

## State officials prepare for overhaul of school facilities oversight

By Allen Young

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In an attempt to streamline oversight of school construction and extend better customer service, plans are underway to significantly restructure both the Office of Public School Construction and the Division of the State Architect, officials told the *Cabinet Report* Tuesday.

The move follows complaints from local districts that the state's funding process has become unnecessarily fragmented and bureaucratic, said Stephen Amos, chief deputy director for the DGS.

"I'm hoping that what we create basically is a road map of collaboration – a plan that is sustainable from administration to administration, that articulates short term, midterm, and long term solutions that everyone can be accountable for," said Amos in an interview.

Amos said he hopes to find ways to speed up processing times, allow customers to receive updates on their projects at any given interval and also address problems early in the process so that districts would stop being denied approval or penalized in the final stages of processing.

The plan will be developed by a committee of stakeholders. Amos said he expected to present a draft plan to the State Allocation Board in September and to make the plan final by October 1.

The plan is expected to feature changes that can be completed internally, but may also include steps that require SAB or legislative approval.

Amos said the plan may add, redirect, or eliminate personnel from the OPSC. While cost savings are an objective, the primary goal is customer satisfaction, he said.

Legislators on the SAB are getting briefed this week on how the department wants to proceed, which is to convene a committee of interest groups.

The working group will be split between 11 state officials and labor and school facility consultants; and 11 "customers" or district representatives.

The stakeholder portion will include representatives from the Coalition of Adequate School Housing, legislative staffers, and officials from the Department of Finance, state Department of Education, Fiscal Crisis and Management Team, DSA, and OPSC.

The school district representatives will include individuals who are located in the legislative districts of the six lawmakers sitting on the State Allocation Board.

Those six individuals have each been assigned a subject area that corresponds with a step in the school construction process. For example, one district representative will be assigned to plan review, while another will be assigned to design, and yet another to funding. The six individuals will chair subgroups to focus on their assigned task.

After the six district representatives have drawn a proposal, two additional work groups will be assembled, one for audits and one for performance metrics.

In January, all 12 divisions of DGS were directed to submit cost reduction plans for up to 15 percent of their program costs in preparation for state budget cuts. Plans were circulated within DGS to reduce OPSC personnel and streamline operations. The plans never went public.

In March and April, the DSA and OPSC held four town hall meetings for school facility operators to provide feedback and concerns about the agencies. The meetings were held in Oroville, Merced, Orange, and Riverside.

The genesis for the forthcoming plan came out of ideas generated by both the internal memos and the complaints heard by field operators. The ideas may or may not be included in the final plan, said Amos.