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School Site Selection and Approval Guide

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Introduction

Selecting the most appropriate site for a school is an important consideration for a school district and the school community. The location, size, and shape of a school site can materially affect the educational program and opportunities for students. Because program needs differ, school districts must carefully develop selection criteria with the requirements of the local school program in mind. The selection must be based not only on current needs but also on projected needs. It is not a simple task. The primary purpose of this guide is to help school districts make the wisest selection possible.

Purpose

This document has been designed to help school districts (1) select school sites that provide both a safe and a supportive environment for the instructional program and the learning process; and (2) gain state approval for the selected sites. To help in the selection process, the guide includes a set of selection criteria that have proven helpful to site selection teams. The guide also contains information about safety factors that should be considered when evaluating potential school sites and about the procedures school districts must follow to gain approval from the Department for new sites and for additions of land areas to existing sites.

The Role of the California Department of Education

Education Code Section 17251 and the *California Code of Regulations (CCR)*, Title 5, sections 14001 through 14012, outline the powers and duties of the Department regarding school sites and the construction of school buildings. Districts seeking state funding must comply with the *Education Code* and Title 5 sections cited above. Site approval from the Department must be granted before the State Allocation Board will apportion funds. Districts using local funds are encouraged to seek the Department's approval for the benefits that such outside, objective reviews provide to the school district and the community.

Selecting the Proper Site

When a school district decides to select a new school site, two basic questions must be addressed: (1) Who will be responsible for the school site selection process? (2) What criteria will be considered in selecting the site? This guide contains information that school districts can use to answer those questions.

Determining Who Will Select the Site

A key decision the school district must make is whether the site will be selected by district staff or through a selection team process. The Department suggests that a selection team recommend a site or sites to the local board of education. For that reason, the information provided in this guide is directed to team members but is equally applicable to district staff. If the school district establishes a site selection team, the team should include community members, teachers, administrators, public officials, and the architect selected by the school district to design the project. The community members should include people with and without children in the district. A consultant from the Department is available to advise the district on the formation of the team. Some school districts include a school board member as part of the team. By following this selection process, the committee may become somewhat large but should produce a better school site as a result. Once the composition of the selection team is determined, one of its first tasks will be to establish site selection criteria.

Developing Site Selection Criteria

School site selection is affected by many factors, including health and safety, location, size, and cost. Those persons responsible for the school site selection will have to evaluate both the present characteristics and the possible future characteristics of a site and its surrounding property. Because the site selection team often is unable to locate a site that meets all the criteria agreed on, it should set priorities and be prepared to make certain compromises. In addition, the team must weigh those site characteristics that may adversely affect the choice. Careful assessment takes time, but the importance of each decision justifies the attention. A public comment period should be incorporated into the process to receive information and support from the broader community for both the primary alternatives and the recommended site or sites.

Screening and Ranking Criteria

To help focus and manage the site selection process, the Department developed screening and ranking procedures. The procedures were created on the basis of the following criteria, which are listed in the general order of importance:

1. Safety
2. Location
3. Environment
4. Soils

5. Topography
6. Size and Shape
7. Accessibility
8. Public Services
9. Utilities
10. Cost
11. Availability
12. Public Acceptance

An explanation of these criteria is in Appendix A, Site Selection Process. Appendix A also contains three work sheets created on the basis of a screening and ranking procedure developed by School Facilities Planning Division (SFPD) staff.

The first work sheet, Site Selection Criteria, outlines the 12 major criteria listed above, with several secondary criteria listed as subtopics. The secondary criteria have been designed to help the selection team define more clearly the factors that must be considered and understand better the types of data needed in the selection and acquisition of the school site. After considering both the primary and secondary criteria, the site selection team should be able to rank the sites in order of acceptability by completing the next two work sheets, Site Selection Evaluation and the Comparative Evaluation of Candidate Sites.

Although the criteria contained in Site Selection Criteria are not the only ones a site selection team should consider, the team might find those criteria useful when explaining to school boards and other interested entities how the selection process was accomplished. School districts purchasing the site with state funds will find the criteria helpful when screening available sites and in identifying at least three acceptable sites. Districts not applying for state funds are not required by *Education Code* Section 17251 to review a specific number of sites. However, the California Environmental Quality Act requires that alternative sites be reviewed in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Prudence suggests that identifying alternative sites is a desirable procedure, and the Department recommends it.

Recommended Resources

School administrators, members of school boards, site selection teams, and other persons involved in facilities planning may find the following documents useful:

School Site Analysis and Development (2000). Available from the California Department of Education, School Facilities Planning Division, 1430 N Street, Suite 1201, Sacramento, CA 95814.

The Guide for Planning Educational Facilities (1995). Available from the Council of Education Facility Planners International, 9180 E. Desert Cove Drive, Suite 104, Scottsdale, AZ 85260.

School Site Analysis and Development contains information the school site selection team can use to evaluate a potential site and determine whether it meets the needs of the particular school. The site standards in the book are based on historical school facilities funding programs. School planners should modify the requirements to fit current local educational program requirements.

