



# PIEDMONT

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## UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

*Office of the Superintendent*

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June 3, 2018

On May 31, Piedmont resident William Blackwell published a letter describing plans for construction of a new high school STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics) building and theater building as “A Costly Mistake.” The District shares his interest in maximizing value and avoiding waste, and has exhaustively reviewed his and many other concepts for modernizing antiquated facilities and adding much-needed science, technology and engineering labs. Mr. Blackwell’s concept is based on inaccurate information and is simply not feasible under rules and restrictions as determined by the Office of Public School Construction and the Division of the State Architect. Additionally, over the past two years, District staff and Board members have met with Mr. Blackwell on multiple occasions to hear his concerns and provide him with accurate information.

### **The Need for Additional Classrooms and Labs**

Mr. Blackwell suggests that the new STEAM and theater buildings will add too many classrooms. The District has 37 high school classrooms, including general classrooms and labs. (This count does not include shared spaces with Piedmont Middle School, including the Instrumental Music and Acappella rooms in Morrison Gym.) He contends that the number of existing classrooms is sufficient to support a high school student population of 800-900 students. He argues that adding classrooms will invite an expansion of programs, resulting in staff increases that the District cannot afford.

The number and type of classrooms needed is outlined in the District’s [Facilities Master Plan](#). The Plan states that, to meet current and future educational needs, the District needs *at least 45* high school classrooms. Also, to support a range of teaching strategies including quiet study, research, small-group collaboration, project work and exploration, presentations, and formal instruction, the District needs *additional* meeting, collaboration, and “break out” spaces.

Under the Plan, the District needs to add at least eight classrooms to support current and projected enrollment, meet new curricular mandates (primarily the Next Generation Science Standards), and meet demand for more varied courses. This includes *at least* two general classrooms, one science lab, and one engineering lab at PHS, one classroom at MHS, and *at least three* additional classrooms at PMS.

Contrary to his assertions, all of the new classrooms are needed to meet the needs of PHS, MHS and PMS students.

### **Full Utilization of Existing Classrooms**

Mr. Blackwell claims that the high school has underutilized classrooms that, if fully utilized, would give the District more options for locating the new STEAM building. Specifically, he advocates for constructing the new STEAM building on the site of the existing Piedmont High School

Administration Building (also known as “the 10s building”) instead of on the site of the Alan Harvey Theater. Also, he advocates for renovating rather than replacing the Theater.

He claims that the eight classrooms and the administrative and counseling offices located in the 10s building could be temporarily absorbed in the Library building. To support this, he states that “classrooms” in the Library building are currently being used for storage and school publications. Nonetheless, the rooms at issue -- basement rooms 30A and 30B -- do not meet DSA requirements for standard classrooms. State law precludes the District from using the kinds of non-classroom spaces identified by Mr. Blackwell as classrooms except in emergencies such as the immediate aftermath of an earthquake.

There are in fact some classrooms that are empty for one or more periods during the school day. Nonetheless, there are not nearly enough of these unused classroom periods to offset the loss of the eight classrooms in the 10s building. Moreover, given the limited space, it is simply not possible to relocate the PHS administrative offices and counseling offices into the Library building or other existing buildings on campus. For this reason, if the District were to build the STEAM building on the site of the 10s building as he suggests, the District would need to use portables for “interim housing.” Interim housing would add millions to the project cost and at least twelve months to the construction schedule. (For more information about interim housing, please see these [Answers to Frequently Asked Questions](#) and scroll down to “*Why is the District working to avoid the use of interim housing?*”)

After an exhaustive study of the options and trade-offs, the District decided the most efficient and cost-effective approach is to build the new STEAM building on the site of the current theater, then demolish the 10s building, and build a new theater on the 10s site. This approach will meet current and future educational needs of students, improve campus flow and campus security, and promote the District’s energy conservation goals. To promote awareness and understanding about the options for locating new STEAM facilities, the District created a website ([www.measureh1.org](http://www.measureh1.org)), a short animated video (<https://youtu.be/IOhWHostJYc>), and two public service announcements; held three community town hall meetings (on April 1, 6 and 18, 2017); met with students; and offered an on-line feedback form. Several hundred parents, students, and members of the community participated in this process.

## Replacement of Alan Harvey Theater

Mr. Blackwell states that there is no need to replace the Alan Harvey Theater and that the existing AHT can be made accessible for under \$10 million.

AHT is undersized for the current school population, does not adequately support the District’s performing arts programs, and does not comply with current fire/life/safety and accessibility codes. The required work includes:

- **Accessible Pathways.** Accessible pathways are needed throughout, including to the stage, orchestra pit, sound booth, dressing rooms, restrooms, and seats at all levels.
- **Number and Accessibility of Restrooms.** Currently there are only two single-occupancy restrooms in the 450-seat theater, and more are needed.
- **Building Systems.** The heating and ventilation systems are more than 35 years old, failing, costly to maintain, and highly inefficient to operate.
- **Dry Rot.** There is extensive dry rot in the building and trellis.
- **Water Intrusion.** The roof, gutter and downspouts are leaking.
- **Fire and Life/Safety Systems and Seismic Safety.** Any renovation will trigger State requirements to upgrade AHT’s fire and life/safety systems (including installation of a new fire alarm, fire sprinklers, and a voice evacuation system) and seismically strengthen the structure.

AHT requires extensive renovation, and District architects determined that the renovation cost would likely exceed the cost of replacement.

### **District Response to Questions**

Lastly, Mr. Blackwell asserts that he has “received no substantive reply” to his concerns. On the contrary, over the last seven months, District staff have thoroughly and respectfully responded to his many questions and suggestions. On May 23, 2017, Director of Facilities Pete Palmer, architect Jeff Evans, and structural engineer Mark Rueb met at length with him to discuss each of these and other issues, and to correct his misinformation. Nonetheless, he has repeatedly raised the identical issues. Since the May 23rd meeting, District staff have met with him twice more and responded to his 23 requests for information about precisely the same issues. Furthermore, members from the Board of Education have also met with him to discuss his concerns.

### **Program Milestones**

The District is on schedule for accomplishing the most pressing goals of the Measure H1 facilities program. This year, the District finalized plans for the new STEAM and theater buildings. The District will submit these plans for State review this summer, and State approval is expected in the Spring of 2019. The District expects to begin construction of the STEAM building in the Summer of 2019, and complete and occupy the building in August 2020. The District expects to begin construction of the new theater in the Summer of 2020, and complete and occupy the building in 2021.

Also this year, the District:

- Completed plans to make a range of safety and security improvements at PMS this summer, including installation of new doors, hardware, and electronic locks.
- Completed plans to add ventilation and climate control equipment at the elementary schools and the PHS 30s building this summer, to prevent classroom overheating and improve the learning environment.
- Finalized plans for the improvement of underground drainage and replacement of the turf and track at Witter Field. The District expects to begin construction of these improvements in the Spring of 2019, and complete this work in the Fall of 2019.
- Completed plans to replace antiquated light fixtures at Witter Field with new LED fixtures this summer. The new fixtures will improve overall field lighting and player safety and promote energy efficiency in accordance with District and community goals.

More information about the Measure H1 facilities program can be seen at [measureh1.org](http://measureh1.org)

As always, I welcome questions and comments at any time at [rbooker@piedmont.k12.ca.us](mailto:rbooker@piedmont.k12.ca.us)

Sincerely,

Randall Booker, Superintendent