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:
La Quinta High School Performing Arts Center Modernization Project

Project Location - Specific:
79-255 Blackhawk Way, La Quinta, CA 92253
Project Location – City: La Quinta **Project Location – County:** Riverside

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:
The proposed project consists of the modernization, replacement and reconstruction of the existing 16,000 square-foot Performing Arts Center at La Quinta High School and the construction of a new, approximately 19,000 square-foot Performing Arts Center within the same footprint as the existing building. Construction is expected to take place in the fall of 2027 and conclude in 2029.

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 15302, Class 2, 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
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10/26/2026 02:11 PM Fee: $ 50.00
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Removed: By: Deputy

CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION

LA QUINTA HIGH SCHOOL
PERFORMING ARTS CENTER MODERNIZATION PROJECT

This document assesses the use of categorical exemptions in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the proposed modernization of the Performing Arts Center at La Quinta High School under California Public Resources Code Section 21084 and CEQA Guidelines Sections §15302 Class 2 exemption, 15314 Class 14, and 15332 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 to modernize, replace, and reconstruct the existing Performing Arts Center at La Quinta High School (the proposed project). The school opened in 1994 and the District has determined that the Performing Arts Center is outdated, does not meet the current needs of the school, and does not meet current building codes. The District is planning to demolish the existing Performing Arts Center and building a new one in its place.

1.1 PROJECT LOCATION AND ZONING

The proposed project site is located at 79-255 Blackhawk Way, La Quinta, California, 92253. The campus is located east of Adams Street on the south side of Blackhawk Way, and west of Dune Palms Road in the city of La Quinta. Regional access to the site is provided by Interstate 10 (I-10) via Dune Palms or Adams Street, (Jefferson Street off-ramp), approximately 3 miles north of the site. State Route 111 (CA-111), is located approximately one-half mile south of the site school and is accessed via Dune Palms or Adams Street.

The La Quinta High School site is designated for Major Community Facilities (MC) in the La Quinta General Plan (La Quinta, 2013) and the Zoning Map. The Major Community Facilities designation allows the use of schools and other types of public facilities. This area of the City has been developed and surrounding land uses include low-density residential to the north and east, open space – recreation (La Quinta Park) to the north; open space – natural (the stormwater channel) to the south; and General Commercial uses to the south of the stormwater channel.

1.2 EXISTING FACILITIES

La Quinta High School contains multiple single-story and two-story buildings of classrooms, as well as a cafeteria, tennis courts, football and track stadium; baseball fields, gymnasium, swim pool and stadium, Performing Arts Center, restroom buildings, multipurpose room, hardscape areas, library, administration buildings, and parking lots. Parking is provided in two parking lots: (1) one located on the northern side of the school

adjacent to Blackhawk Way; and (2) one located on the eastern side of the school site adjacent to Dune Palms Road. A student pick-up and drop-off area is located on the northern portion of the site with access to Blackhawk Way and a second pick-up and drop-off area is located within the parking lot on Dune Palms Road. The areas surrounding La Quinta High School are largely residential on the north and east, and includes the La Quinta Park north of the school on Blackhawk Way. Undeveloped land that consists of the north bank of the Coachella Valley Stormwater Channel (CVSC) is located immediately south of the site, with a commercial area on the southern banks of the stormwater channel.

1.3 SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND CAPACITY

La Quinta High School serves Grade 9 through Grade 12 and had an enrollment of 2,445 students in the 2025-2026 school year. Table 1 shows student enrollment at La Quinta High School over the last 10 years averaged approximately 2,548 students per year.

TABLE 1

La Quinta High School Enrollment History

SCHOOL YEAR	ENROLLMENT
2025-2026	2,445
2024-2025	2,425
2023-2024	2,488
2022-2023	2,500
2021-2022	2,582
2020-2021	2,511
2019-2020	2,535
2018-2019	2,635
2017-2018	2,691
2016-2017	2,666
10-Year Average Enrollment	2,548

Source: CDE, 2026

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project consists of the demolition of the existing 16,000 square-foot Performing Arts Center and the construction of a new, approximately 19,000 square-foot Performing Arts Center within the same footprint to replace the existing building. The Performing Arts Center is located within the existing La Quinta High School, adjacent to the southwest corner of Dune Palms Road and Westward Ho Drive. The new Performing Arts Center will be located within the same footprint as the existing Center.

