

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

To: ☒ Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: Saugus Union School District
24930 Avenue Stanford
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

☒ County Clerk
County of Los Angeles

12400 Imperial Hwy

Norwalk, CA 90650

Highlands Elementary School Improvements Project
Project Title

27332 Catala Avenue
Project Location - Specific

Santa Clarita
Project Location – City

Los Angeles
Project Location – County

The proposed project includes improvements to the existing field on the northeastern portion of the campus. The existing grass field would be replaced with turf grass, and a new 10-foot-wide, concrete walking track would be constructed around the field and connect to the existing play courts at the southern edge of the field. Portions of the western edge of the field, adjacent to the playground and lunch shelter, would be converted to a native planting area. In addition, a new irrigation system would be installed on the field.

The proposed project would include the installation of a new fabric shade structure above the existing playground in the northern portion of the campus. Asphalt surfacing around the playground would be removed and replaced; the existing tetherball posts and footings would also be replaced. Asphalt west of the playground would also be replaced, new swing play equipment would be added, and play markings on the asphalt would be updated.

Asphalt at the play courts in the center of the campus would be removed and replaced, and existing ramps to classroom buildings would be improved. New striping and a replacement ball wall would be added to the play courts. Existing storage units would be temporarily relocated during construction activities and returned to their original location upon completion. The asphalt at the northwestern and southwestern parking lots would also be replaced.

In the southern portion of the campus, concrete paving would be removed and replaced, with the addition of new play markings, a new chain-link cage area for play equipment, and improvements to the existing ramps to classroom buildings. Existing sod in this area would also be replaced. Additionally, concrete would be removed and replaced and drainage improvements made in two areas to the south and east of the administration and classroom building (Building B).

Construction of the proposed project would be completed in two phases. The construction of the new walking track, replacement of the existing field, and installation of the new irrigation system would be completed between June and July 2026. The replacement of asphalt on the play courts and parking lots and addition of the new shade structure would be completed between June and July 2027.

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project

Saugus Union School District
Name of Public Agency Approving Project

Saugus Union School District
Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project

Exempt Status: (check one below)

☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);☐ Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));☐ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));☒ Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: Class 1, Existing Facilities, 14 CCR § 15301; Class 11, Accessory Structures, 14 CCR § 15311; Class 14, Minor Additions to Schools, 14 CCR § 15314.☐ Statutory Exemptions. State code number: _____

The proposed project is categorically exempt under Class 1, Existing Facilities (Section 15301). The proposed project consists of minor alterations, maintenance, and repairs to an operational public facility, with no expansion of its existing use. Specific improvements—including field upgrades, asphalt and concrete replacement, a new shade structure, updated play equipment, drainage features, and hardscape striping—will occur within the existing campus and will not alter the campus boundaries. These proposed upgrades to the campus will serve the existing student population and staff without increasing enrollment or intensifying campus use. Therefore, the proposed project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15301.

The proposed project is categorically exempt from CEQA under Class 11, Accessory Structures (Section 15311), because it includes resurfacing of the northwestern and southwestern parking lots on the campus. The existing northwestern parking lot has a total of 30 parking stalls, and the existing southwestern parking lot has a total of 32 parking stalls. The proposed project will not change the number of parking stalls at either parking lot. The improvements would be within previously developed areas of the campus and would not expand the footprint or intensity of use. Therefore, the proposed project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15311.

The proposed project is categorically exempt from CEQA under Class 14, Minor Additions to Schools (Section 15314), because the proposed project would include minor additions and improvements to the existing school campus and would not result in the construction of any new classrooms. As such, the proposed project would not increase student capacity on the campus by 25 percent or 10 new classrooms. The proposed project includes construction of a walking track, replacement of the existing field with turf and installation of irrigation, installation of a shade structure, replacement of asphalt and concrete surfaces, and upgrades to playground and recreational facilities, which would take place entirely within the developed Highlands ES campus. The proposed project would not alter or expand the existing school use of the campus, would not increase student capacity or the number of classrooms, and would only result in minor improvements to the existing campus. No off-campus improvements would occur. Therefore, the project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15314.