The Department also recommends that the team select a site on the basis of the school district's facility master plan that reflects the district's demographics, potential growth rates, and capacities at existing school sites. In addition, many cities and counties have designated future school sites on general plan land use maps that the team should review.

Impacted Sites

The Department's recommendations for site size can be found in *School Site Analysis and Development*. A ratio of 1:2 between buildings and developed grounds is incorporated in all the tables. Unfortunately, in many cases, primarily in urban settings, sites must be smaller than the acreage that appears in the charts. Although open space on a school campus is desirable for athletic fields, free play, parking, emergency access, foot traffic circulation, supervision, and aesthetics, the district often cannot feasibly acquire enough land. Using eminent domain to condemn property is possible; however, displacing families to gain land for a school is a difficult decision for many school districts to make. In such cases the Department may approve an amount of acreage less than the recommended site size. Policies related to urban impacted areas are being developed. All other site selection procedures outlined in this book should be followed for these sites.

Careful planning on undersized sites must take place to provide the students at that school an appropriate educational program. Educational specifications must be examined carefully to ensure that all aspects of the program can take place within the bounds of a small site. The school district may consider building multilevel complexes with underground parking to maximize the useable acreage on the site. Off-site issues, such as traffic congestion, should also be addressed in the planning process.

Evaluating Safety Factors

Safety is the first consideration in the selection of school sites. Certain health and safety requirements are governed by state regulations and the policies of the Department. In selecting a school site, the selection team should consider the following factors: (1) proximity to airports; (2) proximity to high-voltage power transmission lines; (3) presence of toxic and hazardous substances; (4) hazardous air emissions and facilities within a quarter mile; (5) other health hazards; (6) proximity to railroads; (7) proximity to high-pressure natural gas lines, gasoline lines, pressurized sewer lines, or high-pressure water pipelines; (8) proximity to propane tanks; (9) noise; (10) proximity to major roadways; (11) results of geological studies and soils analyses; (12) condition of traffic and school bus safety; (13) safe routes to school; and (14) safety issues for joint-use projects.

Proximity to Airports

The responsibilities of the school district, the California Department of Education, and the Department of Transportation (DOT), Aeronautics Program, Office of Airports, concerning the school site's proximity to runways are contained in *Education Code* Section 17215 (as amended by Assembly Bill (AB) 747, Chapter 837, Statutes of 1999). (See *CCR, Title 5, Section 14011(k)*.)

As a part of the site selection prescreening process, the school district should determine the proximity of the site to runways. Both the Department and DOT have maps identifying airport locations. If the site is within two nautical miles of an existing airport runway or a potential runway included in an airport master plan, as measured by direct air line from the part of the runway that is nearest to the school site, the following procedures must be followed before the site can be approved:

1. The governing board of the school district, including any district governed by a city board of education, shall give the Department written notice of the proposed acquisition and shall submit any information that is required by the Department. The Department will notify the DOT Aeronautics Program, Office of Airports.
2. The Division of Aeronautics shall investigate the proposed site and, within 30 working days after receipt of the notice, shall submit to the local governing board a written report and its recommendations concerning acquisition of the site. As a part of the investigation, the Aeronautics Program shall give notice to the owner and operator of the airport, who shall be granted the opportunity to comment on the proposed school site.
3. The governing board of the school district shall not acquire title to the property until the report of the DOT Aeronautics Program has been received. If the report favors the acquisition of the property for a school site or an addition to a present school site, the governing board shall hold a public hearing on the matter before acquiring the site.
4. If the report does not favor the acquisition of the property for a school site or an addition to a present school site, the governing board may not acquire title to the property. If the report does not favor acquisition of a proposed site, no state funds or local funds shall be apportioned or expended for the acquisition of that site, construction of any school building on that site, or the expansion of any existing site to include that site.
5. The requirements noted above do not apply to sites acquired before January 1, 1966, or to any additions or extensions to those sites.

Proximity to High-Voltage Power Transmission Lines

Electric power transmission lines maintained by power companies may or may not be hazardous to human health. Research continues on the affects of electromagnetic fields (EMF) on human beings. However, school districts should be cautious about the health and safety aspects relating to overhead transmission lines. School districts should take a conservative approach when reviewing sites situated near easements for power transmissions lines.

In consultation with the State Department of Health Services (DHS) and electric power companies, the Department has established the following limits for locating any part of a school site property line near the edge of easements for high-voltage power transmission lines:

1. 100 feet from the edge of an easement for a 50-133kV (kilo volts) line
2. 150 feet from the edge of an easement for a 220-230kV line
3. 350 feet from the edge of an easement for a 500-550kV line

These figures represent kV strengths of transmission lines used by utility companies in January 1993. Utility companies report that strengths for distribution lines are below 50kV.

The Department of Health Services completed a multiyear study of EMFs in schools. Results of the study were published at the end of 2000. The limits noted above for locating school sites near EMF-producing lines may be amended on the basis of the findings of the study.

When evaluating a potential site situated near a power line easement, the site selection team should ask the following questions:

1. Is it necessary for the school district to acquire a site near the easement?
2. Are other options available?
3. Has the school district contacted and discussed with the utility company any plans to (a) increase the voltage of the transmission lines; or (b) build other towers on the easement?
4. Is the line a transmission or distribution line?

