

OPSC rolls out new 'outreach' team

By Allen Young

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In an effort to bring a more service orientation to its role overseeing facility projects, the Office of Public School Construction unveiled this month a new five-person team whose mission is to reach out to districts and explain what funding programs they may qualify for.

Based on a variety of factors including pupil enrollment, local bond results and whether the district has recently accessed state facility funds, the team has been tasked with making cold-calls statewide just to make sure administrators understand the options.

"The new team will provide additional customer service to districts," said Rebecca Kirk, spokeswoman for the Office of Public School Construction.

Kirk said the team is the newest effort of a greater internal restructuring plan and the idea followed suggestions from stakeholders that the agency expand its communication to the field.

"We recognize the challenges of the current economy and that districts are exploring different ways of accessing funds. This is one thing we identified that we could do to assist districts in accessing facilities funding," she said.

As an example, said Kirk, the outreach team could help a low income district comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act by helping operators see whether they qualify for the Financial Hardship Program, which authorizes the state to pay for up to 100 percent of the project's cost.

The team also plans to educate new facility managers about the state's complex funding process and inform longtime operators about changes to current programs.

Cathy Allen, assistant superintendent for facilities and maintenance services at Western Placer Unified, said she liked the idea behind the effort, but also noted that the state's depleted new school construction account may limit a district's ability to access new funds.

"Right now it won't help them very much at all since there's no money going out the door, but I think school districts should certainly be aware of what their eligibility is and what they qualify for," said Allen, who is also chair of the Coalition for Adequate School Housing, a school facility association.