The proposed project was also reviewed for possible exceptions under Section 15300.2, and it was found that the exceptions do not apply.

Reasons why project is exempt

Kathie Pisano, Director of Facilities

(661) 294-5300

Contact Person:

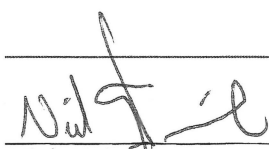
Area Code/Telephone/Extension:

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption findings
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project ☒ Yes ☐ No

Date
Received for
Filing:

Signature:


Nick Heinen

Title: Assistant Superintendent of Business

Attachment to Notice of Exemption
Highlands Elementary School Improvements Project
Saugus Union School District
SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Saugus Union School District (SUSD or District) proposes improvements to the Highlands Elementary School (ES) campus with the construction of a new walking track, replacement of the existing field, installation of a new irrigation system, replacement of asphalt on the play courts, replacement asphalt in the parking lots, and addition of a new shade structure (proposed project). This supplemental information provides justification for the Categorical Exemptions pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines under California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Sections 15301, 15311, and 15314. The District is the lead agency for the proposed project in accordance with the CEQA Guidelines Section 15051(c).

1. EXISTING CONDITIONS

1.1 Project Location

The Highlands ES campus is at 27332 Catala Avenue in the City of Santa Clarita (Assessor's Parcel Number 2808-021-901), in Los Angeles County (project site) (see Figure 1, *Project Location*).

The campus is bounded by an undeveloped hillside to the north; residential uses to the northwest, west, and south; and Saugus High School to the east (see Figure 2, *Aerial Photograph*). Regional access to the campus is provided by Interstate (I-) 5 approximately 3.5 miles west of the campus, and State Route (SR-) 14, approximately 5.0 miles east of the campus. Vehicular access to the campus is provided via Catala Avenue and Empino Lane to the west.

1.2 Local Setting

Surrounding land uses primarily consist of single-family homes to the north, west, and south and Saugus High School to the east of the campus.

1.3 Existing Land Use and Zoning

The Highlands ES campus has General Plan land use and zoning designations of Public Institutional (PI), which is applied to lands that are used for various types of public or/and community-serving facilities owned and operated by public agencies, special districts, nonprofit organizations, and other entities (Santa Clarita 2026).

1.4 Surrounding General Plan Land Use Designation

The campus is surrounded by Urban Residential zones (UR2) (five dwelling units per acre [du/a]) to the northwest, west, and south. North of the project site is zoned Open Space (OS). Saugus High School to the east of the project site is also zoned PI. Land use designations surrounding the site are consistent with zoning designations (Santa Clarita 2026).

1.5 Saugus Union School District

The Saugus Union School District (District) provides school services to the City of Santa Clarita and includes 14 elementary schools and a preschool. SUSD had a districtwide enrollment of 9,113 students in the 2025-2026 school year (CDE 2026a).