Each site will be evaluated according to its own potential hazards by the Department consultant. (See *CCR, Title 5, Section 14010 (c)*.)

Presence of Toxic and Hazardous Substances

The presence of potentially toxic or hazardous substances on or in the vicinity of a prospective school site is another concern relating to the safety of students, staff, and the public. Persons responsible for site evaluation should give special consideration to the following hazards:

1. Landfill areas on or adjacent to the site
2. Proximity of the site to current or former dump areas, chemical plants, oil fields, refineries, fuel storage facilities, nuclear generating plants, abandoned farms and dairies, and agricultural areas where pesticides and fertilizer have been heavily used

3. Naturally occurring hazardous materials, such as asbestos, oil, and gas

Education Code sections 17071.13, 17072.13, 17210, 17210.1, 17213.1-3, and 17268 became effective January 1, 2000. Together they established requirements for assessments and approvals regarding toxic and hazardous materials that school districts must follow before receiving final site approval from the Department and funds under the School Facilities Program. (A summary of those requirements is noted below.) The school district may submit materials documenting compliance with the toxic and hazardous substances requirements before submitting the balance of the site approval package documents required by the Department. A local educational agency (LEA) may elect not to pursue a proposed site at any time during the process. Refer to SFPD Advisory 00-01 and SFPD Form 4.01* for further information. (See *CCR, Title 5, Section 14011(j)*.)

A summary of the requirements is as follows:

- Current and historic uses on and near the proposed school site shall be investigated by a qualified consultant who prepares a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (paper/database, site review, and interview investigation) conducted according to the American Society of Testing and Materials standards (ASTM E-1527-2000).
- If the Phase I review concludes that no further investigation is required, two copies of the Phase I assessment and payment for review by the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) shall be submitted to the Department. The Department will transmit the payment and the Phase I assessment to DTSC for its review and determination. If DTSC concurs with the Phase I assessment, it will issue a determination letter stating that "no action" is required related to hazardous materials.
- If the Phase I review concludes that further investigation is needed or DTSC requires it, the LEA shall enter into an agreement with DTSC and hire a qualified consultant to complete a Preliminary Endangerment Assessment (PEA) under DTSC oversight and review. The PEA includes the sampling of soils and risk assessment to determine whether a release of hazardous material has occurred, there is a threat of release, or a naturally occurring hazardous material poses a significant health risk. The LEA will then submit the PEA to DTSC. If no hazardous materials are identified, or if they do not pose a significant health risk, DTSC will approve the PEA and issue a determination letter stating that "no further action" is required.
- If required by DTSC because of health risks associated with hazardous materials are identified in the approved PEA, the LEA shall prepare and implement a Response Action (cleanup, removal, or remediation of hazardous materials) under DTSC oversight and approval. DTSC will issue a certification letter when the Response Action is completed. When a Response Action is required for a site, the LEA must obtain a Contingent Site Approval from the Department before the acquisition and implementation of the Response Action to ensure that the site meets all other requirements for Department approval.

Hazardous Air Emissions and Facilities Within A Quarter Mile

(See *Education Code* Section 17213(b) and *Public Resources Code* Section 21151.8(a)(2).)

The LEA shall consult with the administering agency and the local air pollution control district or air quality management district to identify facilities within a quarter mile of the proposed site that might reasonably be anticipated to emit hazardous air emissions or handle hazardous materials, substances, or wastes and shall provide written notification of those findings.

The LEA shall make the finding either that no such facilities were identified or that they do exist but that the health risks do not or will not constitute an actual or potential endangerment of public health at the site or that corrective measures will be taken that will result in emissions mitigation to levels that will not constitute endangerment. In the final instance the LEA should make an additional finding that emissions will have been mitigated before occupancy of the school.

These written findings, as adopted by the LEA governing board, must be submitted to the Department as a part of the site approval package. Often this information is included in the Phase I site assessment and in the adopted California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) document. (See *CCR, Title 5, Section 14011(i)*.)

Other Health Hazards

(See *Education Code* Section 17213(a) and *Public Resources Code* Section 21151.8(a)(1); see also *CCR, Title 5, Section 14011(h)*.)

The LEA shall include in an environmental impact report or a negative declaration the information needed to determine that the proposed site is not any of the following type:

1. The site of a current or former hazardous waste disposal site or a solid waste disposal site unless, if the site was a former solid waste disposal site, the LEA governing board concludes that the wastes have been removed.
2. A hazardous substance release site identified by the Department of Health Services (now maintained by DTSC)
3. The site of one or more pipelines, situated underground or aboveground, which carry hazardous substances, materials, or wastes, unless the pipeline is used only to supply natural gas to that school or neighborhood

These written determinations, as adopted by the LEA governing board, must be submitted to the Department as a part of the site approval package. Often this information is included in the Phase I site assessment and in the adopted CEQA document.

Other factors to consider are as follows:

- If the proposed land has been designated a border zone property by the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), then a school may not be located on the site without a specific variance in writing by DTSC. Contact DTSC, Site

Mitigation, (916) 255-3745. See *Health and Safety Code* Section 25220.

