NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

To: County Clerk, Peter Aldana
County of Riverside
2724 Gateway Dr.
Riverside, CA 92507

From: Desert Sands Unified School District
47-950 Dune Palms Road
La Quinta, CA 92253

Project Title:
Andrew Jackson Elementary School New Kindergarten Building Project

Project Location - Specific:
82-850 Kenner Avenue, Indio, CA 92201
Project Location – City: Indio **Project Location – County:** Riverside

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:
The proposed project consists of the construction of a new kindergarten building to support three kindergarten classrooms and the removal of six portable classrooms at the Andrew Jackson Elementary School. Construction is expected to take place in spring of 2027 and conclude at the end of 2027.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project:
Desert Sands Unified School District

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project:
Desert Sands Unified School District

Exempt Status:
☐ 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: CEQA Guidelines Section 15314 Class 14, and Section 15332 Class 32
☐ Statutory Exemption: (PRC §21080.23, CEQA Guidelines Section 15284)

Reasons why project is exempt:
See the Attachment for a discussion on why the project is exempt from CEQA.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Patrick Cisneros
Telephone: 760-771-8516

If filed by applicant:
1. Attached certified document of exemption findings
2. Has NOE been filed by the public agency approving the project? ☑ Yes ☐ No

Agency Representative Signature: _____ Date: 10/26/2026
Title: Director, Facilities Services

☑ Signed by Lead Agency
☐ Signed by Applicant

Date Received for Filing at OPR_____

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County of Riverside
Peter Aldana
Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder
E-202600942
10/26/2026 02:19 PM Fee: $ 50.00
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Removed: By: Deputy

CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION

ANDREW JACKSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
NEW KINDERGARTEN BUILDING PROJECT

This document assesses the use of categorical exemptions in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the proposed addition of a new kindergarten building at the Andrew Jackson Elementary School under California Public Resources Code Section 21084 and CEQA Guidelines Sections 5314 Class 14, and 153332 Class 32 (California Code of Regulations Title 14 Sections 15000 et seq.).

1.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Desert Sands Unified School District (DSUSD or District) is proposing improvements to the Andrew Jackson Elementary School, Indio, California (the proposed project). The school opened in July 1980 and the District has determined that a new kindergarten building, including restrooms, are needed to provide adequate classroom facilities for the kindergarten population. The existing school includes a number of buildings that house classrooms for TK through Grade 5 education as well as facilities to support the school facilities.

The proposed project consists of the construction of a new, approximately 4,000 to 5,000 square foot building with three (3) new kindergarten classrooms, to modernize the school campus. The new building will be located on the western portion of the school site, just east of Towne Street and Building A. In addition, six (6) portable classrooms will be removed.

1.1 PROJECT LOCATION AND ZONING

The proposed project site is located at 82-850 Kenner Avenue, Indio, CA 92201. The campus is located on the northeast corner of Towne Street and Kenner Avenue, and west of Jackson Street, and south of the Whitewater River, in the city of Indio. Regional access to the site is provided by Interstate 10 (I-10) via Jackson Street, approximately one-third mile (1,730 feet) north of the site. State Route 111 (CA-111), is located approximately 1.25 miles south of the site school.

1.2 EXISTING FACILITIES

Jackson Elementary School contains multiple single-story buildings and classrooms, as well as a cafeteria, tennis courts, basketball courts, playgrounds and hardscape areas, restroom buildings, multipurpose room, and a library. The school site also includes six portable classrooms located in the northern portion of the site, adjacent to the parking area and North Jackson Park. Baseball fields are also located adjacent to the northern boundary of the school site, within North Jackson Park. Parking is provided in two parking lots: (1) one located on the northern side of the school, between the school and North Jackson Park,

which is accessed off of Towne Street; and (2) one located on the south side of the school site adjacent to the intersection of Kenner Avenue and Towne Street. A student pick-up and drop-off area is located on the southern portion of the site with access from Kenner Avenue. The areas surrounding Andrew Jackson Elementary School are largely residential on the west and south, and includes the North Jackson Park north of the school. Undeveloped land that consists of the south bank of the Coachella Valley Stormwater Channel (CVSC) is located immediately northeast of the site.

