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SDUSD releases details of labor agreement

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By Carlos Rico

After several months of discussion and debate the San Diego Unified School District Board of Education will vote on a labor agreement for all construction work on Proposition S Tuesday night.

Over the Memorial Day weekend, the district released the 35-page Project Stabilization Agreement, which states the guidelines contractors would have to meet in order to work on any project funded by the \$2.1 billion bond measure passed by voters in November.

The agreement promotes local contractors to be hired, including student apprentices; establishes set wages, hours and working conditions, as well as pay for health insurance for workers; and prevents worker stoppages such as strikes, slowdowns or lockouts.

The labor agreement only applies to projects that receive more than three bidders and that exceed \$1 million.

If a subcontractor is hired by a general contractor on a project that totals more than \$1 million -- even though the work the subcontractor performs does not surpass \$1 million -- the sub still needs to oblige by all of the requirements of the stabilization agreement.

In the event the lowest bidder on a project is not within 10 percent of the estimated cost by the district's engineer, the district will reject all bids and re-advertise the project.

The district also will reject all bids and re-advertise a project if at least three bids are not received.

The district plans to designate a "project labor coordinator" to ensure all parties involved on Proposition S projects follow the labor agreement. The district will either assign someone from its own staff or hire an independent contractor acting as a liaison for the district.

There is no condition in the agreement for any contractor to join or otherwise become a party to any collective bargaining agreement with a union.

Whispers about a possible labor agreement began shortly after the November 2008 election. Since then nonunion and union construction groups have tried to be part of the contract negotiation.

At the end of January this year, the five school board members voted to only include union contractor representatives at the negotiation table for the labor agreement.

Soon thereafter nonunion construction groups started a campaign against a possible labor

agreement including asking for money to make and send out radio commercials and mailers. They have also invited and received visits from some board members at their apprentice shops to show them nonunion shops are just as good as union ones.

Now even though a labor agreement has not been approved, there have been multi-million dollar projects approved by the board including contracts for a new classroom building at Hoover High School and a new multimedia studio at San Diego High Educational Complex.

A final decision on the Project Stabilization Agreement is expected late Tuesday evening at the board's weekly meeting.