- From a nuisance standpoint the site selection committee should also consider whether a site is located near or downwind from a stockyard, fertilizer plant, soil-processing operation, auto dismantling facility, sewage treatment plant, or other potentially hazardous facility.

Proximity to Railroads

When evaluating a site near railroad tracks, a study should be conducted to answer the following questions (See *CCR, Title 5, Section 14010(d)*):

1. What is the distance from the track easement to the site?
2. Are the tracks mainline or spur?
3. What kinds of cargo are carried?
4. What is the frequency of rail traffic, and how does the rail traffic schedule relate to the school time schedule?
5. Is the proposed site near a grade, curve, bridge, signal, or other track feature?
6. What is the need for sound and safety barriers?
7. If pedestrians or vehicles must cross the tracks, are there adequate safeguards at the crossing?
8. Are there high-pressure gas lines near the tracks that might rupture in the event of derailment?

While most railroads have detailed instructions for handling hazardous materials, no setback distance between railroad tracks and schools is defined in law. However, the *California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 14010(d)*, established the following regulations pertaining to proximity to railroads:

If the proposed site is within 1,500 feet of a railroad track easement, a safety study shall be done by a competent professional trained in assessing cargo manifests, frequency, speed, and schedule of railroad traffic, grade, curves, type and condition of track, need for sound or safety barriers, need for pedestrian and vehicle safeguards at railroad crossing, presence of high pressure gas lines near the tracks that could rupture in the event of a derailment, preparation of an evacuation plan. In addition to the analysis, possible and reasonable mitigation measures must be identified.

The National Transportation Safety Board has called for a uniform standard separation of at least 100 feet between hazardous materials storage and production facilities and mainline railroad tracks. Hazardous materials authorities have evacuated homes within a radius of 1,500 feet to 2,500 feet of railroad accidents when toxic gas and explosives were involved.

Additional information may be obtained from the following organizations:

1. California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) (☒) has three regional offices providing railroad information.

Sacramento (Fresno and counties north)
Contact: Robert (Buzz) Webb
916-327-3131

San Francisco (bay and coastal counties)
Contact: George Elsmore
415-703-2665

Los Angeles (counties south of Fresno)
Contact: Tom Hunt
213-576-7089

2. Operation Life Savers, which provides educational materials regarding railroad safety information:

Contact: Eric Jacobsen
530-367-3918 (telephone)
530-367-3053 (fax)

3. The U.S. Government has statutory authority regarding railroads and works collaboratively with the CPUC.

Federal Railroad Administration
650 Capitol Mall, Room 7007
Sacramento, CA
Contact Al Settje
916-498-6540

4. Refer to Public Utilities Commission General Order No. 161, Rule 4, regarding the ability of local emergency response agencies (fire department or other public agency with responsibility for responding to an emergency) to obtain a list of hazardous materials transported on the rail line in question for the most recent prior twelve-month period. Main line railroads have risk management offices:

Union Pacific (St. Louis)
800-892-1283

Burlington Northern Santa Fe (Fort Worth)
817-234-2350

Amtrak (Oakland)
800-663-4114

Caltrain (San Jose)
408-291-5660

Metrolink (Los Angeles)
909-593-6973

Emergency Response Plan. There are approximately thirty-three short line railroads, not mainline, around the state. School districts should have information about them (e.g. name of rails, owner, operation, location, and dispatch office). In addition, school districts should identify the mile post crossing nearest the school and keep on file with the school's emergency response plan.

Proximity to Pressurized Gas, Gasoline, or Sewer Pipeline

Education Code Section 17213 prohibits the acquisition of a school site by a school district if the site "contains one or more pipelines, situated underground or aboveground, which carries hazardous substances, acutely hazardous materials, or hazardous wastes, unless the pipeline is a natural gas line which is used only to supply natural gas to that school or neighborhood." *Public Resources Code* Section 21151.8 uses the same language with reference to approval of environmental impact reports or negative declarations. (See *CCR, Title 5, Section 14010(h).*)

Proximity to High-Pressure Water Pipelines, Reservoirs, Water Storage Tanks

Large, buried pipelines are commonly used for delivery of water. The ground surfaces over these buried pipelines are covered with roadways or green belts or remain undeveloped, and the general public is unaware of their existence. Designs of such pipelines include a wide margin of safety for the operating water pressures within the pipe, but a severe earthquake, damage by an adjacent construction activity, or highly corrosive conditions surrounding soils can contribute to leakage or even failure of the pipe. A sudden rupturing of a high-pressure pipeline can result in the release of a large volume of water at the point of failure and fragments of concrete pipe being hurled throughout the immediate area. Subsequent flooding of the immediate area and along the path of drainage to lower ground levels might occur.

To ensure the protection of students, faculty, and school property if the proposed school site is within 1,500 feet of the easement of an aboveground or underground pipeline that can pose a safety hazard, the school district should obtain the following information from the pipeline owner or operator:

1. The pipeline alignment, size, type of pipe, depth of cover
2. Operating water pressures in pipelines near the proposed school site
3. Estimated volume of water that might be released from the pipeline should a rupture occur on the site
4. Owner's assessment of the structural condition of the pipeline (Periodic reassessment would be appropriate as long as both the pipeline and the school remain operational.)

