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# Colorado Association of School Executives

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## School Budget Elections in Presidential Election Years

A school district contemplating a budget election this fall recently asked CASE if it makes any difference if the election is held in a U.S. Presidential election year. “Darned if I know,” was my response, whereupon we set off to find out. So, with a little help from our colleague Rudy Andras at Dain-Rauscher, we have compiled some research.

Below is a display of all Colorado school budget elections (categorized by Bond elections and Operating elections) held since November 1993. We chose 1993 as a starting date because TABOR was passed in 1992 and consolidated all budget elections to be held in November. In 1992, and in prior years, school budget elections could be held at different times of the year other than November.

So, here’s the data:

### Colorado School District Bond Elections

Year	Ballot Questions	Pass	% Pass	Current Year \$ Requested	\$ Pass of Current Year \$ Requested	% \$ Pass	% State Voter Turnout <sup>1</sup>
1993	10	6	60%	\$332,050,000	\$254,700,000	77%	34.8%
1994	30	18	60%	\$368,540,000	\$273,405,000	74%	57.7%
1995	27	17	63%	\$526,420,000	\$336,280,000	64%	34.5%
1996*	19	14	74%	\$453,840,000	\$421,840,000	93%	67.9%
1997	25	14	56%	\$698,950,000	\$560,715,000	80%	30.0%
1998	23	15	65%	\$636,755,000	\$550,560,000	86%	51.6%
1999	17	9	53%	\$501,810,000	\$276,690,000	55%	30.2%
2000*	15	12	80%	\$665,700,000	\$654,625,000	98%	66.8%
2001	17	14	82%	\$793,295,000	\$421,330,000	53%	29.8%
2002	18	13	72%	\$983,850,000	\$816,850,000	83%	49.5%
2003	22	15	68%	\$832,950,000	\$709,925,000	85%	33.3%
Total	223	147	66%	\$6,794,160,000	\$5,276,920,000	78%	
1996 and 2000	34	26	76%	\$1,119,540,000	\$1,076,465,000	96%	67.35% avg
Other 93-03 Years	189	121	64%	\$5,674,620,000	\$4,200,455,000	74%	39% avg

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## School District Operating Elections

Year	Ballot Questions	# Pass	# Pass %	\$ Requested	\$ Requested Passed	\$ Pass %	% State Voter Turnout <sup>2</sup>
1993	9	6	67%	\$4,618,640	\$2,321,277	50%	34.8%
1994	11	4	36%	\$23,146,092	\$1,545,000	7%	57.7%
1995	4	0	0%	\$32,795,000	\$0	0%	34.5%
1996*	8	4	50%	\$18,136,146	\$16,750,000	92%	67.9%
1997	5	5	100%	\$17,527,000	\$17,527,000	100%	30.0%
1998	13	6	46%	\$87,374,000	\$42,791,000	49%	51.6%
1999	17	10	59%	\$116,942,000	\$73,488,000	63%	30.2%
2000*	13	8	62%	\$60,425,000	\$58,290,000	96%	66.8%
2001	16	11	69%	\$23,909,000	\$10,797,000	45%	29.8%
2002	11	6	55%	\$34,719,000	\$27,649,000	80%	49.5%
2003	17	12	71%	\$69,487,000	\$56,506,000	81%	33.3%
Total	124	72	58%	\$489,078,878	\$307,664,277	63%	
1996 and 2000	21	12	57%	\$78,561,146	\$75,040,000	96%	67.35% avg
Other 93-03 Years	103	60	58%	\$410,517,732	\$232,624,277	57%	39% avg

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Discussion – This data would appear to refute the “conventional wisdom” in school districts that budget elections have a lower probability of passing with a higher voter turnout. Indeed, when TABOR passed in November 1992, many officials predicted disaster for budget and bond elections in Colorado. That simply has not materialized. In fact, this analysis suggests just the opposite.

Nota Bene: Voter turnout for odd-numbered years can be quite tricky for several reasons. First, there are no statewide candidates; only issues. Secondly, a growing number of counties have been using mail ballots, which increases voter participation. And finally, odd-numbered election year fervor can be almost impossible to judge. A better measure for districts gauging voter participation is local turnouts over time.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Colorado Secretary of State

\* Presidential Election Year