

# Los Angeles Unified School District

## Office of Environmental Health and Safety

ANDRES E. CHAIT  
Acting Superintendent of Schools

CARLOS A. TORRES  
Director, Environmental Health and Safety

JENNIFER FLORES  
Deputy Director, Environmental Health and Safety

### NOTICE OF EXEMPTION


THIS NOTICE WAS POSTED

ON March 31 2026

UNTIL April 30 2026

REGISTRAR – RECORDER/COUNTY CLERK

2026 070407



FILED  
Mar 31 2026

Dean C. Logan, Registrar – Recorder/County Clerk

Electronically signed by LORENA VALDEZ

**To:** County Clerk and Registrar-Recorder  
County of Los Angeles  
12400 Imperial Highway  
Norwalk, CA 90650

**From:** LAUSD OEHS  
333 S. Beaudry Avenue  
21<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90017

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**Project Title:**

Castelar Street Early Education Center (EEC) – Outdoor Classroom

**Project Location – Specific:**

The Castelar Early Education Center Outdoor Classroom (Project) is located at 840 Yale Street in the Chinatown neighborhood in the City of Los Angeles. It is bound by College Street to the north, Hill Street to the east, Alpine Street to the south, and Yale Street to the west. The Project will occur on approximately 6,400 square feet portion of Castelar Street Elementary School, which includes Castelar Early Education Center (Castelar EEC or Campus). The Campus is located in an urbanized community primarily consisting of residential, commercial, medical, and recreational uses.

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**Project Location – City:**

Los Angeles

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**Project Location – County:**

Los Angeles

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**Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project:**

The proposed project (Project) will construct an outdoor classroom covering approximately 6,400 square feet by dividing the existing EEC playground area into distinct activity areas. The scope of work includes replacing playground matting; installing new trees and planting area with mulch; providing approximately 4,400 square feet of new solar reflective coating over existing asphalt; and installing raised planter beds, a tricycle path, several toddler play sets, a music play area, storage, and various site furnishings. The Board of Education approved the Project's budget of \$697,867 on November 18, 2025.

Minor work will include improvements to ensure compliance with local, state, and federal requirements including those of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), Division of State Architect (DSA), and Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC).

The Project will establish nurturing, nature-based outdoor spaces that support whole-child development and learning, as well as address early education facilities needs that are necessary to improve student health,

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333 South Beaudry Avenue, 21<sup>st</sup> Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90017 • Telephone (213) 241-3199

*Our Mission: To ensure a safe and healthy environment for students to learn, teachers to teach, and employees to work.*

*Our Vision: To eliminate all environmental health and safety risks at schools.*

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safety, and educational quality. The Project will be implemented per all applicable local and State regulations, as well as all District Standards and Specifications, such as those provided in LA Unified's Program Environmental Impact Report for the School Upgrade Program (Program EIR and Subsequent PEIR).<sup>1</sup> The Project will not cause an increase in student capacity or enrollment and would not result in an increase in the intensity of use. The beneficiaries of the Project include students and staff at each of the respective schools and the community at large who may request access to the facilities and grounds of each Campus pursuant to the Civic Center Act (CA Ed. Code Sections 38130 - 38139).

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**Name of Public Agency Approving Project:**

Los Angeles Unified School District

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**Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project:**

Los Angeles Unified School District

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**Exempt Status: (check one below)**

- Ministerial [Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 21080(b)(1); CEQA Guidelines Section 15268<sup>2</sup>]:
- Declared Emergency [PRC Section 21080(b)(3); CEQA Guidelines Section 15269(a)]:
- Emergency Project [PRC Section 21080(b)(4); CEQA Guidelines Section 15269(b)(c)]:
- Categorical Exemption (PRC Section 21084; CEQA Guidelines Sections 15300 -15333):
- *CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 – Existing Facilities*
  - *CEQA Guidelines Section 15304 – Minor Alterations to Land*
- Statutory Exemption:

**Reasons why project is exempt:**

Section 15301 Existing Facilities

Class 1 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 at the time of the lead agency's determination.