School districts should determine from topographic maps and in consultation with appropriate local officials the general direction that water released from the pipeline would drain. If site selection must involve such pipelines, districts should seek to (1) avoid or minimize students use of ground surfaces above or in close proximity to the buried pipeline; (2) locate facilities safely or provide safeguards to preclude flooding in the event of a pipeline failure; and (3) prepare and implement emergency response plans for the safety of students and faculty in the event of pipeline failure and flooding.

Proximity to Propane Tanks

A propane tank explosion is known as a boiling liquid evaporative explosion (BLEVE). The school district should address the safety issues of locating a propane tank on or near a school site by answering the following questions:

1. How many tanks are on the site now and how many might there be in the future?
2. How far away would the tanks be stored from the school boundaries?
3. What is the capacity of the tanks?

Once the answers to these questions are established, the district should contact the following state agencies for assistance in evaluating the school's level of safety in the event of explosions and nonexplosive fires:

- State Fire Marshal, (916) 445-8200; Hazardous Materials Division, 916- 445-8477
- Public Utilities Commission, Natural Gas Safety Branch, 415-703-1353
- California Department of Industrial Relations, 510-622-3052
- Local Fire Marshal

Noise

Noise is unwanted or harmful sound; sound that is too loud is distracting or, worse, injurious.

The loudness of sound is measured in decibels. Each decibel level equates to the amount of acoustical energy necessary to produce that level of sound. The decibel scale is exponential. A person's whisper may be measured at 20 decibels. The sound measured at 30 decibels is ten times as loud as the 20 decibel whisper.

The normal range of conversation is between 34 and 66 decibels. Between 70 and 90 decibels, sound is distracting and presents an obstacle to conversation, thinking, or learning. Above 90 decibels, sound can cause permanent hearing loss. The California Department of Transportation considers sound at 50 decibels in the vicinity of schools to be the point at which it will take corrective action for noise generated by freeways. (See *Streets and Highway Code* sections 216 and 216.1.)

If the school district is considering a potential school site near a freeway or other source of noise, it should hire an acoustical engineer to determine the level of sound that location is subjected to and to assist in designing the school should that site be chosen. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) guidelines recommend that in classrooms sounds dissipate in 0.4 seconds or less (and not reverberate) and that background noise not rise above 30 decibels.

Proximity to Major Roadways

The *California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 14010(e)*, states: "The site shall not be adjacent to a road or freeway that any site-related traffic and sound level studies have determined will have safety problems or sound levels which adversely affect the educational program."

Trucks traveling on public roads - including interstate freeways, state highways, and local roads - often contain the same hazardous materials that railcars on railroads contain. Although the quantities of materials being carried on trucks are smaller for a double trailer or tanker in comparison to a railcar, trucks have a greater incidence of accidents, spills, and explosions than do railcars. Moreover, the protective enclosures of a truck are not as strong as are those of a railcar.

When evaluating a site near a major roadway, a school district needs to ask questions similar to those used in evaluating risk from rail lines:

1. What is the distance from the near edge of the roadway right-of-way to the site?
2. How heavy is the traffic flow?
3. How many trucks carrying freight use the roadway during the time students and staff are present?
4. Is a safety or sound barrier necessary?
5. How will students coming across the highway get to school safely?

The California Highway Patrol (CHP) maintains records of traffic flow, traffic accidents, and roadway accidents involving hazardous materials. The CHP Commercial Vehicles Section (916-445-8665) maintains records on traffic flow and accidents involving hazardous materials. The CHP Safety Net Section (916-375-2838) maintains records on all accidents.

County road departments are also a good source for traffic flow and accident information in the local area. The school district may wish to consult the city or county general plan "Noise Element" to help evaluate school sites near major roadways.

Like railroad setbacks, highway setbacks from schools are not established in law. However, experience and practice indicate that distances of at least 2,500 feet are advisable when explosives are carried and at least 1,500 feet when gasoline, diesel, propane, chlorine, oxygen, pesticides, and other combustible or poisonous gases are transported. In the absence of specific, legally defined setback distances for schools, the Department reviews each case individually.

Results of Geological Studies and Soils Analysis

Education Code sections 17212 and 17212.5 require that a geological study and a soils analysis provide an assessment of the potential for earthquake or other geological hazard damage if the prospective school site is located (1) within the boundaries of any Alquist-Priolo special studies zone; or (2) within an area designated as geologically hazardous in the safety element of the local general plan, as provided in *Government Code* Section 65302(g). Because California is seismically active and new faults are being discovered, Department policy is that all proposed school sites have geological studies and soils analyses completed.

Any geological study must be conducted according to provisions contained in *Education Code* Section 17212.5, which states that "no school building shall be constructed, reconstructed, or relocated on the trace of a geological fault along which surface rupture can be reasonably expected to occur within the life of the school building." (See *CCR, Title 5, Section 14011(g)*).

