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Legislation allows district-wide bond elections for RCC

The Oregon Legislature recently passed a bill initiated by the Rogue Community College Board of Education that allows the college to hold district-wide elections on bond measures.

Under 1996 legislation that annexed Jackson County into the RCC District, Rogue could hold bond measure elections by county or service area only. House Bill 3116, which was sponsored by Representatives Peter Buckley and Sal Esquivel and by Sen. Alan Bates, becomes effective Jan. 1, 2010.

The original bill applied only to the RCC and Blue Mountain Community College districts but was later amended — at the request of their boards — to include Columbia Gorge and Southwestern Oregon Community College districts. All four community college districts have annexed neighboring counties.

“Essentially the bill gives the expansion districts the option of holding district-wide elections on bond measures,” said Karen Smith, general counsel for the Oregon Community College Association, which helped draft the legislation. “The bill also preserves the ability to hold an election by service area as has been required in the past for RCC and BMCC,” she said.

The RCC District was founded in 1970 and included only Josephine County. Voters in Jackson and Josephine counties voted overwhelmingly in 1996 to annex Jackson County into the district.

“The original annexation language requiring separate votes by county/service area was put into the statute to protect the original district from being dominated by the new service area. This was important in 1996 because we had much larger Jackson County being added to the district,” said RCC President Peter Angstadt.

“Now that the RCC district has become fully integrated, with many community members in both counties accessing community college services throughout the district, there is no longer a concern that one service area will dominate the other, and it makes sense to have district-wide elections,” he added.

In 2008-09, for example, more than 17,000 students attended RCC with about 64 percent taking classes in Jackson County and 51 percent taking classes in Josephine County. More than 1,650 students or nearly 10 percent attended classes at more than one campus. (RCC has three campuses in Medford, White City and Grants Pass, plus a learning center in the Illinois Valley.)

Southwestern and Columbia Gorge Community colleges, on the other hand, wanted the option of a separate vote by service area.

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