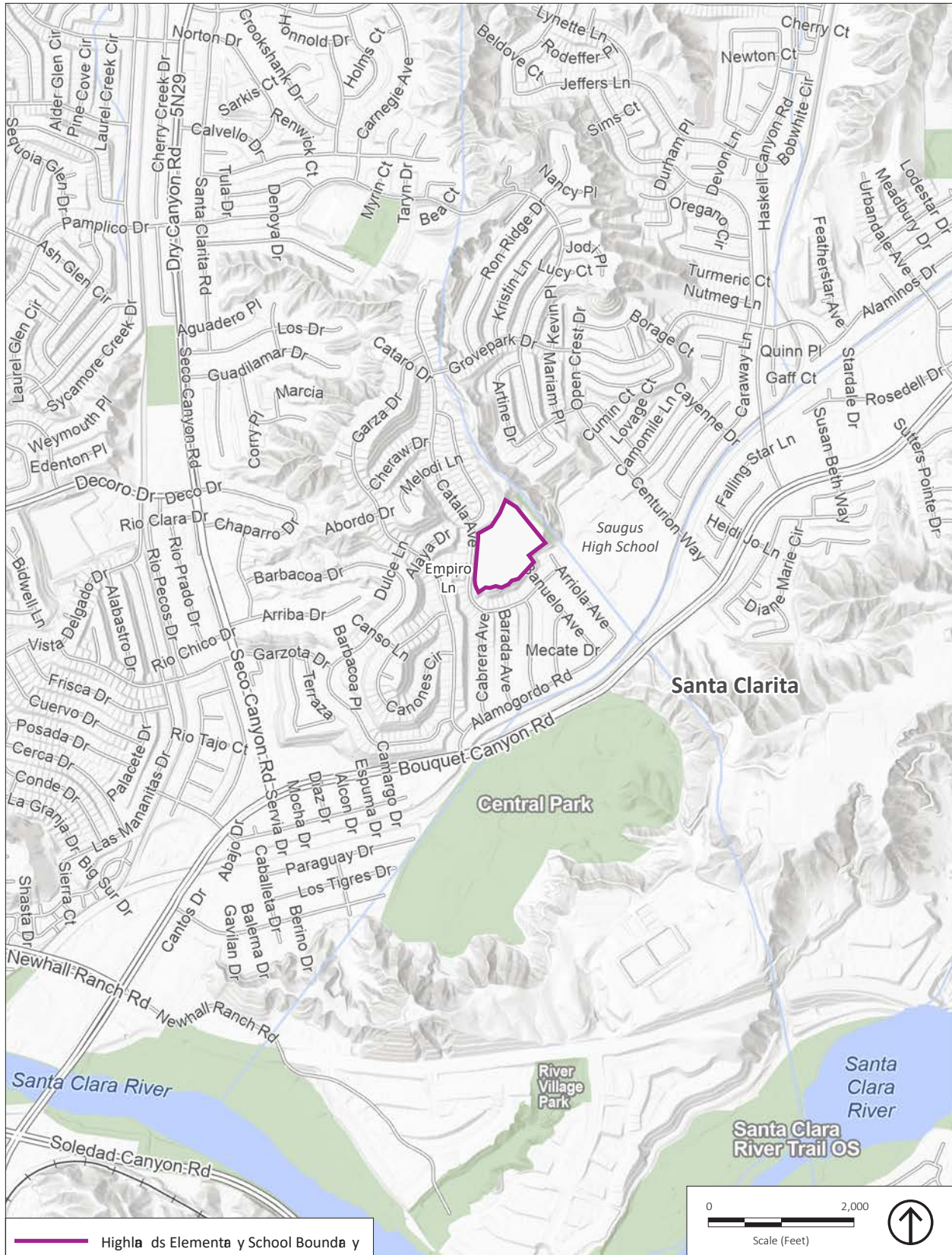
1.6 Highlands Elementary School

Highlands ES is a transitional kindergarten (TK) through sixth-grade elementary school (SUSD 2026). Highlands ES had a schoolwide enrollment of 616 students in the 2025-2026 school year (CDE 2026b).

1.7 Existing Facilities

The Highlands ES campus contains a variety of permanent and portable structures that support educational and extracurricular functions. The campus includes an administrative and classroom building (Building B); two parking lots at the northwestern and southwestern portions of the campus; hardscaped play courts; a field at the northeastern portion of the campus; and a playground. On-site circulation, parking, utilities, hardscape, and landscaping already exist. The campus is currently fully developed. Infrastructure (water, sewer, storm drainage, electrical, lighting, walkways) is already in place and supporting current operations.