The Project will construct an outdoor classroom covering approximately 6,400 square feet by dividing the existing playground area into distinct activity areas. The scope of work includes replacing playground matting; installing new trees and new planting area with mulch; providing approximately 4,400 square feet of new solar reflective coating over existing asphalt; and installing raised planter beds, a tricycle path, several toddler play sets, a music play area, storage, and various site furnishings. All Project components will involve minor alterations and will occur within areas occupied by existing facilities at the Project site. The Project components will not present a new or expanded use of the Project site. Therefore, the Project fulfills the requirements of CEQA Guidelines Section 15301.

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<sup>1</sup>LAUSD OEHS, "School Upgrade Program Final Subsequent Program Environmental Impact Report (SPEIR)," <https://www.lausd.org/ceqa>, adopted by the Board of Education on December 12, 2023

<sup>2</sup> CEQA Guidelines can be found at California Code of Regulations Title 14, Chapter 3, Section 15000 – Section 15387

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### Section 15304 – Minor Alterations to Land

Class 4 consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve the removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry and agricultural purposes.

The Project will construct an outdoor classroom covering approximately 6,400 square feet by dividing the existing playground area into distinct activity areas. The scope of work includes replacing playground matting; installing new trees and new planting area with mulch; providing approximately 4,400 square feet of new solar reflective coating over existing asphalt; and installing raised planter beds, a tricycle path, several toddler play sets, a music play area, storage, and various site furnishings. The removal of trees is not anticipated as part of the proposed scope of work. Therefore, the Project fulfills the requirements of CEQA Guidelines Section 15304.

### Section 15300.2 – Exceptions

Section 15300.2 of the CEQA Guidelines, Exceptions, provides conditions under which categorical exemptions are inapplicable. Review of the Project indicates that they would not violate any of the exceptions, as described below.

1. *The projects would occur in certain specified sensitive environments or locations;*

The Project site is a fully developed Campus within Chinatown, an urbanized neighborhood in the City of Los Angeles.<sup>3</sup> The Project site is not designated as a biologically sensitive location. The nearest significant ecological area (SEA) is the Griffith Park SEA located approximately 4.3 miles east of the Project site.<sup>4,5</sup> The nearest threatened or endangered species is the Coastal California gnatcatcher located approximately 8.3 miles east of the Project site at Montebello. As such, the Project will not affect sensitive environments or locations.

2. *Cumulative impacts would be considerable because successive projects of the same type would occur at the same place over time;*

The Campus is an active school site and there will likely be ongoing maintenance activities and minor Project to keep them operational. There are currently no known successive projects of the same type or scale planned for the Campus. As the Project would not result in any lasting impacts once construction of the Project is complete, the Project would not contribute to cumulative impacts when considered with expected successive projects. Therefore, no cumulative impacts will result from the Project and successive projects of the same type and at the same place over time.

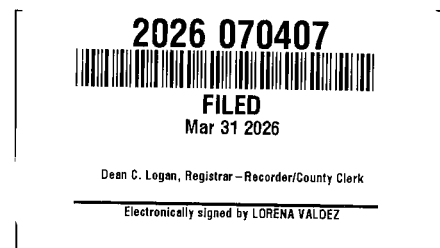
3. *There is a reasonable possibility that the activity would have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.*

There are no known unusual circumstances that would have a significant effect on the environment. The upgrades associated with the Project are comparable to other modernizations and

<sup>3</sup> Southern California Association of Governments, HELPR 3.0 <https://rdp.scag.ca.gov/helpr/>, accessed March 2026.

<sup>4</sup> United States Fish and Wildlife Service Critical Habitat Portal, <https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/report/table/critical-habitat.html>, accessed March 2026.

