



El Camino Measure N Signature Project Forum Report

Summary

San Juan Unified held a Measure N Signature Project Forum at El Camino Fundamental High School on Monday, Oct. 13, 2014 in the cafeteria.

The El Camino Forum drew a crowd of 181 (plus an uncounted number of students that performed and did not stay). The evening began with a song performed by the marching band. Staff then delivered a short presentation seeking input and feedback regarding three previously proposed Signature Project ideas at El Camino: A 600-seat performing arts center, a digital technology media center, and upgrades to the Abbott Field stadium beyond a recent turf/track installation.

Next, staff asked for the crowd to move into a small group breakout session to talk about each of the projects. Several community members spoke against moving into small groups and requested that the projects either be discussed in the large group setting, or that staff simply ask for a show-of-hands vote and end the forum.

Staff explained that small groups are designed to provide every person in attendance a chance to have their voice heard, and that breakout sessions would allow discussion of all three projects more thoroughly and efficiently. A breakout group of 28 individuals formed and staff proceeded with the discussion. The small group then rejoined the larger group.

Small Group results

A show-of-hands poll was taken in the small group session. There were 23 people in the group that said they prefer a theater. Two people said they would prefer further improvements to Abbott Field, and there were no hands raised for a digital media center. There were three people who did not vote for any of the three previously identified Signature Projects, and said they preferred a swimming pool.

Key points (listed in no particular order):

Why further stadium upgrades are needed at El Camino:

- Need better sound system (clearer, not louder)
- Better access for band that currently walks through the crowd
- Multiple schools use the field, so upgrades would benefit many

Needed features at the stadium:

- New sound system
- New access points
- Remove an unsightly dirt hill
- Upgrades to press box/seating/concessions

Why a digital media center is needed at El Camino:

- More open access to technology
- Could be a shared facility with other schools
- Current computer programs/labs are limited
- Not all students have computers/technology at home

Needed features of a digital media center:

- Features were not called out during group discussion

Why a performing arts center is needed at El Camino:

- Current space (seating, stage etc.) is not adequate for performing arts programs
- Closer venue for neighboring middle and elementary schools
- State-of-the-art facility would boost district enrollment
- VAPA boosts student test scores
- VAPA options make for well-rounded, college ready students
- It's a community project that will benefit generations to come
- Other schools in the region have theaters with at least 400 seats
- Current programs have to rent church facilities to accommodate crowds

Needed features of a theater:

- Better theater-style stage
- 600 seats
- Space for pit orchestra (more musicals)
- Rehearsal space
- ADA accessibility
- Changing rooms

- Connection to stage set design, engineering, costume making, and other VAPA courses

Questions and Answers

Audience members at El Camino made comments expressing some frustration in the process that has led to the Signature Project program. Several voices expressed that the community has organized a push for a performing arts center for more than five years and has gone through many meetings to discuss what that building/program should look like. There was some frustration that the district has asked for further input instead of moving forward with a theater project.

Other thoughts that were expressed during the Monday night forum included:

- El Camino wants to build a performing arts center for the community. Many feel the district should be willing to spend above the \$10 million Signature Project average for an El Camino theater because it would benefit thousands from other high school, middle school, elementary schools along with other community groups.
- Some said they helped campaign for Measure N because they were told if the bond passed, that El Camino would get a theater. Frustration was expressed that two years after the bond passage, El Camino still has to attend forums to advocate for a theater.
- A student said she and a friend talked recently about how they are disappointed that the district only has one real Performing Arts Center, and that it is on the other side of the district at Mesa Verde.

Q: Why do we as a community have to have another forum? Can we just take a vote?

A: The reason San Juan Unified is conducting another Signature Project Forum is to provide the broader community that may not have had the chance to participate in previous forums an opportunity to have a voice. The district also has new management atop its facilities division that is eager to engage our high school communities and learn more about what each site wants in its Signature Project before making a final recommendation to the Board of Education. The district's goal is to ensure every stakeholder has had an opportunity to weigh in on necessary features of projects before recommendations are made to the Board of Education.

Q: If the theater project that El Camino wants is not affordable under the district's Signature Project Forum, will our community have an opportunity to fundraise and contribute that way?

A: Yes, you can fundraise - and kudos to EC Arts for the work you've already done. Right now, the district is going over all of the Signature Projects. Once we have a recommendation of all projects put together, we'll know how much can be allocated to El Camino. So, hypothetically, if the district puts together a proposal for a \$10 million facility but the project you want is \$15 million, we would then get together and talk about what the district came up with for \$10 million. At that time, we can decide whether to wait and raise more money or move ahead with that \$10 million project.

We also heard earlier that El Camino wants to tie in Career Tech Education programs to the theater. There's a possibility a CTE program would make the project eligible for grants. We can research those opportunities as well.

Q: If multiple high schools use this facility, can more money from the Signature Project program be directed to El Camino?

A: The district is asking each high school to come up with the appropriate Signature Project for its school and community. There is \$117 million allocated to Signature Projects and we're looking at an average cost of \$10 million (plus escalation and contingency costs) at each school. We're not sure exactly how that will look until we've determined all of the projects. We have not looked at pulling money from other Signature Project budgets to fund El Camino's Signature Project.

Q: Just a math observation: You said \$117 million for Signature Projects. Dividing that by nine high schools, that's an average of \$13 million, not \$10 million.

A: That \$117 million includes escalation and contingency costs. The \$10 million figure is in today's dollars for each of the nine high schools.

Q: I have had daughters at Mira Loma, El Camino, Churchill, and Arcade, all with no performing arts facility. We've stayed on the West side despite a void. I want to ask the Superintendent, do we have a void in performing arts facilities in this district?

A: (Answered by Superintendent Kern) Yes, in the western district.