

# NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

To:  Office of Planning and Research  
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121  
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: Saugus Union School District

24930 Avenue Stanford

Santa Clarita, CA 91355

County Clerk  
County of Los Angeles

12400 Imperial Hwy

Norwalk, CA 90650

Highlands Elementary School Improvements Project

Project Title

27332 Catala Avenue

Project Location - Specific

Santa Clarita

Project Location - City

Los Angeles

Project Location - County

The proposed project will include the following improvements to Modular Buildings A, B, and C, and portable buildings.

- Improvements to Modular Building A include updates to the HVAC units, new interior improvements finishes (flooring and paint), updated countertops, and replacement of the fire alarm system.
- Improvements to Modular Building B include new stud walls, selective ceiling replacement, int door and window frames, updating existing casework countertops, new sinks in proposed Flex Class, new roofing system and HVAC units, interior paint, flooring, updated lighting fixtures, signage, etc. Additional, the sprinkler system will be updated to accommodate new enclosed classrooms, and replacement of the fire alarm system.
- Improvements to Modular Building C include updated wall finishes and countertops, and replacement of the fire alarm system.
- All portable buildings, with the exception of existing portable building No. 10, will receive updated finishes and fire alarm replacement.

The proposed project will also include the replacement of the exterior drinking fountains, accessible signage, and minor renovations at accessible parking stalls.

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project

Saugus Union School District

Name of Public Agency Approving Project

Saugus Union School District

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project

Exempt Status: (check one below)

Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);

Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));

Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));

Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: : § 15301, Class 1, Existing Facilities; §15311, Class 11, Accessory Structures.

Statutory Exemptions. State code number: \_\_\_\_\_

CEQA: California Environmental Quality Act

The proposed updates to Modular Buildings A, B, and , and portable classrooms are exempt from CEQA under Class 1, Existing Facilities (Section 15301). The proposed improvements including updates to the existing HVAC units, interior finishings, countertops, walls and lighting fixtures, fire alarm system, new accessible signage, and renovations to the parking stalls are considered repairs or minor alterations of existing public structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, involving negligible improvements to the campus and no expansion of use beyond existing campus boundaries. The improvements will not alter the basic functions of the facilities and will not increase student capacity. Thus, the proposed project is exempt from CEQA review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301.

The proposed signage and improvements to the parking lots are exempt from CEQA under Class 11, Accessory Structures (Section 15311). The proposed project includes new parking signage and minor renovations at accessible parking stalls . The campus parking lots and ADA parking stalls shall require associated signage to be installed. Thus the proposed new signage and improvements to the existing parking lot and parking stall is exempt from CEQA under Section 15311.

The proposed project was also reviewed for possible exceptions under Section 15300.2 and found that the exceptions do not apply.

See Attachment to Notice of Exemption for further explanation of the evaluation, which is available for review at the District office

Reasons why project is exempt

Kathie Pisano, Facilities Project Manager

(661) 294-5300

Contact Person:

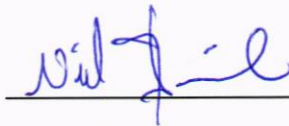
Area Code/Telephone/Extension:

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption findings
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving  Yes  No the project

Date  
Received for  
Filing:

Signature:



Title:

Assistant Superintendent of Business

**Attachment to Notice of Exemption**  
**Highlands Elementary School Improvements Project**  
**SAUGUS UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION**

Highlands Elementary School (ES) is one of 15 elementary schools within the Saugus Union School District (SUSD or District). The District proposes improvements to Modular Buildings A, B and C including finishings to classroom (including portable classrooms); replacement of internal finishing, water fountains and fire alarms, and the installation of new signage and Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) units at the Highlands ES (proposed project). This supplemental information provides justification for the Categorical Exemption pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines under California Code of Regulations, Title 14 § 15301 and 15311.