Earthquakes, Liquefaction, and Landslides. Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone maps delineate active fault lines and earthquake fault zone boundaries (previously known as Special Study Zones). For further information on these maps, contact the California Department of Conservation (CDC), *Division of Mines and Geology (DMG)*, at 916 323-9672. These maps are important because the *California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 14010(f)*, specifies that new school sites may not contain an active earthquake fault or fault trace.

School districts may also wish to refer to Seismic Hazard Zone maps, also prepared by CDC, which address the hazards of liquefaction and earthquake induced landslides. For further information, contact *DMG* at 916 323-8569. These maps are important because the *California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 14010(i)*, requires that new school sites not be subject to moderate-to-high liquefaction or landslides.

Copies of either of these types of hazard maps for specific communities may be purchased from BPS Reprographic Services, 149

Second Street, San Francisco, CA 94105; 415-512-6550.

The *California Building Code* contains descriptions of areas in the state that are divided into seismic zones III or IV. These zone designations will affect the structural safety design requirements of the Division of the State Architect. Eventually, these zone designations may be affected if a new code is adopted.

Areas Subject to Flooding and Inundation. The *California Code of Regulations (CCR)*, Title 5, Section 14010(g), requires that new school sites are not to be within an area of flood or dam inundation unless the cost of mitigating the impact is reasonable. The overflowing or failure of nearby rivers, streams, dams, levees, detention/retention basins, flood control channels, water supply aqueducts, irrigation canals, and areas subject to flash flooding and surface runoff is cause for concern. Potential damage may be mitigated by elevating the site above flood levels, creating or improving the levees and drainage infrastructure, and establishing emergency notification and evacuation procedures. As a condition of final site approval, the Department consultant may require a hydrologic study or other means of confirmation that the site will not be subject to flooding or a report of proposed mitigation measures, including estimated costs, or both.

The district should consult the local city or county general plan, responsible flood control agencies, and Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM), which are available from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). These official maps delineate flood hazard areas, such as the 100-year flood plan. Copies of flood maps are available for a nominal fee. Contact the following agency for a copy of the current flood map for a specific community: [Map Service Center \(MSC\)](#) ☐, P.O. Box 1038, Jessup, MD 20794-1038; 800-358-9616.

The Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) publishes maps that provide the best estimate of where water would flow if dams were to experience failure. For further information contact [OES](#) ☐.

See Appendix H for factors to be included in geological hazard reports.

Traffic and School Bus Safety Conditions

The school facility should be situated so that students can enter and depart the buildings and grounds safely. As the number of schools providing child care and extended day classes increases, schools need to ensure the safe flow of buses and other traffic through designated areas of the school grounds. When analyzing potential school sites, the selection team should consider a number of safety factors. The size and shape of the site will affect the traffic flow and the placement of pickup and drop-off points for parents.

When designing pickup and drop-off points, the team should remember that the separation of bus traffic from all other traffic is of paramount importance. Roads servicing the area must be of sufficient paved width when the point at which the bus loads and unloads pupils is off the main thoroughfare. The need for left turn lanes must be determined. Driveway openings must conform to local ordinances or regulations. When analyzing potential school sites for traffic and bus safety, site selection teams should use the evaluation checklist contained in Appendix B. Department consultants can help in evaluating issues of ingress and egress.

Safe Routes to School

The national Walk Our Children to School Day was established in 1997 by the Partnership for a Walkable America, a national alliance of public and private organizations committed to making walking safer. Because the physical environment greatly affects how many residents can and will walk, a Walkability Checklist is provided in Appendix J. It is an excerpt from the [National Safety Council's](#) ☐ checklist. A growing number of communities are implementing measures to make their environments safer for walking.

The Department recommends that the site selection committee walk the area surrounding each proposed school site. If there are unsatisfactory walking routes for a proposed site, the school district should consider another site or work with the city or county to have safe walking routes installed before opening the school.

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funds may be available to help make school access safer for pedestrians and cyclists. Assembly Bill 1475 (Chapter 663, Statutes of 1999) directs FHWA safety funds to a new program entitled Safe Routes to Schools. This program will sunset January 1, 2005.

The California Department of Transportation (DOT) has the responsibility to distribute the Safe Routes to Schools program guidelines. Additional information may be obtained at the following:

[California Department of Transportation](#) ☐
[Caltrans Division of Local Assistance](#) ☐
[California Department of Transportation, Traffic Operations](#) ☐

Safety Studies for Joint-Use Sites

Many school districts plan schools for use in conjunction with park districts, library districts, or other governmental entities. Such cooperative planning is encouraged and may result in recreational and educational areas suitable for use by both students and community members. Special care must be taken to ensure that both the students and the community members can use the site without compromising the safety and security of the school. Particular attention should be given to placing public parking areas and toilets away from classrooms and student play areas.

Choosing Appropriate Sites for Joint-Use Facilities

Frequently, school districts agree to cooperate with a local governmental entity, recreation district, or possibly an adjacent school district when planning a new facility, such as a new library, technology center, performing arts center, swimming pool, gymnasium, multipurpose room, or sports complex. Likewise, a commercial or industrial complex may be jointly planned to include a school.