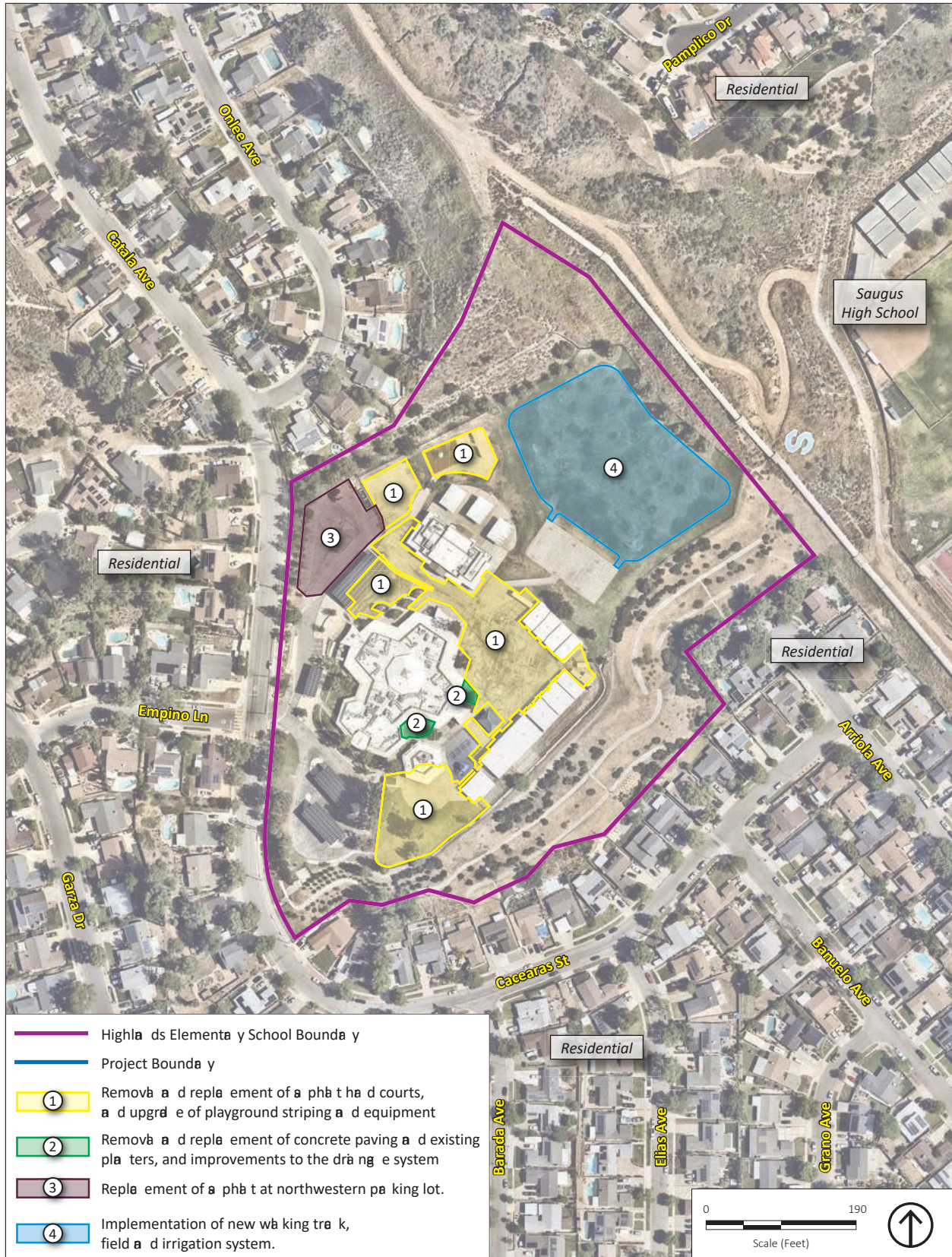
HIGHLANDS ES IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT
SAUGUS UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT



Source: Generated using GIS Pro 2026.

Figure 1
Project Location

HIGHLANDS ES IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT SAUGUS UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT



Source: Nea map 2026.

Figure 2
Aerial View

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project would include improvements to the existing field on the campus with the implementation of a new walking track, replacement of the existing field, and installation of a new irrigation system. Additionally, the proposed project would include the replacement of the asphalt on the play courts and in both existing parking lots, and addition of a new shade structure. Student and staff capacity at Highlands ES would not increase as a result of the proposed project.