The proposed project will not affect any other portions of the school site or add new classrooms to the site.

3.0 CEQA EVALUATION

3.1 CLASS 2 EXEMPTION – REPLACEMENT OR RECONSTRUCTION

A Class 2 Exemption (CEQA Section 15302 – Replacement or Reconstruction) applies to the "replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities where the new structure will be located on the same site as the structure replaced and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure replaced, including but not limited to: (a) Replacement or reconstruction of existing schools and hospitals to provide earthquake resistant structures which do not increase capacity more than 50 percent."

The proposed project aims to modernize, replace and reconstruct the existing Performing Arts Center at La Quinta High School. No other buildings or structures are included as part of the project. Therefore, the project includes the replacement and reconstruction of existing facilities at the school site. The overall purpose of the school and the Performing Arts Center would not change. The student capacity of the school would not increase as no new classrooms would be built. The modernized Performing Arts Center is expected to result in a small expansion, i.e., 19,000 square-feet, as compared to the existing size of 16,000 square-feet. This would result in an increase of 3,000 square-feet or 19 percent increase in size. The student capacity of the school would not increase.

Therefore, the proposed modifications to La Quinta High School are considered to be exempt per CEQA Guidelines §15302 Class 2 exemption for the following reasons:

(1) The proposed project (modernization of the Performing Arts Center) will be located on the same site as the existing Performing Arts Center.
(2) The new Performing Arts Center will not result in a change in purpose and it will continue to be used for the same purpose as the existing Performing Arts Center.
(3) There will be no increase in classrooms or student capacity; therefore, the capacity of the school would not increase more than 50 percent.

3.2 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 modernize, replace and reconstruct the existing Performing Arts Center at La Qunita High School. No other buildings or structures are included as part of the project. The number of classrooms at La Quinta High School would not change (increase or decrease) after modernization activities are complete. The capacity of the school would not change and thus the student capacity is not expected to increase (i.e., increase in capacity would be less than 25%).

All of the proposed modifications to La Quinta High School are within the confines of the existing school. The proposed project would not result in any increase in classrooms or result in an increase in student capacity. Therefore, the proposed modifications to La Quinta High 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 modernize, replace and reconstruct the existing Performing Arts Center at La Qunita High School. The modernized Performing Arts Center is expected to result in a small expansion, i.e., 19,000 square-feet, or an approximately 19 percent increase. No other buildings or structures are included as part of the project.

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

a. The La Quinta High School site is designated for Major Community Facilities (MC) (City of La Qunita, 2013) and the Zoning Map. The MC 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 La Quinta. The new Performing Arts Center would be approximately 19,000 sf, as compared to the existing building of 16,000 sf. 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 existing Performing Arts Center is mostly hardscape, or contains non-native turf and vegetation which has no value as habitat for endangered, rare, or threatened species.
d. The proposed project would modernize, replace and reconstruct the existing Performing Arts Center at La Qunita High School. Demolition and construction activities would occur within the existing school boundaries and on the same site as the existing Performing Arts Building. Impacts to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality would be limited to the period when demolition and construction activities would occur. Demolition and construction activities are expected to be minor because the construction of the existing building is minor (16,000 square-feet) and the new building will be slightly larger (19,000 square-feet) and the school site has already been graded and developed.

   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 19,000 square-feet and is not expected to require more than 20-40 workers at any given time and they would be temporary. After construction, the project will not increase the capacity of the school or generate additional visitors or traffic to the site.

   Demolition and 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 La Quinta, no water runoff from the site would be expected due to the use of water during construction activities. Water from restrooms at the Performing Arts

Building will be handled the same as the existing site and 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. La Quinta High 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 2, 14 and 32 exemptions and, therefore, this exception 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 La Quinta High School.