The Andrew Jackson Elementary School site is designated for Public and Institutional (PI) in the Indio General Plan (Indio, 2022) and the Zoning Map. The Public and Institutional designation allows the use of schools, educational facilities, and other types of public facilities. This area of the City has been developed and surrounding land uses include mixed-used residential zones that provide a range of housing choices, including single-family dwellings, as well as apartments, condos, and small-sized multi-family buildings (up to 14 dwelling units per acre). The land use designation of Parks and Open Space (OS) is located to the north of the school site, including the North Jackson Park, as well as the CVSC. A commercial area (landscape supply store) is located east of the school site.

1.3 SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND CAPACITY

Andrew Jackson Elementary School serves Grade TK through Grade 5 and had an enrollment of 750 students in the 2024-2025 school year. Table 1 shows student enrollment at Andrew Jackson Elementary School over the last 10 years averaged approximately 683 students per year.

TABLE 1

La Quinta High School Enrollment History

SCHOOL YEAR	ENROLLMENT
2024-2025	750
2023-2024	762
2022-2023	748
2021-2022	675
2020-2021	668
2019-2020	658
2018-2019	657
2017-2018	606
2016-2017	661
2015-2016	642
10-Year Average Enrollment	683

Source: CDE, 2025

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project consists of the construction of a new, approximately 4,000 to 5,000 square foot building with three new kindergarten classrooms, to modernize the school campus. The new building will be located on the western portion of the school site, just east of Towne Street and Building A.

During the construction of the proposed project, the existing six portable classrooms on the northern portion of the school site will remain. Following completion of construction activities, the six portable classrooms will be removed from the school site. The project will add three new permanent classrooms to the school site and remove six portable classrooms. Therefore, the project will remove three classrooms from the site.

3.0 CEQA EVALUATION

3.1 CLASS 14 EXEMPTION – MINOR ADDITIONS TO SCHOOLS

CEQA guidelines include exemptions for certain types of minor projects, including school projects. A Class 14 Exemption (CEQA Section 15314 – Minor Additions to Schools) applies to "minor additions to existing schools within existing school grounds where the addition does not increase original student capacity by more than 25% or 10 classrooms, whichever is less."

The objective of the proposed project is to construct three new permanent kindergarten classrooms and remove the six existing portable classrooms at the Andrew Jackson Elementary School. No other buildings or structures are included as part of the project. The number of classrooms at the school would decrease by three after construction activities are complete and there would be no increase in the school capacity; therefore, the student capacity is not expected to increase (i.e., increase in capacity would be less than 25%).

All of the proposed modifications to Andrew Jackson Elementary School are within the confines of the existing school. The proposed project would result in a decrease in three classrooms. Therefore, the proposed modifications to Andrew Jackson Elementary School are considered to be exempt per CEQA Guidelines §15314 Class 14 exemption for the following reasons:

(1) The proposed project would not result in an increase in classrooms (which is less than 10 classrooms); and
(2) There would be no increase in student capacity (which is less than 25 percent).

3.2 CLASS 32 EXEMPTION – IN-FILL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

A Class 32 Exemption (CEQA Section 15332 – In-Fill Development Projects) include exemptions for in-fill development that consists of the following:

a. The project is consistent with the applicable general plan designation and all applicable general plan policies as well as with applicable zoning designations and regulations.
b. The proposed development occurs within city limits on a project site of no more than five acres substantially surrounded by urban uses.
c. The project site has no value as habitat for endangered, rare or threatened species.
d. Approval of the project would not result in any significant effects relating to traffic noise, air quality, or water quality.
e. The site can be adequately served by all required utilities and public services.

The proposed project would add a new 4,000 to 5,000 sq ft. kindergarten classroom buildings to provide additional educational opportunities to Andrew Jackson Elementary School. No other buildings or structures are included as part of the project. Therefore, the project includes the construction of three classrooms as in-fill development and the removal of six portable classrooms. The overall purpose of the school would not change.

