



BOARD OF EDUCATION

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**October 09, 2024, Board Meeting
Trustee Agenda Item Questions & Answers**

AGENDA ITEM: C-6

Q: Farber independent studies. I still hear a lot of complaints about our online learning not being sufficiently monitored. That students are cheating, not learning and getting high school credits without earning them. Is this item the same program?

A: Beginning in the 2024/25 school year, Farber Online School (formerly eLearn) moved from traditional independent study to a course-based independent study model. In the course-based model, students attend virtual classes daily for the same number of instructional minutes as their classroom-based peers. Teachers utilize the district- adopted instructional materials, and all classes are one semester long. The Farber Online School (formerly eLearn) does not utilize Edgenuity Curriculum.

AGENDA ITEM: C-8

Q: For the item on ethnic studies, have the concerns the teachers had been addressed?

Q: Regarding ethnic studies: did this item gain support from our teaching staff that created our Ethnic studies programming? They have been very involved and vocal in the past, and I want to make sure they are on board with this.

A: Yes. The major concern that was raised by our Ethnic Studies teachers was the termination of the contract with CRE last November. We have re-established a relationship with CRE and have established the contract that is being presented to the Board for professional learning, curriculum support, and instructional coaching for teachers and district staff.

All work completed by CRE will be in direct alignment with the state model curriculum framework. All content is co-created with our teachers and will be vetted by district staff prior to including into each professional development or materials for our teachers.

AGENDA ITEM: C-12

Q: Why is this project list coming to the board for approval after ballots have already arrived in the homes of voters, and how did the public participate in its development, and subsequent revisions?

A: The public had opportunity to provide input on priorities during board workshops which were held on 5/30/23, 4/29/24 and the 6/12/24 board meeting. Open House informational sessions regarding Measure H were held on 9/4/24 and 10/1/24, both with opportunities for feedback. Staff presented multiple options to the Board and the list was refined based on board feedback, knowing the Board is representing the voice of constituents.

Q: Why is the bond measure coming to voters before a permanent superintendent is hired? Does doing so create a public perception that the interim superintendent may be allocating bond funds into certain trustee regions to secure the permanent superintendent position by catering to a simple majority of the board?

A: The timing of the current bond measure is based on the \$2.5 billion dollars of growing facilities' needs, ensuring continuity of facility improvements from one bond measure to the next. Any bond measure project list is subject to approval by the Board, who speaks through one majority voice. That requires staff, including a permanent or interim superintendent, to follow board direction. This is irrespective of any superintendent transition.

Q: Why wasn't a community bond committee formed to provide input for the project list?

A: Our polling partners at FM3 surveyed our voter base three different times gathering feedback on their priorities. Those polls are statistically representative of the Fresno Unified voter base and that information was presented to the Board and used by staff in developing proposed project lists. The public also had opportunities to provide input on priorities during board workshops which were held on 5/30/23, 4/29/24 and the 6/12/24 board meeting.

Q: What was the interim superintendent's process for prioritizing projects?

A: Projects were prioritized by staff using a combination of Equity and Facility Assessment scores, the Board's feedback (to include more regional projects instead of solely equity and facility assessments), and constituent feedback through FM3 surveys, Measure H open houses, public comment, and community outreach conducted during the development of the equity tool.

Q: What was the interim superintendent's process for revising the project list? How many revisions have been made to the original project list? Do the revisions to the project list reflect the interim superintendent's best, professional recommendation for students and families, or was it dictated by board majority? If the project list reflects the interim superintendent's professional recommendation, why does it keep changing?

A: Based on continued Board feedback, four revisions were made to the original proposed project list. The first proposed project list was presented by staff during the 6/12/24 board meeting. The first revision was presented by staff during individual trustee meetings in early August. The second revision, guided by board member feedback during the individual meetings, was presented during the 8/24/24 board meeting. Following further board feedback, the third revision was presented in individual trustee meetings held September 9th through September 18th. The most recent revision was sent to board members during the first week of October, following further board members' feedback. Yes, the project list represents the interim superintendent's best, professional recommendation after hearing all Board feedback. The list continued to be refined to maximize impact of funding and meet the differentiated needs and interests of the Board and community.

Q: Why hasn't there been opportunities for public participation and discussion with each revision? (*Item C-12 is on the Consent Agenda*)

A: As mentioned in previous answers, the public has had the opportunity to participate and provide feedback on priorities in several board workshops and meetings, as well as other community feedback opportunities. Any board agenda item, whether on the consent agenda or discussion agenda, may be pulled for public comment by the public at any board meeting.

Q: Why should taxpayers trust Fresno Unified with more tax dollars when student performance is so poor?

