

# El Monte Promise Foundation hits roadblock in its mission to help local kids go to college



By [Rebecca Kimitch](#), The San Gabriel Valley Tribune

4/04/14

EL MONTE >> A new effort to send more kids to college has hit a roadblock.

The El Monte Promise Foundation, a new community nonprofit, [announced last week](#) an initiative to help more El Monte children go to college by providing matching funds to their college savings accounts, educating parents on college requirements and offering other resources.

But the bid to create a “cradle to college” pipeline in the community is missing a key link: high school.

The El Monte Union High School district has so far declined to join the effort. The school board voted 3-2 Thursday night to indefinitely table a [memorandum of understanding](#) between the district and the Promise Foundation.

Foundation supporters insist the district’s support is key to promoting the effort as a community partnership in order to attract federal grants and private donations. The foundation already has the support of the city’s elementary school districts, City Hall, the El Monte/South El Monte Chamber of Commerce and the California Community Foundation.

“The whole idea is to bring together government agencies, school districts, nonprofits and businesses to really work together — a lot of funding is going to collaboratives like this,” Promise Foundation president Norma Edith Garcia said. “But we need to demonstrate everyone is on board, from cradle to college.”

School board president Maria-Elena Talamantes said the partnership isn’t as simple as it may seem. That’s because while the El Monte Promise Foundation is focused on students from just the city, the school district also serves students in South El Monte and Rosemead.

“I heard what some of the parents were saying last night ... but I’ve had other people from South El Monte and Rosemead say they feel it would be exclusive of them,” Talamantes said. “We want to ensure we are servicing all of our students.”

Talamantes, along with board members Esthela Torres de Siegrist and Salvador Ramirez, voted to indefinitely table the MOU. Board members Ricardo Padilla and Juanita Gonzales voted against tabling it.

But Garcia says the Promise Foundation has been and will continue to provide resources to all students in the high school district, including college family nights and ELL curriculum support. The [agreement](#) the district is being asked to sign specifically says “El Monte and its surrounding communities,” she said.

One of the main initiatives of the foundation encourages parents to start college savings accounts for their children and provides matching funds. That program will start in seven El Monte elementary schools, but will later be expanded, Garcia said.

Under the MOU, the district would share enrollment and GPA data with the foundation, commit to providing five to 10 hours of financial literacy instruction to students every year, and provide other general support. In return, the foundation would provide on-campus programs to students and parents.

Talamantes said the district is already helping students reach their college ambitions through a program launched in 2010, known as the El Monte Union Pledge. Through the program, students who graduate from the district are first in line to get the classes they want at Rio Hondo College. If they maintain a 3.0 grade point average, they are guaranteed admission to UC Irvine.

Parents in support of the foundation who attended Thursday’s school board meeting said politics are to blame.

“I am so sad. I honestly think the board of education chose politics over the future of our students,” said parent Ana Gutierrez, who has two sons at El Monte High School and serves on the Promise Foundation board.