All of the proposed modifications to Andrew Jackson Elementary School are within the confines of the existing school which is currently zoned for school purposes. Therefore, the proposed modifications to Andrew Jackson Elementary School are considered to be exempt per CEQA Guidelines §15332 Class 32 exemption for the following reasons:

a. The Andrew Jackson Elementary School site is designated for Public and Institutional (PI) in the Indio General Plan (Indio, 2022) and the Zoning Map. The Public and Institutional designation allows the use of schools, educational facilities, and other types of public facilities. Therefore, the project is consistent with the existing land use and zoning designations of the site.
b. The development occurs within the Indio city limits. The building would be approximately 4,000 to 5,000 square feet. Therefore, the project would be much less than five acres and is largely surrounded by urban uses as described in Section 1.2 above.
c. The location of the new kindergarten building is mostly hardscape, or contains non-native turf and vegetation which has no value as habitat for endangered, rare, or threatened species.
d. Construction of the kindergarten building would provide three new, permanent classrooms to provide educational facilities to school children. The project would be built within the school boundaries which have already been graded. Impacts to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality would be limited to the period when construction activities would occur. Construction activities are expected to be minor because the construction of the new building is small (a maximum of 5,000

square feet) which would require minimal construction workers and equipment as the site is already graded.

Traffic impacts would be limited to the construction period. The number of construction workers would be small because the building will be a maximum of 5,000 square feet and is not expected to require more than 15-20 workers at any given time. After construction, the project will not increase the capacity of the school or generate additional visitors or traffic to the site.

Following the construction of the foundation, equipment would be limited to hand held equipment, air compressors, etc. Further, construction activities that generate noise would be limited to daylight hours which minimize the potential for noise impacts.

Air quality impacts would also be minimal as very little construction equipment (e.g., graders, rollers, excavators) would be required and limited to the construction of the foundation. Once construction activities are completed, no additional air quality impacts would be generated over the existing school site activities.

Water use would be limited to a small amount used to suppress dust generation during construction activities. Because of the arid nature of the environment in Indio, no water runoff from the site would be expected due to the use of water during construction activities. Water from the restrooms will be directed to the existing sewer system and eventually treated at a public wastewater treatment plant. As discussed above, the project will not increase the capacity of the school site or generate additional visitors to the site. Therefore, the project is not expected to result in an increase in wastewater generated by the school site or result in significant water quality impacts.

Based on the above, the project would not result in significant impacts to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality.

e. Andrew Jackson Elementary School is currently served by all public utilities and public services and no changes in those utilities or services are expected due to the proposed project.

3.3 EXCEPTIONS TO CATEGORICAL EXEMPTIONS

CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2, Exceptions, identifies conditions under which categorical exemptions would not be applicable. The proposed project has been reviewed under Section 15300.2 for characteristics or circumstances that might invalidate findings that the proposed project is exempt.

A. Location

CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(a) states that Class 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 exemptions are qualified by consideration of whether the project is located in a uniquely sensitive environment, such that it impacts an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern that has been designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies. This exception does not apply to Class 14 and 32 exemptions and, therefore, exemption does not apply to this project.

B. Cumulative Impact

Exemptions are not applicable when there is a significant cumulative impact of "successive projects of the same type in the same place over time." Beyond the proposed project, the District has no other planned improvements at Andrew Jackson Elementary School.

The District has completed modernization improvements at two schools in Indio in the District, including: James Madison Elementary School located at 80845 Avenue 46, approximately 2.4 miles southwest of Andrew Jackson Elementary School; and (2) John F. Kennedy Elementary School located at 45100 Clinton Street, approximately 1.6 miles southwest of Andrew Jackson Elementary. The construction activities associated with these school improvements have been completed. Therefore, there are no cumulative impacts associated with District school projects in Indio.

The District has proposed other school improvement projects in Palm Desert, Indian Wells, and La Quinta, including: (1) Abraham Lincoln Elementary School located on Rutledge Way in Palm Desert, approximately 9 miles west of Andrew Jackson Elementary School; (2) Gerald Ford Elementary School on Warner Trail in Indian Wells, approximately 5.4 miles southwest of Andrew Jackson Elementary School; (3) Carter Elementary School located on Hovley Lane in Palm Desert, approximately 8.8 miles west of Andrew Jackson Elementary School; and (4) La Quinta High School, located at 79255 Blackhawk Way in La Quinta, approximately 3.7 miles southwest of Andrew Jackson Elementary School.

