

## Facility bills seek to make school projects more energy efficient, better planned

By Allen Young

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Responding to concerns that schools are falling behind California's strides in technology and infrastructure, state Sen. Alan Lowenthal has introduced legislation to provide more energy-efficient school facilities and to have them conform with the state's other plans for public construction.

SB 128 would let districts tap available state school modernization funds for energy efficient materials such as solar panels or sun roofs. The bill would also allow districts to access a largely untapped pot of state construction funds for career technical education projects.

SB 132 would require the State Allocation Board and districts to ensure that construction plans for new and existing school sites conform to the state's planning priorities around infill development and pollution reduction.

"This is where the state is moving and we want schools to be a major part of it," said Lowenthal, D-Long Beach.

Over 40 years ago, the governor's Office of Planning and Research created the State Environmental Goals and Policy Report, which is released every four years and articulates the state's plan for land use, population distribution, and conservationism.

Since then, various government entities that do site planning for infrastructure have been required to reflect those priorities in their plan – but schools have not been included.

"School site (planning) has not been part of all these major initiatives," explained Lowenthal. "It has been seen as an independent animal. All we want to do is to begin to link the site planning of schools to state priorities, and to have them begin to work together."

Under SB 132, the State Allocation Board would rewrite regulations to ensure that school site planning is aligned with state planning priorities.

Also, the California Department of Education would have to incorporate the state's planning objectives into any advice given to districts on site acquisition or school construction.

The senator's other school facility bill, SB 128, would allow districts to use available modernization funding to install green technology materials, a practice that is currently prohibited by law.

Additionally, SB 128 would open a rarely-accessed construction funding pot – the High Performance Schools Program – for facilities built for career technical education.

Proposition 1D, approved by voters in 2006, set aside \$100 million in general obligation bonds for the High Performance Schools Program, which provides districts with supplemental funding to cover energy-efficient materials.

Unfortunately, only about a quarter of the funds have gone out to schools. Observers have noted that the program has been seldom accessed because eligibility criteria is limiting. Districts have also complained that the funds don't fully cover the cost of implementation.

But given the popularity of career tech, Lowenthal hopes that the remaining \$75 million in the high performance grants will be rapidly snatched up.

Historically, proposals to open one pot of construction funding for another purpose have raised legal issues, the argument being that voters approved school construction bonds for one specific activity and not something different. For example, school modernization funds cannot be used to build new schools.

But according to the Lowenthal's office, Proposition 1D allows enough flexibility to let career tech facilities access the high performance funds.