2.1 Walking Track and Field

The proposed project includes improvements to the existing field on the northeastern portion of the campus. The existing grass field would be replaced with turf grass, and a new 10-foot-wide, concrete walking track would be constructed around the field and connect to the existing play courts at the southern edge of the field. Portions of the western edge of the field, adjacent to the playground and lunch shelter, would be converted to a native planting area. In addition, a new irrigation system would be installed on the field (see Figure 3, *Proposed Site Plans*).

2.2 Campus Improvements

The proposed project would include the installation of a new fabric shade structure above the existing playground in the northern portion of the campus. Asphalt surfacing around the playground would be removed and replaced; the existing tetherball posts and footings would also be replaced. Asphalt west of the playground would also be replaced, new swing play equipment would be added, and play markings on the asphalt would be updated.

Asphalt at the play courts in the center of the campus would be removed and replaced, and existing ramps to classroom buildings would be improved. New striping and a replacement ball wall would be added to the play courts. Existing storage units would be temporarily relocated during construction activities and returned to their original location upon completion. The asphalt at the northwestern and southwestern parking lots would also be replaced.

In the southern portion of the campus, concrete paving would be removed and replaced, with the addition of new play markings, a new chain-link cage area for play equipment, and improvements to the existing ramps to classroom buildings. Existing sod in this area would also be replaced.

Additionally, concrete would be removed and replaced and drainage improvements made in two areas to the south and east of the administration and classroom building (Building B) (see Figure 3).



Source: sgh Architects 2025.

Figure 3
Proposed Site Plan

2.3 Project Construction

Construction of the proposed project would be completed in two phases. The construction of the new walking track, replacement of the existing field, and installation of the new irrigation system would be completed between June and July 2026. The replacement of asphalt on the play courts and parking lots, and addition of the new shade structure would be completed between June and July 2027. All construction equipment and workers would be staged within the boundaries of the project site, and contractors would adhere to Santa Clarita Municipal Code Section 11.44.080, Special Noise Sources: Construction and Building, to avoid disruption to campus operations. The proposed project would not increase the school's student capacity. All project improvements would be on campus, and no off-site improvements would be part of the proposed project.

3. REASONS WHY THE PROJECT IS EXEMPT

The proposed project is exempt from further environmental review under the requirements of CEQA (Public Resources Code Sections 21000 et seq.) because it is consistent with Classes 1, 11, and 14 exemptions.

Categorical Exemption

CEQA GUIDELINES SECTION 15301

- **Class 1, Existing Facilities (CEQA Guidelines Section 15301)**, 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 existing or former use. The key consideration is whether the project involves negligible or no expansion of use.

The proposed project is categorically exempt under Class 1, Existing Facilities (Section 15301). The proposed project consists of minor alterations, maintenance, and repairs to an operational public facility, with no expansion of its existing use. Specific improvements—including field upgrades, asphalt and concrete replacement, a new shade structure, updated play equipment, drainage features, and hardscape striping—will occur within the existing campus and will not alter the campus boundaries. These proposed upgrades to the campus will serve the existing student population and staff without increasing enrollment or intensifying campus use. Therefore, the proposed project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15301.

CEQA GUIDELINES SECTION 15311

- **Class 11, Accessory Structures (CEQA Guidelines Section 15311)**, consists of construction, or placement of minor structures accessory to (appurtenant to) existing commercial, industrial, or institutional facilities, including, but not limited to, (a) on-premise signs; (b)

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small parking lots; (c) placement of seasonal or temporary use items such as lifeguard towers, mobile food units, portable restrooms, or similar items in generally the same locations from time to time in publicly owned parks, stadiums, or other facilities designed for public use.

The proposed project is categorically exempt from CEQA under Class 11, Accessory Structures (Section 15311), because it includes resurfacing of the northwestern and southwestern parking lots on the campus. The existing northwestern parking lot has a total of 30 parking stalls, and the existing southwestern parking lot has a total of 32 parking stalls. The proposed project will not change the number of parking stalls at either parking lot. The improvements would be within previously developed areas of the campus and would not expand the footprint or intensity of use. Therefore, the proposed project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15311.

