

REDWOOD CITY DAILY NEWS

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A chance to stretch tax dollars

BY RON GALATOLO
SPECIAL TO THE DAILY NEWS

What if there was a way to construct public school buildings that cost less, allowed them to be completed faster and made the best use of taxpayer dollars? Well, there is. It's called design/build. The concept is to overlap the design and construction phases of a project, teaming together the architect and the builder throughout the building process.

Traditionally, the design/build model wasn't open to community colleges, but state Sen. Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto) changed that in 2002 [while in the Assembly] when he authored Assembly Bill 1000, which allowed the San Mateo County Community College District to be one of a handful of community college districts in California to use the design/build approach to construct new school buildings.

By using design/build, our district was able to complete three successful projects that were produced on time and on budget, with an estimated savings of \$2.6 million to taxpayers.

The experiment worked, and that's why Simitian now wants to make the design/build approach available to all community college districts with his Senate Bill 614. It would also expand the number of projects at our K-12 schools eligible to use design/build. It

was approved by both the Senate and the Assembly, and is now on the governor's desk.

Design/build has long been a popular construction delivery method in private industry for commercial and industrial builders who recognized early on the advantages it offered. It may not be the right tool for every project or in every locale, but in a great many cases, it works to provide better results than the traditional approach.

Guest Opinion

Design/build works because it requires the builder and the architect to combine their talents at the beginning of a project. Because the builder is involved early in the process, the architect can include his or her input, resulting in fewer design errors and omissions. Also, the project owner is able to negotiate — in advance — a guaranteed maximum price for the finished project, which means a lower overall project cost and greater accountability.

Before Simitian's legislation, community colleges weren't allowed to use the design/build approach because the state's public contract code required that construction contracts be awarded to the so-called "lowest responsible bidder." Thus, public institutions such as the San Mateo County Community College District had to follow the

more cumbersome and less synchronized "design/bid/build" approach, under which an architect designs a structure and provides a rough cost estimate for the project. Bids are then solicited from general contractors. Because it's common for those bids to come in higher than expected, the plans are returned to the architect to be redesigned. This back-and-forth process often means increased costs and project delays.

Simitian's SB 614 is about offering an approach to our state's community colleges and K-12 school districts that will save them money, time and precious resources. It allows local districts to choose the method they prefer, thereby providing flexibility while maintaining local control. It's a practical good-government tool we can use to do more for our students.

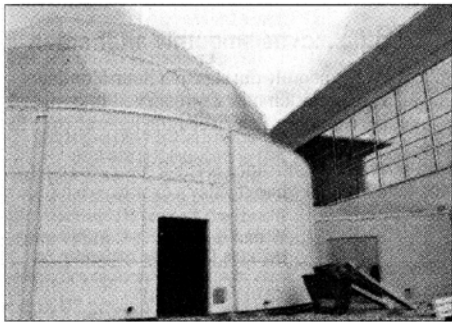
There is never enough money to do all the things we want to do; design/build allows us to stretch our dollars. The taxpayers rightly want us to get them the most for their money, and design/build helps us do just that. As a chancellor of a community college district that has successfully used design/build, I urge the governor to sign SB 614.

Ron Galatolo is the chancellor of the San Mateo County Community College District.

San Mateo County Times

October 16, 2007

Law may cut schools' construction costs



STAFF FILE

A NEW LAW would help schools do campus improvements as when College of San Mateo recently built its new Science Building.

■ SB614 allows schools to 'build faster, cheaper and with more flexibility'

By Neil Gonzales
STAFF WRITER

A new law could help California school districts and community colleges save millions of dollars in construction costs by streamlining the way they do a project.

Senate Bill 614, signed into law Friday by Gov. Schwarzenegger, will provide districts another tool to "build projects faster, cheaper and with more flexibility," the legislation's author, state Sen. Joe Simitian, said Monday.

The law takes effect Jan. 1 and will make the design-build method of construction more available to districts and community colleges.

That method has already helped the San Mateo County Community College District and could prove a boon to other local school agencies that are pursuing or exploring construction bond measures.

This approach partners the architect and builder throughout the construction process.

Traditionally, schools have relied on the "design-bid-build" concept in which separate contracts are awarded for architectural, engineering and construction services, said Simitian, D-Palo Alto.

He said the latter method at times creates an adversarial relationship among the architect, engineer and construction contractor, slowing down the process and driving up costs.

Simitian said his legislation does not require all districts or community colleges to use the de-

sign-build method.

Instead, it lowers the threshold for these agencies to use the design-build method if they choose, he said.

The legislation allows them to go with the design-build strategy for projects costing more than \$2.5 million rather than \$10 million.

It also lifts a restriction on the number of community-college level projects able to use this method. It thus extends the use of the design-build process to all community college districts.

Another Simitian bill in 2002 allowed San Mateo and other community college districts to try the design-build approach.

"It's been extremely beneficial to the district," said Jose Nunez, vice chancellor of facilities.

Please see **LAW**, Local 3

New law would help schools save on construction costs

► **LAW**, from Local 1

planning and operations for San Mateo. "We were able to have significant savings and save time."

San Mateo used design-build for the science building at College of San Mateo, the student center at Skyline College in San Bruno and field improvements districtwide, Nunez said.

The savings amounted to an estimated \$2.6 million, according to Chancellor Ron Galatolo.

Nunez said San Mateo will continue to turn to the design-bid concept for future projects such as new buildings housing administrative offices, a wellness center and other services at CSM.

School districts that seek to upgrade their campuses may also look more closely at design-build. Burlingame, for instance, has put a \$48.3 million bond measure on the November ballot while Sequoia Union High is mulling a similar proposal for an election next year.

The Engineering and Utility Contractors Association in San Ramon, however, has opposed SB 614, arguing that the lowered threshold will force small general contractors to compete with big firms.

Tara McGovern, the association's director of government relations, said the mom-and-pop type contractors now bid on projects valued under \$10 million.

But SB 614 will allow the big firms to also bid for those projects, she said. "It's forcing smaller contractors to compete with the larger, more-sophisticated firms that have engineering departments."

But she said the association is not against the design-build concept and recognizes its streamlining benefits. "We just want it to be fair for everyone," she said.

Simitian said schools are the priority.

"We can't guarantee every job put out to bid will be available to a contractor," he said. "Our goal is to let schools build the projects that are best for them."

Staff writer Neil Gonzales covers education. He can be reached at (650) 348-4338 or ngonzales@sanmateocountytimes.com.