<sup>5</sup> Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning, [http://gis.planning.lacounty.gov/GIS-NET3\\_Public/Viewer.html](http://gis.planning.lacounty.gov/GIS-NET3_Public/Viewer.html), accessed March 2026.



improvements that are being completed throughout the District under the School Upgrade Program. The removal of trees is not anticipated as part of the proposed scope of work. However, should the Project be altered to include the removal of trees, LA Unified's Office of Environmental Health & Safety (OEHS) must be notified immediately. District policy requires consultation with an arborist to determine if the trees are a protected native species. Additionally, written approval from the school principal will be required before any trees can be removed. If tree removal is scheduled to occur between February 1 and August 31, a nesting bird survey would be performed prior to removal activities, per standard condition (SC) of approval SC-BIO-3 of the Standard Conditions of Approval for District Construction, Upgrade, and Improvements Projects.<sup>6</sup>

The Project will include minor ground-disturbing activities. These activities are not considered unusual circumstances for the classes of projects under which an exemption is claimed. All Project-related ground disturbing activities would comply with SC-AQ-1, SC-AQ-2, SC-AQ-3, and SC-AQ-4. Since the Project involves the removal of pavement, soil sampling and testing has or will be conducted and a determination memorandum will be created for the Campus prior to demolition and removal of the paving materials. If justified by the determination memorandum, excavated soils would only be reused onsite if they are placed beneath paved areas. If construction or earthmoving activities require import or export of soils and materials, OEHS must be notified to provide oversight to ensure that these activities are conducted in compliance with the requirements of District Specification 01 4524, relevant provisions of South Coast Air Quality Management District Rule 1466, and other applicable environmental agency rules and requirements.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, as set forth in SC-CUL-7, SC-CUL-9, SC-CUL-10, and SC-CUL-11 of the Standard Conditions of Approval for District Construction, Upgrade, and Improvements Projects, and in District protocols, construction activities must be stopped immediately and OEHS notified upon discovery of subsurface features, such as buried resources (i.e., paleontological resources, archaeological resources), tanks or seepage pits, or stained/odoriferous soils.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, any construction and demolition waste shall be recycled to the maximum extent feasible per SC-USS-1.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the Project will not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

4. *The project 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;*

The closest designated state scenic highway is the Angeles Crest Scenic Highway, a 55-mile portion of State Route 2 (SR-2) which is located approximately 11.6 miles north of Castelar EEC.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the Project will not result in damage to scenic resources or similar resources within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway.

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<sup>6</sup> LAUSD OEHS, "Standard Conditions of Approval for District Construction, Upgrade, and Improvements Projects," available at [https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/domain/135/ceqa/2023\\_Standard\\_Conditions\\_UPDATE\\_Final.pdf](https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/domain/135/ceqa/2023_Standard_Conditions_UPDATE_Final.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> LAUSD OEHS, "Section 01 4524 Environmental Import/Export Materials Testing", [http://www.laschools.org/documents/file?file\\_id=219798234&show\\_all\\_versions\\_p=t](http://www.laschools.org/documents/file?file_id=219798234&show_all_versions_p=t)

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning, [https://gis.planning.lacounty.gov/GIS-NET3\\_Public/Viewer.html](https://gis.planning.lacounty.gov/GIS-NET3_Public/Viewer.html), accessed March 2026.



5. *The project is located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code; or*

The Project site is not located on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the Project will have no impacts related to being located on a hazardous waste site.

6. *The project may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historic resource.*

Castelar EEC opened in 1976 and is over 45 years old, meeting the District's threshold for review as a potential historic resource and requiring evaluation for historic eligibility. It was determined to be ineligible as a historic resource by LA Unified's Historic Preservation Specialist and Coordinator. Therefore, the Project will not cause substantial adverse changes in the significance of a historic resource.

Prepared By:

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Signed by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'C. Torres', written over a horizontal line.