More efforts at saving dollars and acreage will occur as funding and space become scarce resources. The construction and land costs saved may be significant. In some cases, the costs may increase because of joint use, but the benefits to communities may offset the increased expenses. By providing combined and expanded resources and services within a single facility, the school district fosters enhanced community activities.

Agreements must be crafted between the school districts and other appropriate entities regarding site acquisition, mutually acceptable arrangements for space, staffing, maintenance, materials acquisition, and other matters related to the administration and operation of the joint-use facility. In some cases the shared community facility is also shared between school sites, such as a middle and a high school. In those cases, careful planning must take place about what can and what cannot be shared. In many school districts, more than one facility is used jointly with the community. The fields, theaters, classrooms, and virtually the entire campus become available for joint use. The school is no longer seen as a separate, stand-alone entity.

Examples of Successful Joint-Use or Strategic Alliance Projects in California

Facility	Location
Community Performing Arts Complex	Elk Grove Unified School District, Sacramento City/County Library
Softball Complex	Clovis Unified School District, City of Clovis
Park and Aquatics Center	Roseville Joint Union High School District, City of Roseville
Field Areas	Woodland Joint Unified School District, City of Woodland
Theater and Gymnasiums	Poway Unified School District, Cities of Poway and San Diego
Gymnasium/Fitness Center	Lodi Unified School District, City of Lodi
Technology Center	San Diego County Office of Education
Medical Magnet School/Hospital	Los Angeles Unified School District and Compton Unified School District, King Drew Medical Magnet High School
High School/Community College Campus	San Diego City Unified School District, San Diego City College
On-site School/Business Entity	Santa Rosa Elementary School District, Hewlett Packard
Senior Center/District Office	Carlsbad Unified School District, Carlsbad Senior Center
Multipurpose Room, Kitchen, Platform	Pauma Elementary School District, Non-profit Foundation, HUD
Library/Media Center, Eastlake High	Sweetwater Union High School District, City of Chula Vista

When planning the acquisition of a site for a joint-use facility, the school district must consider many issues as follows:

- Safety and security
- Access, day and night year-round, including access by public transportation
- Location, as a prominent landmark that encourages community use
- Appropriate size, including adequate space for buildings, grounds, and convenient, plentiful parking

Observing California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Requirements

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is located in the *Public Resources Code* Section 21000 et seq.; the CEQA guidelines are found in the *California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15000 et seq.* Enacted in 1970, CEQA was primarily intended for use by public agencies in considering the potential environmental implications of their actions when approving projects. The Act establishes a duty for public agencies, including school districts, to analyze, avoid, mitigate, or where feasible, minimize foreseeable environmental damage.

Lead Agency

The lead agency is the single agency responsible for determining the type of environmental analysis CEQA requires and for approving and carrying out the project. The local educational agency (LEA) (i.e., school district or county office of education) is the lead agency under CEQA for school facility construction projects and land acquisition.

One of the requirements for the final site approval by the Department is the LEA's completion of the CEQA process before site acquisition. Although the Department will review adopted CEQA documents as a part of its site approval process, the Department


is not responsible for ensuring that the LEA properly followed all CEQA requirements or for challenging LEA decisions under CEQA. In most cases the LEA will be required to produce and adopt a negative declaration or an environmental impact report (EIR) for site acquisitions. This CEQA document will also usually encompass the proposed school construction project.

CEQA Documents Needed for Final Department Approval

As a part of the Department's final site approval process, the LEA must submit a copy of the following documents to the School Facilities Planning Division in its site approval package (see Appendix D, SFPD 4.01*):

- LEA-certified final EIR or adopted negative declaration (including the Initial Study/Environmental Checklist)
- Stamped Notice of Completion (NOC) or comment-period closure letter from the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR), State Clearinghouse (SCH)
- Stamped Notice of Determination (NOD) filed with the County Clerk

The Department recommends that the DTSC review and approval process be completed before completing the CEQA process. However, if a Preliminary Endangerment Assessment is required, the LEA should coordinate with DTSC when completing the CEQA and public participation process.

For further information on CEQA, contact the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse , at 1400 Tenth Street, Room 222, Sacramento, CA 95814; mailing address: P.O. Box 3044, Sacramento, CA 95812-3044; telephone: 916-445-0613.

Recognizing Land-Use Issues

Several local, regional, and statewide land-use issues must be considered when evaluating and selecting a school site. Many of these issues are considered a part of the school district's compliance with CEQA.

Cities and counties have the responsibility to adopt local ordinances, policies, plans, and zoning maps regarding allowed and prohibited land uses. General plans may also contain the jurisdiction's preferred approximate location of future school sites. While plan coordination is advisable and notification is required before acquisition, school districts retain the authority to overrule local zoning and general plan land-use designations for schools if specified procedures are followed. (See *Government Code* sections 53094, 65402(a), and 65403 and *Public Resources Code* Section 21151.2.)

The California Coastal Commission is a statewide land-use planning agency that a school district may have to consult when selecting school sites. This agency is responsible for planning and regulating development along California's coastal zone, which may extend up to five miles inland. (See *Public Resources Code* Section 30000 et seq. and *California Code of Regulations, Title 14*, sections 13001-13666.4.)

