

State board approves community college district

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Bonneville County residents will decide in the voting booths whether they want the College of Eastern Idaho.

Idaho State Board of Education members unanimously and enthusiastically recommended the creation of a community college taxing district during a Friday morning teleconference. The district would consist of Bonneville County.

“Thank you so much to the members of the board to bring this forward,” said Rick Aman, Eastern Idaho Technical College’s president, during the teleconference. “It’s clearly, in my mind, long overdue and I think the timing will work out very well. Based on the work we’ve done for the study panel it looks like this could be a viable enterprise and work very well in eastern Idaho for students and economic development.”

The Bonneville County commission will decide when the measure goes to ballot. Voters will likely get a chance to approve or reject the district’s formation during the May 16 election. The initiative requires a 66.67 percent supermajority to pass.

If approved, EITC likely will be converted into the College of Eastern Idaho by fall, Citizens for Affordable Higher Education spokesman Steve Taggart said. Taggart’s group collected the signatures required to get the initiative on the ballot.

“The state board’s decision reinforces the case that we made locally that a community college is not only beneficial, but needed. We have a lot of students of all ages who simply don’t have affordable access to higher education,” Taggart said.

The average Bonneville County homeowner would contribute \$13.37 to the community college every year, Taggart said.

If approved, other counties will be able to opt into the taxing district with a simple majority vote during any subsequent election. Residents within the taxing district would pay \$125 per credit at the college, compared to \$175 for non-district residents.

Counties that opt into the district will reduce the tax burden on all participating taxpayers. At least one representative from nearly every surrounding county has expressed interest in opting into the taxing district, Taggart said.