Carlos A. Torres,  
CEQA Officer of the Los Angeles Unified School District

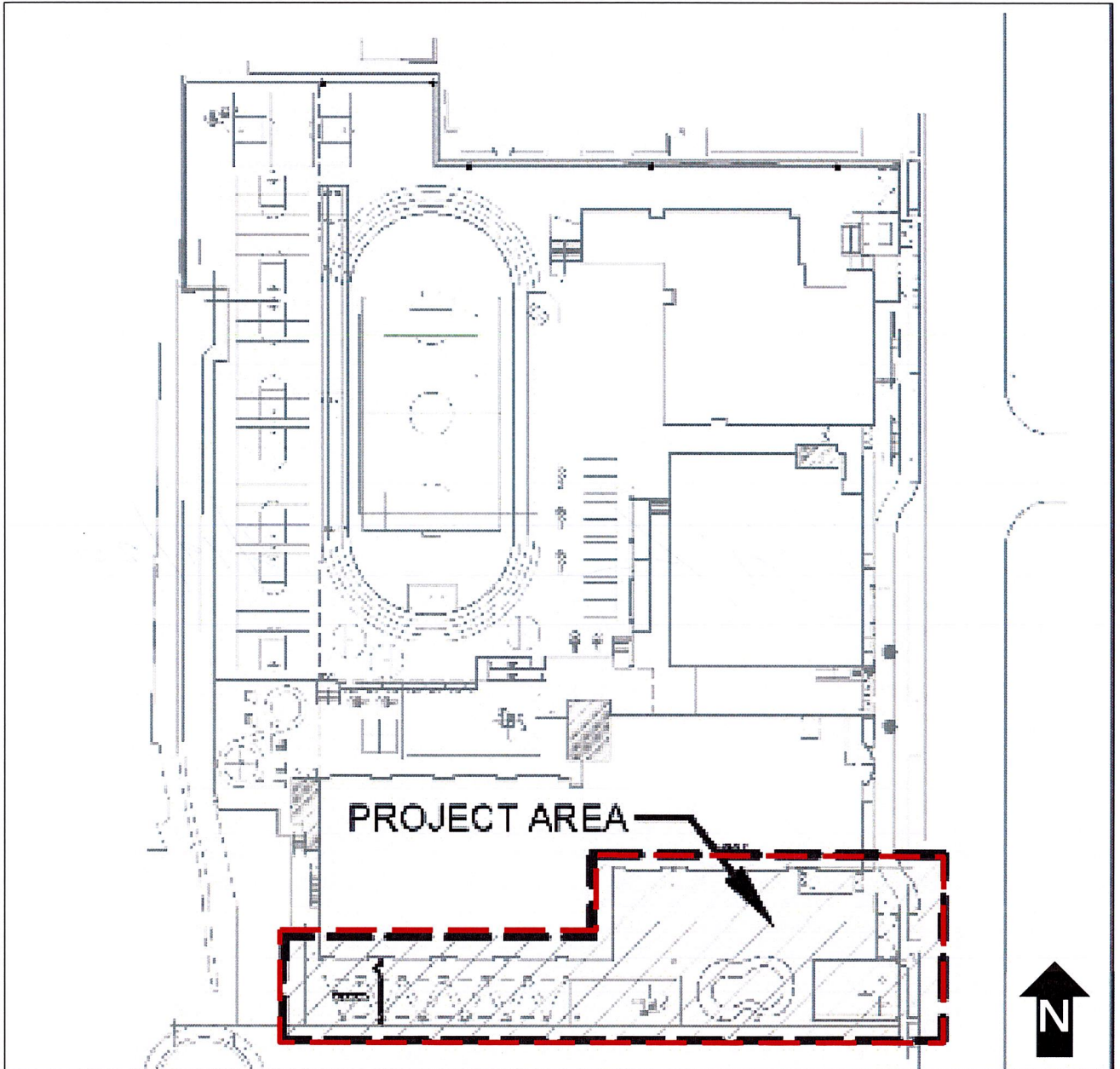
Date:

A handwritten date '3/19/26' in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Attachment: Exhibit A – Site Plan

<sup>11</sup> California Department of Toxic Substances Control. DTSC Databases. Available at: <https://dtsc.ca.gov/dtscs-cortese-list/> Accessed March 2026

EXHIBIT A – CASTELAR EEC SITE PLAN (not to scale)



 PROJECT SITE