Environmental effects caused by the modernization and improvements to other schools would be localized, limited to construction activities, and not within range of project effects at the other school sites, e.g., traffic, noise, etc. Each school's modernization project would comply with applicable local, state, and federal regulations and District best management practices. Therefore, any potential overlap of construction activities/schedules would not result in a significant adverse impact and would not be cumulatively considerable. Additionally, there are no related projects near Andrew Jackson Elementary School whose environmental effects could be combined with the proposed project's to create cumulatively significant construction and operational impacts. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

In 2000, eight classrooms were added to Andrew Jackson Elementary School. The currently proposed project would result in an increase of three permanent classrooms and

the removal of six existing portable classrooms, for an overall decrease in three classrooms. Following completion of the proposed project, the District will have added a total of five classrooms to the school site since 2000. The Andrew Jackson Elementary School site would still be below the 10 classroom maximum allowed in the Class 14 exemption and would not result in cumulative impacts with previous development at Andrew Jackson Elementary School.

C. Significant Effects

A categorical exemption cannot 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 (CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(c)). The determination whether this exception applies involves two distinct questions: (1) whether the project presents unusual circumstances, and (2) whether there is a reasonable possibility that a significant environmental impact will result from those unusual circumstances. The lead agency considers the second prong of this test only if it first finds that some circumstance of the project is unusual. *Berkeley Hillside Preservation v. City of Berkeley (2015) 60 C4th 1086, 1104.*

The proposed facility improvements at Andrew Jackson Elementary School are not unusual. The proposed project would construct permanent classrooms and remove existing portable facilities, all of which would be confined to the boundaries of the existing school campus. The facility improvements would be common for school facility construction projects, which must adhere to strict standards established by California Code of Regulations Title 5, California Building Code, and California Education Code and are overseen by the California Department of Education and Division of the State Architect.

Andrew Jackson Elementary School serves an urbanized area and the District does not forecast substantial enrollment growth at the school or within the District. The proposed project will result in the construction of three new permanent classrooms and the removal of six portable classrooms; therefore, the proposed project will result in a decrease of three classrooms at the school site and will not result in an increase in overall student capacity. The proposed project would result in normal construction activities within the confines of the existing campus. The project would add a new permanent building for kindergarten, but is not expected to result in substantial changes and school operations would be substantially the same as current operations.

There are no known unusual circumstances related to the project site or the proposed project, and there is also no evidence that the project would cause significant direct or indirect environmental effects. The District and its construction manager will comply with all applicable local, state, and federal laws, regulations, and best management practices that would minimize potential environmental impacts caused by construction activities. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

D. Scenic Highways

A categorical exemption cannot 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 (CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(d)). The closest officially designated scenic highway is State Route 74 which runs southwest from CA-111 in Palm Desert, CA (CalTrans, 2025). Andrew Jackson Elementary School is located approximately 11.7 miles northeast of the portion of State Route 74 where the scenic highway designation begins. Due to the distance, topography, and intervening hills/structures, the school site is not visible and the proposed project would not result in a visual impact to a scenic resource. Further, the project would add one small, one-story building (approximately 4,000 to 5,000 square feet) and would not be visible to a scenic highway. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

E. Hazardous Waste Sites

A categorical exemption cannot be used for a project on a site that is on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the California Government Code (CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(e)). Section 65962.5 of the California Government Code specifies: (1) lists of hazardous materials sites and hazardous waste facilities; (2) hazardous waste discharges for which the State Water Quality Control Board has issued certain types of orders; (3) public drinking water wells containing detectable levels of organic contaminants; (4) underground storage tanks with reported unauthorized releases; and (5) solid waste disposal facilities from which hazardous was has migrated. Three regulatory agency databases were searched including: (1) GeoTracker, maintained by the State Water Resources Control Board (RWQCB, 2025); (2) EnviroStor, maintained by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC, 2025); and (3) EnviroMapper, maintained by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA, 2025).

Using these search databases, no active hazardous waste sources were found within 3,000 feet of Andrew Jackson Elementary School. One underground storage tank (apparently gasoline) was located within 1,000 feet east of the school at Valley Block, located at 43320 Jackson Street, Indio (RWQCB, 2025). The underground storage tank was removed from the site and cleanup activities were completed approximately 25 years ago. The cleanup status of the site was closed by the RWQCB in December 1997, meaning that cleanup of the site was completed to applicable standards and there is very little chance for potential significant impacts to off-site properties.

Four other sites located within 3,000 feet of the school site were identified and are summarized below.

1. Exxon Gas Station, located at 44045 Jackson Street, Indio, approximately 1,600 feet from the school site. An underground gasoline storage tank was removed from

the site and cleanup activities were implemented. The cleanup status of the case was closed by the RWQCB in of July 8, 1996.