The District recently completed modernization activities at the baseball fields which included the installation of new turf, reorientation of the fields, new lighting, as well as new bleachers. The modernization activities at the baseball fields were completed several years ago and did not add any new classrooms or increase the student capacity. The construction activities associated with these school improvements have been completed. Therefore, there are no cumulative impacts associated with the baseball field improvements at La Quinta High School.

The District is completing improvements at Andrew Jackson Elementary School, located at 82-850 Kenner Avenue, Indio, approximately 3.7 miles northeast of La Quinta High School. The improvements at Andrew Jackson Elementary School consist of the construction of a new kindergarten building to support three kindergarten classrooms and the removal of six portable classrooms. Construction is expected to take place beginning mid-2026 and conclude in 2028.

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 known related projects near La Quinta High 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.

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.*

La Quinta High School serves an urbanized area and the District does not forecast substantial enrollment growth at the school or within the District. The proposed project implementation will not result in an increase in student capacity as no additional classrooms will be built. The proposed project would result in normal construction activities within the confines of the existing campus. The proposed project would modernize, replace and reconstruct the existing Performing Arts Center at La Qunita High School, but is not expected to result in substantial changes and school operations would be substantially the same as current operations.

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. The project 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. (Cal Trans, 2026). La Quinta High School is located approximately eight 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 would not be visible or result in a visual impact to a scenic resource. Further, the project would replace the existing Performing Arts Center and would not add new buildings or structures. 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 waste has migrated. Three regulatory agency databases were searched including: (1) GeoTracker, maintained by the State Water Resources Control Board (RWQCB, 2026); (2) EnviroStor, maintained by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC, 2026); and (3) EnviroMapper, maintained by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA, 2026).

Using these search databases, no active hazardous sources were found within over 4,000 feet of La Quinta High School. Two underground storage tank cases were located over 3,000 feet from the school (RWQCB, 2026). Both sites had completed cleanup activities over 15 years ago and have been closed by the RWQCB, meaning that cleanup of the sites have been completed to applicable standards and there is very little chance for potential impacts to off-site properties of any significance. Further, these sites are located over one-half mile away from La Quinta High School. No significant potential impacts are expected as a result of contamination that would impact La Quinta High School. Therefore, this exception does not apply to the proposed project.

No significant potential impacts are expected as a result of contamination that would impact La Quinta High 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)). La Quinta High School first opened in 1994 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, 2026). The structures at the school, including the existing Performing Arts Center, 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). 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 La Quinta High School are considered to be exempt per CEQA Guidelines §15302 Class 2 exemption, §15314 Class 14 exemption, and §15332 Class 32 exemption for the following reasons:

(1) The proposed project (modernization, replace and reconstruct the Performing Arts Center) will be located on the same site as the existing Performing Arts Center.
(2) The new Performing Arts Center will not result in a change in purpose from the existing Performing Arts Center.
(3) The proposed project would not result in an increase in classrooms (which is less than 10 classrooms).
(4) 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 or 50 percent.
(5) The proposed project is consistent with the existing land use and zoning designations of the site by the City of La Quinta.
(6) The development will occur within the urbanized portion of the City of La Quinta.
(7) The proposed new building would be approximately 19,000 square-feet, which is less than five acres.
(8) The new Performing Arts Center will be constructed where existing Performing Arts Center is currently located and which has no value as habitat for endangered, rare, or threatened species.

(9) 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.
(10) 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.
(11) None of the exceptions to the exemptions apply to the proposed project.

Therefore, the proposed modifications to La Quinta High School meet the requirements of CEQA Guidelines §15302 Class 2 exemption, §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 09/08/26. https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/

California Department of Transportation (CalTrans), 2026. California Scenic Highway Mapping System. Accessed 09/09/26. https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?layers=f0259b1ad0fe4093a5604c9b838a486a

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA), 2026. EnviroMapper Database. Accessed 09/09/26. https://geopub.epa.gov/myem/efmap/index.html

Office of Historic Preservation (OHP). Listed California Historical Resources. Accessed 09/09/2026. https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/ListedResources/?view=county&criteria=33