A: As found in research, "Students are generally better able to learn and remain engaged in instruction, and teachers are better able to do their jobs, in well-maintained classrooms that are well-lit, clean, spacious, and heated and air-conditioned as needed. In contrast, when classrooms are too hot, too cold, overcrowded, dust-filled, or poorly ventilated, students and teachers suffer." (Filardo et. al., 2019) With more than \$2.5 billion in growing facilities needs, it is imperative that we continue to fund ongoing facility improvements to best serve our students' academic needs. Additionally, catastrophic failure and the inability to address serious aging infrastructure needs will have negative impact on the ability to improve student achievement.

Q: In the Fresno Bee article that came out on Sunday (10/6/24), it stated that there are aging elementary schools in danger of complete failure that could potentially leave up to 800 students without a neighborhood school. If that is true, why did the district recently construct the brand-new Farber campus, and why is the district currently renovating the superintendent's office and board room?

A: While there are currently no renovations of the Superintendent's office, the Board room renovation was requested by the Board due to safety concerns. The Farber campus was designed to mitigate the concerns of three other school campuses rated "poor", getting students out of schools at risk of failure. Both Farber and the Board room renovations were previous bond measure-funded, board-approved projects.

Q: Why is \$27M going towards administrative (adult) spaces, including at the brand-new Farber facility? Why are adult spaces prioritized over student spaces when there is so much unaddressed need at schools and in classrooms?

A: The administrative projects on the list are at schools focused on improving safety and access, namely single point of entry. These administrative spaces also meet a critical need of additional confidential space, supporting students. Additionally, the Board has requested that remaining projects from Measure M be carried over and completed through Measure H.

Q: Why are brand new CTE facilities prioritized over existing schools in poor condition that are not on the project list?

A: Career readiness is a high priority area identified by our community and voters, through FM3 surveys and feedback sessions. However, based on Board feedback, the most recent project list eliminates \$15 million in funding for a new Aviation campus and reallocates that across the regions to fund additional restrooms.

Q: For the most recent revision (Aviation Academy \$15M Redistribution) of the project list, how did you find an additional \$15M last week to fund the Aviation Academy amidst more expected budget cuts? Where did that \$15M come from and why wasn't it already earmarked to fund the Aviation Academy?

A: Staff did not find an additional \$15 million to fund the aviation academy. \$49.6 M of ELOP funding has already been identified for the Aviation academy project. While it was originally contemplated that an additional \$15M of bond funding would also be utilized for the project, based upon the Board's feedback and priorities, staff felt that restroom construction investments were of higher priority to the board and that is reflected in the most recent proposed project list revision.

Q: Why is there no supporting argument for Measure H on the ballot, and only a statement opposing Measure H? Isn't it customary for the district to facilitate a statement of support from community members? Why was this missed?

A: While the district can inform and educate about Measure H, we cannot advocate for support or opposition. Two major educational partners, FTA and Trades, have chosen to support Measure H; however, neither of these partners filed a community support statement. A group of community supporters did attempt to file a rebuttal statement; however, it was not accepted as it was received past the County Clerk's deadline.

Q: How will you communicate to voters which projects they can expect at their neighborhood schools – especially at this late date when people are already voting?

A: If and when a finalized project list is approved by the board, our Communications team will create additional educational/informational content specific to that approved list to communicate with the public. Prior to attaining a board-approved list, we have been communicating general priorities including safer schools, better classrooms, career readiness, and upgrading and repairing old schools. These priorities were selected based off community, voter, and Board feedback.

Q: Is there a timeline for when taxpayers can expect each project to be started, or which order the projects will follow?

A: The current proposed project list is sorted by a 'worst-first' qualifier and reflects projects in order of timeline.

Q: Why is the district collaborating with Fresno Teachers Association for 33% (\$165M) of potential bond funds? Why does the teacher's union have more say in how bond funds will be used than the taxpayers who are paying for it?

A: During the most recent negotiations cycle with FTA, a clear need for classroom and confidential space investment was communicated and agreed upon. Knowing that current bond measure funding is already allocated via a board-approved project list, we came to a mutual agreement to work together on the next bond to ensure we prioritized classrooms and confidential spaces. This is in the mutual interest of teachers and the district. The community and voters have shared over many years that they too have a mutual interest in bettering classrooms and reducing overcrowding, which is why the district agreed to partner on the upcoming Measure H to prioritize classrooms.

Q: If this project list is approved and the bond measure passes, can the board still vote down certain projects on the approved project list later? How can taxpayers trust the projects on the list will be approved by a majority of the board when the time comes?

A: Yes. As with all previous bond measures, all facilities projects must come to the Board for approval.

Q: What is the specific plan for repairing facilities that are in poor condition and are not included on the project list? How can taxpayers trust the projects on the list will be approved by a majority of the board when the time comes?