2. Circle K, located at 44046 Jackson Street, Indio, approximately 1,750 feet from the school site. Three underground gasoline storage tanks were removed from the site in April 1999 and cleanup activities were implemented, including free product removal and soil vapor extraction. The cleanup status of the case was closed by the RWQCB in January 10, 2013.
3. North Indio Drive Thru, located at 43977 Jackson Street, Indio, approximately 1,500 feet from the school site. Three underground storage tanks were removed in April 2000 and site monitoring was conducted. The site was closed in September 2013 when monitoring showed no contaminants were detected.
4. Former Express Gas, located at 44180 Jackson Street, Indio, approximately 2,000 feet from the school site. Three underground storage tanks were removed from the site in April 1999 and monitoring and cleanup activities were implemented, including free product removal and soil vapor extraction. The cleanup status of the case was closed by the RWQCB in March 4, 2016.

No significant potential impacts are expected as a result of contamination that would impact Andrew Jackson Elementary School because the historically contaminated sites have been cleaned up and closed by the RWQCB. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

F. Historic Resources

A categorical exemption cannot be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource. Historical resources are defined as buildings, structures, or objects that are more than 50 years old (CCR 4852(d)(2)). Andrew Jackson Elementary first opened in 1980 and does not meet the minimum age requirement of 50 years to be considered for historical significance. The school site is not listed on an official local register of historical resources, the California Register of Historical Resources, nor the National Register of Historic Places (OHP, 2025). The structures at the school do not embody distinctive characteristics or a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represent the work of an important creative individual or possess high artistic values (CEQA Guidelines §1604.5(a)(3)(C). Further, no permanent buildings will be demolished at the school site and the proposed project will only remove portable classrooms which do not qualify as historic resources. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a direct impact to historical resources and this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, the proposed modifications to Andrew Jackson Elementary School are considered to be exempt per CEQA Guidelines §15314 Class 14 exemption and §15332 Class 32 exemption for the following reasons:

(1) The proposed project would not result in an increase in classrooms (which is less than 10 classrooms).
(2) The proposed project would not result in an increase in student capacity; therefore, the capacity of the school would not increase more than 25 percent.
(3) The proposed project is consistent with the existing land use and zoning designations of the site by the City of Indio.
(4) The development will occur within the urbanized portion of the city of Indio.
(5) The proposed new building would be approximately 4,000 to 5,000 square feet and less than five acres.
(6) The location of the new classroom building will be constructed where existing turf and non-native vegetation is currently located and which has no value as habitat for endangered, rare, or threatened species.
(7) The proposed project would not expand the capacity of the school site, increase the number of students, teachers, administrative staff or visitors to the school site. Therefore, the project would not permanently change or increase traffic, noise, air quality or water quality.
(8) The school site is currently served by all public utilities and public services and no changes in those utilities or services are expected to be required due to the proposed project.
(9) None of the exceptions to the exemptions apply to the proposed project.

Therefore, the proposed modifications to Andrew Jackson Elementary School meet the requirements of CEQA Guidelines §15314 Class 14 exemption and §15332 Class 32 exemption and the proposed project is exempt under CEQA.

5.0 REFERENCES

California Department of Education (CDE), 2025. Enrollment Report. Accessed 09/12/25. https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/

California Department of Transportation (CalTrans), 2025. California Scenic Highway Mapping System. Accessed 09/18/25. https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?layers=f0259b1ad0fe4093a5604c9b838a486a

Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), 2025. EnviroStor Database. Accessed September 24, 2025. https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/map/?myaddress=82850+Kenner+avenue+indio

Indio, City of 2022. City of Indio Zoning and General Plan Map. Accessed 09/12/2025. https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/5659d176b4864139862b074d753cf5aa/#data_s=id%3AdataSource_3-184e47e9825-layer-4-23-24%3A5037

Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), 2025. GeoTracker Database. https://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/ Accessed September 24, 2025. https://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/map/?CMD=runreport&myaddress=andrew+jackson+elementary+school

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA), 2025. EnviroMapper Database. Accessed 09/24/2025. https://geopub.epa.gov/myem/efmap/index.html

Office of Historic Preservation (OHP). Listed California Historical Resources. Accessed 09/18/2025. https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/ListedResources/?view=county&criteria=33