State law also encourages public agencies, including school districts, to avoid acquiring land that is designated in the general plan and zoned for agricultural use or sites that fall under Williamson Act agricultural preserves and contracts. Should agricultural land acquisition be necessary, however, districts will need to follow the procedures described in *Education Code* Section 39006 (repealed in 1996, replaced in 1998) and *Government Code* Section 51290 et seq.).

Obtaining Site Approval

After deciding on a site or sites, the school district site selection team should proceed as follows:

Schedule a site visit with the Department consultant.

If the site is to be purchased with state funds, Department approval is required before state funds can be apportioned. Provide the Department consultant with maps of three approvable sites for review purposed. The consultant will view the sites and provide the district a written evaluation of the site(s) on SFPD Form 4.0, Initial School Site Evaluation (Appendix C). The consultant will indicate which sites are approvable and will rank the sites relative to each other. The consultant will also provide the district three forms required for final approval of the site:

SFPD 4.01, School Site Approval Procedures (Appendix D)

SFPD 4.02, School Site Report (Appendix E)

SFPD 4.03, School Site Certification (Appendix F)

The Department will issue a Final Site Approval Letter (Appendix G) valid for five years.

If the site is to be purchased with funds other than state funds and the school district will not seek state reimbursement at a future date, the district can voluntarily ask the Department to review the site to confirm its suitability as a school site. The district should follow the same procedures outlined above.

Request that the Department arrange an investigation of the site in accordance with *Education Code* Section 17215 (amended in 1999 by Assembly Bill 747) by the Department of Transportation, Aeronautics Program, Office of Airports, if the site is within two nautical miles of an airport runway.

For further information on requirements for purchasing sites with state funds or with funds other than state funds, see *Education Code* sections 17211 and 17251(a) and (b) and *California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 14012*. Refer to the section *Presence of Toxic and Hazardous Substances*, under *Evaluating Safety Factors*, for what must be done regarding a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment.

Many statutes and regulations other than those of the Department and the State Allocation Board, Office of Public School Construction, apply to the purchase and use of land for a school. School districts should confer with legal counsel or their county office of education superintendent, or both, before acquiring property.

For additional information regarding any changes in issues relating to school site selection, school districts should contact the School Facilities Planning Division (SFPD) at 916-322-2470 or refer to the [SFPD Web site](#).

Appendix

Appendix A Site Selection Process

When a school district is planning to acquire a site for a school, it must take various factors into consideration. The School Facilities Planning Division has developed three work sheets to assist the district in assessing potential sites and making preliminary selections. The work sheets, which are included in this appendix, outline a set of 12 primary criteria governing school site selection and consists of three components: Site Selection Criteria, Site Selection Evaluation, and a Comparative Evaluation of Candidate Sites. These components allow for a comprehensive examination of sites to determine strengths and weaknesses (Site Selection Criteria); a ranking of each site (Site Selection Evaluation); and finally, a comparison of sites by the rating factors and total scoring (Comparative Evaluation of Candidate Sites). The criteria are consistent with the *California Education Code*, *California Code of Regulations, Title 5*, *California Public Resources Code*, and the California Department of Education policies and guidelines.

Although these standards are not the sole criteria to be considered by a school district's site selection committee, the committee may find them useful in evaluating various sites, identifying at least three acceptable sites from which a final choice can be made, and, eventually, explaining the site selection process to interested entities.

Each primary element listed on the Site Selection Criteria work sheet contains secondary measures that provide the committee the opportunity to apply a specific set of guidelines to each potential site and aid in the analysis of a site. The secondary criteria may also be used by the committee to understand better the types of data needed in identifications, selection, and final acquisition of a school site. After considering both primary and secondary standards on the work sheet, the committee should rank the sites in order of acceptability by completing the second and third work sheets.

[Part 1. Site Selection Criteria \(PDF\)](#)

[Part 2. Site Selections Evaluation \(PDF\)](#)

[Part 3. Comparative Evaluation of Candidate Sites \(PDF\)](#)

Appendix B [Evaluation Checklist for School Bus Driveways \(PDF\)](#)

Appendix C [SFPD 4.0 Initial School Site Evaluation \(DOC\)](#)

Appendix D [SFPD 4.01 School Site Approval Procedures \(DOC\)](#)

Appendix E [SFPD 4.02 School Site Report \(DOC\)](#)

Appendix F [SFPD 4.03 School Site Certification \(DOC\)](#)

Appendix H **Factors to Be Included In a Geological and Environmental Hazards Report**

- i. Site Description
 - A. Location of site identified by street name, lot number(s), or other descriptors that are site specific.
 - B. Description of site reconnaissance, including the vegetation (describe type), and previous site usage.
- ii. Geological
 - A. Seismic and Fault Hazard
 1. Whether the site is in Alquist-Priolo zone; whether it is situated on or near a pressure ridge, geological fault, or fault trace that may rupture during the life of the school building; and what the student risk factor is.
 2. Locations and potential for ground shaking of nearby faults or fault traces. Discussion of field inspection and reconnaissance.
 3. Subsurface conditions determined by exploration and literature review.