Berkeley voters approve Measure I, a school facilities bond, but reject Measure H, a simple renewal (not an increase) of an existing parcel tax for maintenance on school district buildings. Your reasoning was that because the existing measure doesn't expire this year, the district should wait to renew.

If Measure H fails (and it needs 66.7 percent to pass), the next Berkeley Unified School District budget would need to propose cuts of \$5

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My Word

million in future years that the maintenance measure currently provides.

This would create a choice between classroom cuts or neglecting school facilities. Either choice hurts children attending Berkeley schools. Berkeley Unified has already cut \$11 million in recent years because of state reductions, and can ill afford further reductions in the schools.

As county superintendent of schools, one of my most important responsibilities is to examine the budget of each school

district and determine the district's financial viability, not just for the coming fiscal year, but two years beyond.

Since the state put that responsibility in the hands of county offices, the number of bankrupt school districts has significantly decreased, despite three consecutive years of cuts to school funding from the state.

Berkeley is among the fiscally strong districts in Alameda County. While state budget cuts have hit the district hard, Berkeley maintains a positive certification.

Districts unable to present balanced multiyear

budgets to the county office receive qualified or negative declarations; which creates immediate problems, including lowering the district bond rating and their ability to borrow money to cope with delayed payments the state is now making to districts.

I congratulate Berkeley Unified for taking a fiscally sound and prudent path by renewing its maintenance measure this year, with no increase to the tax rate. I urge voters to support both Measures H and I.

Sheila Jordan is the Alameda County superintendent of schools.