A: Routine restricted maintenance and deferred maintenance are funding sources utilized for ongoing repairs and facility maintenance. The plan and timeline for repairing facilities is also determined through equity and facility assessment scores, as well as urgent needs through any vandalism, theft, or failure. Potential Prop 2 funding would allow us to extend the life of our bond to cover additional repairs. The community will make their determination of their trust in the Board's commitments through their following of board meetings and the Board's communications. The Board is actively engaging in coaching and is committed to Student Outcomes Focused Governance which includes a strong commitment to Board unity and speaking through one collective voice.

Q: How much will Measure H impact property taxes annually and for how long? For a home valued at \$300,000, what is the current annual tax rate, and how much will it increase (annually) if Measure H passes?

A: Measure H will increase the tax rate by 3 cents and up to 6 cents per \$100 of assessed value (not market value) for 40 years. The current annual tax rate for a home valued at \$100,000 is \$213.36 and will raise to \$238.36. For a \$300,000 home the annual tax rate will rise from \$640.08 to \$715.08, an increase of \$75 annually or \$6.25 per month.

Q: If Measure H passes, the tax rate increase will be the highest we've ever seen in Fresno, and the surrounding area. True or False?

A: The same increase of \$25 per \$100,000 assessed value happened for Measure M, meaning this will not be the highest tax increase. If no other districts raise their tax rates, this will be the highest tax *rate* in the surrounding area at \$238.36. Unfortunately, with the current formula for bond measure investment which is to levy taxes based on local assessed property values, districts that have lower levels of property values per student are able to raise less money to upgrade their facilities. From an equity standpoint, this is why state funding opportunities such as Proposition 2 are so critical.

Q: What is the “Equity Tool”? What method did the interim superintendent use to define and apply “Equity” as it relates to the project list? What evidence drove your decision- making? Is the Equity Tool applied solely to brand new construction, or was it also used to determine which schools receive necessary repairs and deferred maintenance?

A: At the direction of the Board, the FUSD Long-Term Planning Tool was developed by RSSC to identify school sites with the highest repair need in the district from using an equity lens. The Equity Index and the Community Impact Ranking bring more context and community input along with the facility assessment scores. The Equity Index is a conglomeration of different socioeconomic identifiers and statistics that were identified by RSSC through research. Measures utilized to assign an Equity Index value include: Student Opportunity, CDE High Need Student Groups, Suspension Status Level, Neighborhood Opportunity, Poverty Levels, Segregation Index, and many more. The Equity Index is then used in the prioritizing algorithm to identify sites with the highest needs overall. The sorting order is: First, the Overall Facility Assessment value (Unsatisfactory, Poor, etc.), then the Equity Index value, then the Community Impact Rank. The Equity Index was the second highest value of three that were utilized for identifying our proposed project list.

Q: How much money did the district pay the consultants who developed the “Equity Tool”, and how was the Equity Tool used to determine which projects would be prioritized? What is the full name & address of the consulting firm?

A: The Board approved two contracts with RSSC totaling \$126,000.
Consultant name and address:
RSS Consulting, LLC.
545 Kenmore Ave., Oakland, CA 94610

Q: Who is your bond consultant (& address), how much are you paying them and what is their role? Were there any other paid consultants used for the bond; what was their role and how much were their contracts? Please include contact information for each.

A: Fresno Unified is working with FM3 Research (12100 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 350, Los Angeles, CA 90025) and Lew Edwards Group (5454 Boardway St. Oakland, CA 94618) to support bond communication and education efforts. Both agreements are in the amount of \$14,500 each.

Q: Is the \$50M allotted for deferred maintenance enough, and why are those projects not identified on this list?

A: In previous bonds we have allotted 10% for deferred maintenance, and we are recommending the same for Measure H. Deferred maintenance projects are not outlined specifically in the project list as these funds must to be flexible to meet urgent needs including vandalism, theft, and failure. The funding is not enough, as we are chasing \$2.5 billion in needs with a \$500 million bond.

Q: Is there a strategic plan in place to obtain Proposition 2 (\$10B for California school facilities) funds if it passes? Both bond measures (Measure H and Prop 2) are on this ballot. Some districts (i.e., LAUSD) are already on a waiting list for Prop 2 funds. Is FUSD positioned to aggressively go after Prop 2 funds- given the impending failure of our school facilities? How will the district utilize both Measure H and Proposition 2 to obtain all available bond funds for dilapidated FUSD facilities? If strategic planning has already occurred, please provide a timeline showing month by month over the past year, the planning and actions taken to make the best use of both of these bond measures.

A: School districts across the state, including Fresno Unified, have projects on a waiting list for state funding. This 'unfunded approval' list of projects would be first in line for Prop 2 to receive funding previously approved after state bond funds were exhausted. Currently, Fresno Unified has over \$34M in projects on this list. Additionally, Fresno Unified submits funding applications on an ongoing basis as qualified projects are identified, such as projects for modernization and new construction. An example includes several CTE buildings that were built through Measure M funding utilizing matching grant funds from the state to extend our bond dollars as far as possible.