

Why Your Ballot Keeps Asking for School Funding

The structural story behind Measure L, Measure W, and every parcel tax before them — plus the statewide fight to fix it at the source.

50th → 13th

CALIFORNIA'S NATIONAL RANK
IN PER-PUPIL FUNDING, 2010–11
TO 2022–23

\$15,100–

\$46,000

PER-STUDENT SPENDING
RANGE ACROSS CA DISTRICTS
TODAY

219

CA DISTRICTS A STATEWIDE
COALITION CALLS
"STATISTICALLY UNDERFUNDED,"
UP FROM ~5 IN 2012

Walnut Creek voters have now seen three separate school funding measures in about 16 months — AUHSD's Measure T (May 2025), WCSD's Measure L (June 2026), and AUHSD's Measure W (November 2026). That's not a coincidence, and it isn't unique to Walnut Creek. It's the predictable result of how California decided, decades ago, to fund its schools.

1 • THE 1978 DECISION STILL SHAPING YOUR BALLOT

Before 1978, California school districts raised most of their own money through local property taxes, set by local voters and boards. That changed with **Proposition 13**, which capped how fast property tax bills could grow and sharply limited districts' ability to raise their own revenue. In exchange, the state took over primary responsibility for school funding.

The formula the state uses today — the **Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)**, adopted in 2013 — gives every district a base grant per student, plus extra ("supplemental" and "concentration") money for districts with large shares of low-income, English-learner, homeless, or foster youth students. It is a genuine improvement over the patchwork formula it replaced, and it is more equitable, on paper, than almost any other state's system.

But the base grant was never built to cover what many California families now expect from a public school: art and music specialists, credentialed librarians, math coaches, wellness centers, career and college centers, or small class sizes beyond the state minimum. Districts that want those things — and don't have enough high-need students to trigger large supplemental funding — have one real option left: ask local voters directly, through a parcel tax. That's Measure H (2009), Measure L (2026), and Measure W (2026), in one sentence.

2 • THE STATE'S OWN NUMBERS — AND WHAT THEY LEAVE OUT

California's statewide funding picture has genuinely improved. Per-pupil funding rose from 50th in the nation in 2010–11 to 13th in 2022–23, at roughly \$19,894 per student:



Source: EdSource analysis of federal Census Bureau school finance data.

That rise mostly reflects one-time pandemic-recovery funding, a strong stock-market-driven state budget, and temporary income-tax measures on high earners (2012 and 2016) — not a permanent increase to the base per-

student formula. It's also a statewide average, and averages hide a lot. Because school funding still depends heavily on local property tax value, California districts today range from about **\$15,100 to \$46,000 per student** — a gap driven far more by local property wealth than by student need.

Walnut Creek's own numbers sit on the lower side of that range relative to its own county. Proponents of Measure L cited WCSD receiving roughly **\$14,902 per student**, against an **\$18,705 Contra Costa County average** — about 20% below its county peers:

WCSD per-student funding

\$14,902

Contra Costa County average

\$18,705

Source: Measure L proponents' ballot argument, Contra Costa County Elections Division. This is a campaign-side figure, not an independently audited one — flagged as such here, the same way it's flagged on the campaign's online explainer.

3 · WHAT MEASURE L AND MEASURE W ACTUALLY WERE

Measure L (WCSD, June 2026) would have added roughly \$1.5 million a year for nine years — stacked on top of the existing Measure H parcel tax since 2009 — to fund reading, math and science instruction, teacher retention, and manageable class sizes. It received about 65% yes, short of the two-thirds supermajority California requires for parcel taxes.

Measure W (AUHSD, November 2026) follows AUHSD's own earlier failed attempt, Measure T (May 2025). It's a flat \$168-per-parcel tax for eight years, with no inflation adjustment, expected to raise \$5.5–6 million a year for high school programs — the Yes on W campaign points to advanced math, science, engineering, and technology courses at Acalanes, Campolindo, Las Lomas, and Miramonte. Both measures included exemptions for senior homeowners and qualifying SSI/SSDI recipients; because Measure L and Measure T failed, their exemptions never took effect.

Worth remembering either way: a parcel tax measure authorizes money — it doesn't by itself guarantee a program. What gets funded with it is a board decision, made budget by budget, after the election.