## **1. EXISTING CONDITIONS**

### **PROJECT LOCATION**

The Highlands ES campus (campus) is at 27332 Catala Avenue (Assessor Parcel Number [APN] 2808-021-901), in the City of Santa Clarita, Los Angeles County (project site). The City of Santa Clarita is surrounded by unincorporated Los Angeles and the community of Castaic to the north, unincorporated Los Angeles to the west and east, the City of Los Angeles and unincorporated Los Angeles to the south. Regional access to the campus is provided via Interstate-5 (I-5) and California State Route 14 (SR-14), approximately 3.6 miles to the west and 4.4 miles to the southeast, respectively.

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

Highlands ES serves students from transitional kindergarten (TK) through sixth-grade, with an enrollment of 561 students as of the 2022-2023 school year (CDE 2023). Highlands ES consist of a central classroom building, one multipurpose building, a family center, modular classroom buildings, four solar powered shade structures, a multipurpose field; two play areas with play structures, a school blacktop with painted athletic courts, and ornamental landscaping.

Vehicular access to the campus is provided by Catala Avenue and Empino Lane via a single driveway to access two vehicle parking lots on campus to the north and south of campus.

### **GENERAL PLAN AND ZONING**

The project site has a zoning and general plan land use designation of Public Institutional (PI). The PI zoning and general plan land use designation provides for civic and governmental offices, public works yards, public or private schools, libraries, day care centers, airports, hospitals and supporting medical facilities, museums, fire stations, police stations, landfills, and prisons. Building height and coverage will be determined by the lead agency for each project, based upon the type and intensity of use (City of Santa Clarita, 2023).

### **SURROUNDING LAND USES**

The project site is surrounded by residential uses with a zoning and General Plan land use designation of urban residential 2 (UR2) to the northwest, west, and south; P/I to the east; and Open Space (OS) to the north (Santa Clarita 2024).

### **DISTRICT**

The Saugus Unified School District provides school services to the City of Santa Clarita, unincorporated-Los Angeles County and the mountain areas to the northeast. The District consists of 15 TK through sixth-grade schools, including

13 elementary schools and two academies. Districtwide enrollment in the 2022-2023 school year was 9,097 students (CDE 2023).

## 2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project includes the following improvements to Modular Buildings A, B, and C, and portable buildings.

- Improvement to Modular Building A includes updates to the HVAC units, new interior improvements finishes (flooring and paint), updated countertops, and replacement of the fire alarm system.
- Improvements to Modular Building B includes new stud walls, selective ceiling replacement, interior door and window frames, updating existing casework countertops, new sinks in proposed Flex Class, new roofing system and HVAC units, interior paint, flooring, updated lighting fixtures, signage, etc. Additionally, the sprinkler system will be updated to accommodate new enclosed classrooms, and replacement of the fire alarm system.
- Improvements to Modular Building C includes updated wall finishes and countertops, and replacement of the fire alarm system.
- All portable buildings, with the exception of existing portable building No. 10, will receive updated finishes and fire alarm replacement.

The proposed project also includes the replacement of the exterior drinking fountains, accessible signage, and minor renovations at accessible parking stalls.

## CONSTRUCTION

All construction equipment and workers will be located within the boundaries of the project site and contractors will adhere to construction noise regulations.

## 3. REASONS THAT THE PROJECT IS EXEMPT

The proposed project is exempt from further environmental review under the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code §§ 21000 et seq.) because it is consistent with Class 1 and Class 11 exemptions.

- » **Class 1, Existing Facilities (CEQA Guidelines § 15301)** consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of use beyond that existing or former use. The key consideration is whether the project involves negligible or no expansion of an existing use.

The proposed updates to Modular Buildings A, B, and C, and portable classrooms are exempt from CEQA under Class 1, Existing Facilities (Section 15301). The proposed improvements including updates to the existing HVAC units, interior finishings, countertops, walls and lighting fixtures, fire alarm system, new accessible signage, and renovations to the parking stalls are considered repairs or minor alterations of existing public structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, involving negligible improvements to the campus and no expansion of use beyond existing campus boundaries. The improvements will not alter the basic functions of the facilities and will not increase student capacity. Thus, the proposed project is exempt from CEQA review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301.