CEQA GUIDELINE SECTION 15314

- **Class 14, Minor Additions to Schools (CEQA Guidelines Section 15314)**, consists of minor additions to existing schools within existing school grounds where the addition does not increase original student capacity by more than 25 percent or 10 classrooms, whichever is less. The addition of portable classrooms is included in this exemption.

The proposed project is categorically exempt from CEQA under Class 14, Minor Additions to Schools (Section 15314), because the proposed project would include minor additions and improvements to the existing school campus and would not result in the construction of any new classrooms, so it would not increase student capacity on the campus by 25 percent or 10 new classrooms. The proposed project includes construction of a walking track, replacement of the existing field with turf and installation of irrigation, installation of a shade structure, replacement of asphalt and concrete surfaces, and upgrades to playground and recreational facilities, which would take place entirely within the developed Highlands ES campus. The proposed project would not alter or expand the existing school use of the campus, would not increase student capacity or the number of classrooms, and would only result in minor improvements to the existing campus. No off-campus improvements would occur. Therefore, the project is exempt from CEQA under Section 15314.

4. REVIEW OF EXCEPTIONS TO THE CATEORICAL EXEMPTION

The proposed project has been reviewed under CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2, Exceptions, for any characteristics or circumstances that might invalidate findings that the proposed project is exempt from CEQA. Each exception is listed by letter and followed by an assessment of whether that exception applies to the proposed project.

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- a. Location.** Classes 3,4,5,6 and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project would be located—a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply all instances, except where the project may have an impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.

The project site is located on the existing Highlands ES campus, which includes classroom buildings, athletic fields and facilities, parking lots, concrete walkways, and ornamental landscaping. Due to the school's developed nature and frequent human disturbance, it does not contain any biological resources of critical concern. The project site is in an urbanized and developed area of Santa Clarita. No mapped riparian habitats or wetlands exist on or near the project site (USFWS 2026). Additionally, there is no evidence of hazardous materials or substances on the campus (see Section [e], *Hazardous Waste Sites*). Therefore, the project site is not considered a particularly sensitive environment, and this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

- b. Cumulative Impacts.** All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.

There are no other planned projects proposed on the campus at this time that, in combination with the proposed project, would result in cumulative impacts. Any future campus improvements would be implemented as independent projects, confined to their respective sites, and subject to their own environmental review under CEQA, as applicable. Construction of the proposed project would be scheduled and phased to minimize disruption to on-campus activities and the surrounding community. Additionally, the proposed project consists of minor additions and alteration of existing facilities and would not expand campus boundaries, increase student or staff capacity, or introduce new operational activities. Thus, it would not contribute to cumulative environmental effects. Significant cumulative impacts are not anticipated with the implementation of any other projects. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

- c. Significant Effects.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

The project site is on a currently occupied school campus that is entirely developed, disturbed, and used throughout the year. The proposed project, which involves improvements to the existing field, play equipment, and parking lots, would add new development consistent with the existing uses on the project site. There are no sensitive resources within or adjacent to the project site. There is no reasonable possibility that the project would have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances. Proposed improvements would not change access and circulation of the surrounding area. All construction activities would

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comply with current local, State, and federal laws, regulations, construction best management practices, and District standards and guidelines. Therefore, this exemption does not apply to the proposed project.

- d. Scenic Highways.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which 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.

There are no designated State scenic highways near the campus. According to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) California Scenic Highway Mapping System, the closest eligible State scenic highway is I-5 from post mile (PM) R44.014 to PM R55.292, approximately 3.75 miles west of the project site. The closest officially designated scenic highway is SR-2 from PM 27.205 to PM 82.265, approximately 22 miles southeast of the project site (Caltrans 2026). All proposed improvements would be within the boundaries of the existing Highlands ES campus and are not visible from any eligible or designated scenic highways due to distance; thus, the proposed project would not affect any scenic highways. Additionally, due to the distance between the project site and these highways, the proposed project would not 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. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

- e. Hazardous Waste Sites.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5.

