

THE INDEPENDENT

October 6, 2001

Bill streamlines permitting

San Mateo High could benefit from legislation

By Chris Rooney
Independent Newspapers

San Mateo High School waits on the brink of reconstruction or a complete rebuild — a process that could be tied up in bureaucracy when the school administration files paperwork for state approval.

But if the governor signs a bill authored by Assemblyman Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, the process would become stream-

lined and eliminate some of the procedural and repetitive steps bogging down districts.

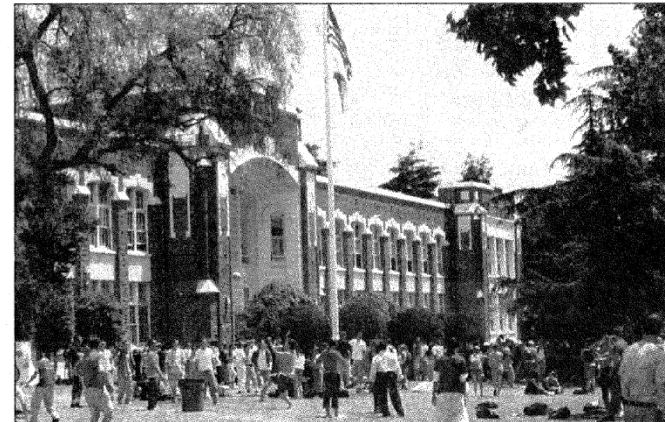
Assembly Bill 1402 — recently approved by the Legislature — allows school districts to put together architectural, engineering and construction services in a single package, called a design-build package, for large projects costing \$10 million or more.

“The design-build option eliminates some of the bureaucracy involved in building new schools, and ensures architects, engineers and construction contractors work together as a team to get schools built,”

Simitian said. “Over the next six years, nearly 700 schools will be built around the state and this new law offers a common sense process for building schools more quickly and economically.”

Among the first projects which could benefit from AB1402 is the building of a new San Mateo High School. The current structure has been deemed unsafe for use, and portable classrooms are being utilized. A debate — including a Nov. 19 court date — has ensued over the fate of the old

CONSTRUCTION: page 4A



SUSAN CALDWELL

San Mateo High School must be either rebuilt or renovated after it was deemed seismically unfit last spring.

CONSTRUCTION: Process streamlined

Continued from 1A

building, but the need for new construction is certain.

San Mateo High School Principal Jacqueline McEvoy, however, is "cautious about streamlining" and said that the biggest problem she has faced has come from bureaucracy at the state level.

She said that getting approval for plans is among her main concerns as she has "tight timelines to meet to get state funding" for the new school.

Current law requires school districts to award construction contracts of more than \$15,000 to the lowest responsible bidder.

Schools have typically been built using a design-bid-build method in which separate contracts are awarded for architectural services, for engineering services and for construction.

In practice, this method sometimes sets up an adversarial

relationship between the architect, engineer and construction contractor and slows down construction, Simitian explained.

San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools Floyd Gonella said "this is exactly the kind of help we need from Sacramento."

Simitian, who served as a Palo Alto school board member for eight years and was on the Santa Clara School Board, said the bill provides a choice for each district, as the "design-build" premise is optional.

That option has been available to varying levels of government but not to school districts. The design-build process is currently authorized for local governments, state agencies, California State University and University of California.

Public school districts are among the few governmental entities that do not have this authority.

"Given the challenges local

districts face in bringing additional school facilities on line, I thought this was a useful tool that could have an immediate impact," Simitian said. "Adequate funding is a must, of course, but if we can help districts 'spend smart' as well as provide adequate resources, we'll be that much better off."

Simitian explained that Gov. Gray Davis vetoed a similar bill last year, but he believes he has been successful in addressing concerns generated by the governor's office.

One change involved the increasing from 5 to 10 percent the amount of money that school districts will withhold from contractors until projects are correctly completed.

"We pooled people together and worked through the issues," Simitian said, feeling confident that the bill would receive a signature of approval this time around. "There has been no formal opposition."

The Department of General Services, the Association of General Contractors of California, the Association of California Construction Managers and Haskell Constructions, a leader in school-related building projects, have all offered endorsements for AB1402.

Simitian credited class size reductions and the fallout of "baby boomers" having children later in life as two reasons why there has been an increase in the need for new schools.

"There is this echo of the 'baby boom' with people getting married later in life and having children later," Simitian explained. "Right now, there is a surge in school-aged children."

The bill applies to both new schools and renovations, which have also been on the rise, the Assemblyman said.

"AB1402 applies to any big project," he said. "And there have been a lot of renovations."