

OPSC to strictly enforce 24 hour submission rule

By Allen Young

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The Office of Public School Construction has begun rigidly enforcing a policy of returning school construction funding applications to districts after 24 hours if any documents are missing.

The directive coming from OPSC's parent agency, the Department of General Services, ends a longstanding practice of giving districts a slightly longer grace period to turn in absent documents once they have submitted an application.

"Now we're going to be enforcing the policy more strictly to ensure consistency and equitable application processing, and reduce overall processing times," said Rebecca Kirk, spokeswoman for the OPSC.

As with any change in practice, expectations are that the OPSC will be met with some resistance from school districts that have grown accustomed to having leeway on submission deadlines. But others note that it is incumbent on facility operators to ensure their packages are complete.

"We need to follow the rules just like anybody else," said Bob Nicholson, a school facility consultant from Eric Hall and Associates LLC. "Let's give them (OPSC) what they need, or at least what they perceive they need, and let's make it work because otherwise we're only hurting our client."

In addition to minimizing processing times, OPSC officials said they want to stop facility operators from prematurely turning in plans in order to reserve a spot in the processing line, a practice that has also been criticized by other construction interests.

Officials said that the new directive is not a part of the OPSC's "program review," which is a planned internal restructuring of the agency that is now under development. That plan will be brought to the State Allocation Board in September.

Rather, the decision to enforce the 24 hour rule aligns with other streamlining efforts made in recent months by both the OPSC and the Division of the State Architect.

In May, the DSA reported that 35 percent of school construction plans awaiting review had been rendered incomplete and returned to local districts.

Efforts to reduce "bin time," or the period that submitted plans wait to begin the review process, have resulted in DSA's intake teams scrutinizing and returning incomplete plans at higher rates, some private architects have noted.

According to state officials, private architects take an average of 47 days to re-submit plans to DSA after they are returned.