4 · THE BIGGER FIGHT: FIXING THE FORMULA ITSELF

Local parcel taxes treat a symptom. A growing group of California districts is trying to treat the underlying cause instead. **Raise the Base** (raisethebase.org) is a coalition — started by Buckeye Union School District's

Dr. David Roth and now joined by Pleasanton and other Tri-Valley-area districts, parent groups, and PTAs — pushing the state legislature to raise the LCFF base grant itself.

~5 → 219

CA districts the coalition calls
"statistically underfunded," 2012 vs.
2024

~1.2M

students in those districts, by the
coalition's count

+7.24%

LCFF base grant increase the
coalition is asking lawmakers to
adopt, per an LAO recommendation

Source: Raise the Base ("The Funding Challenge & Solution," raisethebase.org), citing its own analysis and a Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) funding-alternatives report. These are the coalition's own figures — advocacy material, not an independently audited study — presented here as their claim.

This is the second time in a decade California districts have organized around this exact argument. A similar coalition, **Full and Fair Funding**, filed a \$15 billion ballot measure in 2019 after California ranked 38th nationally, aiming to lift the state to the national average (then about a \$2,500-per-student gap). That measure was shelved before reaching the ballot. Raise the Base is the current version of that same push — smaller in scope, aimed at the legislature rather than a statewide vote, and grounded in a specific, LAO-sourced number rather than a round dollar figure.

5 • DOES THE CASE HOLD UP?

Largely, yes — with real nuance worth stating plainly rather than glossing over. California's statewide per-pupil rank genuinely improved, and that's a fair thing to acknowledge rather than dismiss. But three things keep the underlying argument intact:

- **The improvement leans on temporary money.** One-time pandemic funds and a strong-revenue budget year drove much of the jump from 28th to 13th; neither is guaranteed to repeat, and the LAO and CalMatters have both flagged the state's revenue volatility as a risk to sustaining current funding levels.
- **A statewide average isn't a district's budget.** The same reporting that shows California's rank improving also shows some districts spending three times what others do, for reasons tied to local property wealth rather than student need — which is exactly the dynamic behind WCSD's below-county-average per-student figure.

- **The 7.24% ask is independently sourced.** It traces to the Legislative Analyst's Office, not to the coalition itself, which gives it more standing than a number a campaign invented to fit its ask.

Where the case is weaker: the "219 underfunded districts" and "~1.2 million students" figures come from the coalition's own analysis, not a neutral third party, and deserve the same "advocacy material, labeled as such" treatment this document (and the campaign's online explainer) gives every other campaign-sourced number.

This document was prepared by the Geetha Ganti Campaign for Walnut Creek School District Board of Education as a voter explainer. It is not an official publication of WCSD, AUHSD, Contra Costa County, or any state agency. Where a figure comes from advocacy material rather than an official or neutral source, it is labeled as such above. Sources in full below.

SOURCES & METHODOLOGY

- EdSource, *"California's education funding level rises compared to other states"* (2026) — historical per-pupil ranking, 2010–11 through 2022–23, and dollar figures.
- EdSource, *"How California compares to other states in per-student spending"* (2026) — national ranking context and equity distribution (Education Law Center, "Making the Grade").
- CalMatters, *"Some California schools get three times more funding than others"* (2026) — Basic Aid vs. LCFF-formula funding disparities, district-level examples.
- Contra Costa County Elections Division — official Measure L ballot text, impartial analysis, and June 2, 2026 results (unofficial as of this writing; confirm certified results at contracostavote.gov).
- Ballotpedia, *"Acalanes Union High School District, California, Measure T, Parcel Tax Measure (May 2025)"* — official result source for Measure T.
- Yes for Our High Schools — Yes on W 2026 campaign one-pager (FPPC #1478885) — Measure W figures and program claims; advocacy material, not a neutral source.
- Raise the Base (raisethebase.org), *"The Funding Challenge & Solution"* and coalition homepage — underfunded-district count, LCFF base-increase ask; advocacy material.
- Pleasanton Weekly, *"Raise the Base: Tri-Valley school districts join coalition seeking to increase state funding floor"* (2026) — coalition background, LAO recommendation reference.
- California School Boards Association (CSBA), press releases on the 2019 Full and Fair Funding ballot measure — historical comparison, 38th-place ranking, \$15B ask.
- Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), Proposition 98 and K–12 budget analyses — LCFF base-grant policy background.