- » **Class 11, Accessory Structures (CEQA Guidelines § 15311)** consists of construction, or placement of minor structures accessory to (appurtenant to) existing commercial, industrial, or institutional facilities, including, but not limited to, (a) on-premise signs and (b) small parking lots.



The proposed signage and improvements to the parking lots are exempt from CEQA under Class 11, Accessory Structures (Section 15311). The proposed project includes new parking signage and minor renovations at accessible parking stalls. The campus parking lots and ADA parking stalls shall require associated signage to be installed. Thus the proposed new signage and improvements to the existing parking lot and parking stall are exempt from CEQA under Section 15311.

#### 4. REVIEW OF EXCEPTIONS TO THE CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION

The proposed project has been reviewed under CEQA Guidelines § 15300.2 - Exceptions, for any characteristics or circumstances that might invalidate findings that the proposed project is exempt from CEQA. Each exception is listed below followed by an assessment of whether that exception applies to the proposed project.

- (a) Location.** Classes 3,4,5,6 and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project would be located—a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply all instances, except where the project may impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.

The project site is entirely within the Highlands ES campus, which is surrounded by residential properties and Saugus High School to the east. The campus has classroom buildings, asphalt hardcourts and parking lots, concrete driveways and walkways, playgrounds, and ornamental landscaping.

According to the Critical Habitat for Endanger Species mapper, there are no critical habitats identified on campus or in the vicinity of campus (FWS 2022). Additionally, due to the school's developed nature, it does not contain any sensitive biological species or habitat. No mapped wetlands exist on campus or in the vicinity of campus (FWS 2024). Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

- (b) Cumulative Impacts.** All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.

The proposed improvements are the only known and planned improvements to the campus during the planned construction. There are no other known successive projects—planned, approved, or under construction—of the same type at and/or near the project site that when combined with the proposed project will result in a cumulative environmental impact. This exception does not apply to the proposed project.

- (c) Significant Effects.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

There are no unusual circumstances on or next to the school that will cause significant environmental impacts. The existing school is in operation, and no unusual circumstances are anticipated with the project construction. The nearest sensitive receptors to noise and hazardous air emissions are residential homes to the north, west and south the of the campus. Project construction and operation will, however, not cause any unusual circumstances resulting in significant environmental impacts. The construction manager will execute construction activities per current, local, state, and federal laws, regulations, construction Best Management Practices, District standards, and guidelines. The significant effects exception does not apply to the proposed project.

- (d) Scenic Highways.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway.

There are no designated state scenic highways near the project site. According to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) California Scenic Highway Mapping System, the closest officially designated state scenic highway is State Route 2, approximately 22.5 miles to the southeast of the project site. Additionally, Interstates 5 (I-5) is eligible for designation; however, it is located approximately 3.6 miles west of the project site (Caltrans 2024). Construction and operation of the proposed project will be completely within the project; thus, the proposed project will not affect scenic resources along any scenic highways. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

**(e) Hazardous Waste Sites.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Government Code § 65962.5.

California Government Code Section 65962.5 requires the compiling of lists of the following types of hazardous materials sites: hazardous waste facilities subject to corrective action; hazardous waste discharges for which the State Water Quality Control Board has issued certain types of orders; public drinking water wells containing detectable levels of organic contaminants; underground storage tanks with reported unauthorized releases; and solid waste disposal facilities from which hazardous waste has migrated.

Five environmental databases were searched for hazardous materials sites on the site and within a quarter mile radius:

- » EnviroStor. Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC 2024)
- » GeoTracker. State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB 2024)
- » EJScreen. US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA 2024a)
- » EnviroMapper. US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA 2024b)
- » Solid Waste Information System. California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle 2024)