California Government Code Section 65962.5 requires the compiling of lists of the following types of hazardous materials sites: hazardous waste facilities subject to corrective action; hazardous waste discharges for which the State Water Quality Control Board has issued certain types of orders; public drinking water wells containing detectable levels of organic contaminants; underground storage tanks with reported unauthorized releases; and solid waste disposal facilities from which hazardous waste has migrated.

Five environmental databases were searched for hazardous materials sites on the site and within a quarter-mile radius:

- EnviroStor, Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC 2025)
- GeoTracker, State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB 2025)
- EnviroMapper, US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA 2025)
- Solid Waste Information System, California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle 2025)
- Cortese List, Department of Toxic Substance Control (DTSC 2025b)

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The search of these databases did not identify any active hazardous waste sites within 0.25 mile of the project site. The project is confined to the campus, and the site is not identified on the DTSC Cortese List as a hazardous site. Thus, the project site is not identified as a hazardous materials site pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5, and the project would not create a hazard to the public. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

- f. Historical Resources.** A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of historical resources. Under Public Resource Code Section 21084.1, a historical resource is a resource listed in or determined to be eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources. Additionally, historical resources included in a local register of historical resources are presumed to be historically or culturally significant, and a lead agency can determine whether the resource may be an historical resource.

The Highlands ES campus is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places or listed as a California Historical Landmark or California Point of Historical Interest, nor is there a listed historic resource within a 0.25-mile radius of the project site (NPS 2026; OHP 2026a, 2026b). Additionally, neither the school nor any adjoining property is listed as a historic resource or potential historic resource by the City of Santa Clarita. No historical resources were identified on-site during preparation of this Notice of Exemption. Therefore, the historical sites exception does not apply to the proposed project.

5. CONCLUSION

The proposed project at Highlands ES is exempt from CEQA review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301, 15311, and 15314. As substantiated in this document, the proposed project will not meet the conditions specified in Section 15300.2, Exceptions, of the CEQA Guidelines, and the project is categorically exempt under Classes 1, 11, and 14.

6. REFERENCES

CalRecycle (California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery). 2026. Solid Waste Information System.

Caltrans (California Department of Transportation). 2026. California Scenic Highway Mapping System. <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/design/lap-landscape-architecture-and-community-livability/lap-liv-i-scenic-highways>.

CDE (California Department of Education). 2026a. Saugus Unified School District Report (19649980000000). DataQuest. Enrollment Report. Enrollment Multi-year Summary by Grade. <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/enrgrdlevels.aspx?aggllevel=District&year=2025-26&cde=1964998>.

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DTSC (Department of Toxic Substances Control). 2026a. EnviroStor. <http://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/>.

DTSC. 2026b. Hazardous Waste and Substances Site List (Cortese). https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/search?cmd=search&reporttype=CORTESE&site_type=CSITES,FUDS&status=ACT,BKLG,COM&reporttitle=HAZARDOUS+WASTE+AND+SUBSTANCES+SITE+LIST+%28CORTESE%29.

NPS (National Park Service). 2026. National Register of Historic Places. <https://www.nps.gov/maps/full.html?mapId=7ad17cc9-b808-4ff8-a2f9-a99909164466>.

OHP (California Office of Historic Preservation). 2026a. California Historical Resources. <https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/ListedResources/?view=county&criteria=19>.

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SWRCB (State Water Resources Control Board). 2026. GeoTracker. <http://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/>.

USEPA (United States Environmental Protection Agency). 2026. EnviroMapper for EnviroFacts. <https://www3.epa.gov/enviro/index.html>.

USFWS (United States Fish and Wildlife Service). 2026. National Wetlands Inventory: Wetlands Mapper. <https://www.fws.gov/wetlands/data/mapper.HTML>.