**Table 1 Hazardous Waste Sites within 0.25 miles**

Site Address	Database	Identifier	Cleanup Status	Proximity to Site
22101 Empino Lane, Santa Clarita, CA (CAC002996180)	EnviroMapper	Asbestos	Inactive (expired: 4/12/2019)	0.05 miles west
22113 Empino Lane, Santa Clarita, CA (CAC002963787)	EnviroMapper	N/a	Inactive (expired: 8/28/2018)	0.06 miles west
27251 Caheras Street, Santa Clarita, CA (CAC003021402)	EnviroMapper	N/a	Inactive (expired: 9/24/2019)	0.08 miles southwest
22112 Caheras Street, Saugus, CA (CAC003025393)	EnviroMapper	Asbestos	Inactive (expired: 10/22/2019)	0.10 miles southwest
27152 Barada Avenue, Santa Clarity, CA (CAC003011833)	EnviroMapper	Asbestos	Inactive (expired: 7/24/2019)	0.19 miles south
27424 Onlee Avenue, Santa Clarita, CA (CAC002966825)	EnviroMapper	Asbestos	Inactive (expired: 9/14/2018)	0.20 miles north
22323 Canones Circle, Santa Clarity, CA (CAC003014628)	EnviroMapper	Asbestos	Inactive (expired: 8/9/2019)	0.22 miles southwest
22006 Mecate Drive, Santa Clarita, CA (CAC003020028)	EnviroMapper	Asbestos	Inactive (expired: 9/16/2019)	0.23 miles southeast

Source: USEPA 2024b

No hazardous materials sites were identified at Highlands ES. According to the USEPA EnviroMapper, there are a total of eight cleanup sites within a quarter mile from the project site (see Table 1, Hazardous Waste Sites within 0.25 miles, above). All of the sites were determined to contain asbestos or undisclosed hazardous waste and were disposed of according to state and federal laws and regulations. The eight cleanup sites are inactive, and the potential for the

contaminants of concern to impact the proposed project is unlikely. The project site has not been identified as a hazardous materials site pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5, and therefore, the proposed project will not create a hazard to the public. Therefore, the project will not create a hazard to the public. This exception does not apply to the proposed project.

- (f) **Historical Resources.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of historical resources. Under Public Resource Code § 21084.1, a historical resource is a resource listed in or determined to be eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. Additionally, historical resources included in a local register of historical resources are presumed to be historically or culturally significant, and a lead agency can determine whether the resource may be an historical resource.

Highlands ES is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a California Historical Landmark, California Point of Historical Interest nor is a listed historic resource within a 0.25-mile radius of the project site (NPS 2024; OHP 2024). Neither the school nor any adjoining property are listed as historic resources or potential historic resources by the City of Santa Clara (Santa Clara 2010). No historical resources have been identified on-site during preparation of this Notice of Exemption, and the historical sites exception does not apply to the proposed project.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The proposed project at Highlands ES is exempt from CEQA review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 and 15311. As substantiated in this document, the proposed project will not meet conditions specified in § 15300.2, Exceptions, of the CEQA Guidelines, and the proposed project is categorically exempt under Class 1 and 11.

## 6. REFERENCES

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- California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle). 2024, March 28 (accessed). SWIS Facticity/Site Search. <https://www2.calrecycle.ca.gov/SolidWaste/Site/Search>
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2024, March 27 (accessed). California Highway System. <https://caltrans.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=465dfd3d807c46cc8e8057116f1aaca>
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- National Park Service (NPS). 2024, March 28 (accessed). National Register of Historic Places. <https://www.nps.gov/maps/full.html?mapId=7ad17cc9-b808-4ff8-a2f9-a99909164466>
- Office of Historic Preservation (OHP). 2024a, March 28 (accessed). California Historical Resources. <https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/ListedResources/?view=county&criteria=19>
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- US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). 2024a, March 28 (accessed). EJSCREEN.  
<https://ejscreen.epa.gov/mapper/>.
- US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). 2024b, March 28 (accessed). EnviroMapper for EnviroFacts.  
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<https://fws.maps.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=9d8de5e265ad4fe09893cf75b8dbfb77>
- . 2024, March 28 (accessed). National Wetlands Inventory – Wetlands Mapper.  
<https://www.fws.gov/wetlands/data/mapper.HTML>.