

BOARD RESOLUTION NO. 21-25

**A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE
ORANGE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION APPROVING THE RANCHO
SONADO OUTDOOR SCIENCE EDUCATION CENTER PROJECT ("PROJECT"),
FINDING AND DETERMINING THAT THE PROJECT IS CATEGORICALLY
EXEMPT FROM THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT, AND
FILING AND RECORDING A NOTICE OF EXEMPTION WITH THE ORANGE
COUNTY CLERK.**

WHEREAS, the Orange County Board of Education ("Board") owns certain real property and improvements located at 8755 Santiago Canyon Road in unincorporated Orange County, California (the "Property," APNs 105-201-32, -35, and -89, and 576-013-05, known as the Rancho Sonado Outdoor Science Education Center ("Rancho Sonado"); and

WHEREAS, the County Superintendent administers and operates the Inside the Outdoors Environmental Education Program, which offers science and social science educational programs at various venues throughout Orange County (the "Program"); and

WHEREAS, in December 2020, the Bond Fire, which burned 6,686 acres in the Santiago Canyon / Irvine Regional Park area, caused extensive damage to Rancho Sonado; and

WHEREAS, Rancho Sonado is accessed via an access easement on APN 576-013-05 owned by Orange County Parks that may require an amendment to the easement; and

WHEREAS, prior to the damage caused by the Bond Fire, Rancho Sonado was a critical venue for the Program, offering environmental instructional programs at an outdoor school in a natural environmental setting for schools located in Orange County, as well as providing opportunities to the public for similar programming and other special events and activities, pursuant to the California Civic Center Act (Government Code Section 38130 et seq.); and

WHEREAS, the County Superintendent proposes to renovate, repair, and reconstruct facilities for the Inside the Outdoors Environmental Education Program at Rancho Sonado, which were damaged by a wildfire in 2020, and resume previous school and public operations ("Project"); and

WHEREAS, the Project will consist of the renovation of seven (7) outdoor teaching stations on existing graded pads along the hiking trails, five (5) of which would be covered, picnic areas, a multipurpose educational building containing restrooms, an administrative building, a covered lunch area, and an outdoor amphitheater, all constructed with non-combustible materials; and

WHEREAS, the Project will also include sitework that includes improvement of the existing driveway/access road to provide adequate access to firefighting trucks/engines and other emergency vehicles to the property, installation of a new on site fire hydrant, renovation of landscaping with drought-tolerant and native plant species, an improved parking lot, and new wayfinding signage; and

WHEREAS, the County Superintendent proposes operation of similar Program activities as pre-fire conditions, including the participation of approximately 120 students each day between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.; and

WHEREAS, prior to constructing the Project, the County Superintendent must comply with the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA," Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.) and the implementing regulations ("CEQA Guidelines," California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15000 et seq.); and

WHEREAS, Article 19 of the CEQA Guidelines categorically exempts 33 classes of projects determined to not have a significant effect on the environment from extended environmental review; and

WHEREAS, the Class 1 categorical exemption (CEQA Guidelines Section 15301, Existing Facilities), applies to 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; and

WHEREAS, the Project meets the conditions of Class 1 because the Project will involve the repair/restoration of Rancho Sonado and will not expand the former use of Rancho Sonado; and

WHEREAS, the Class 2 categorical exemption (CEQA Guidelines Section 15302, Replacement or Reconstruction) consists of 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 existing streets, pedestrian trails, and similar facilities; and restoration or rehabilitation of deteriorated or damaged structures, facilities, or mechanical equipment to meet current standards of public health and safety; and

WHEREAS, the Project meets the conditions of Class 2 because the Project will involve the reconstruction/replacement of Rancho Sonado structures and facilities and will not expand the former capacity or use of Rancho Sonado; and

WHEREAS, the Class 3 categorical exemption (CEQA Guidelines Section 15303, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures) consists of construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures; installation of small new equipment and facilities in small structures; and the conversion of existing small structures from one use to another where only minor modifications are made in the exterior of the structure; and

WHEREAS, the Project meets the conditions of Class 3 because the Project will, in part, involve the construction of less than 2,500 square feet of new building/structure area at Rancho Sonado before the 2020 wildfire, and because the Project will not involve the use of significant amounts of hazardous substances; and

WHEREAS, the Class 14 categorical exemption (CEQA Guidelines Section, Minor Additions to Schools) 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 ten classrooms, whichever is less; and

WHEREAS, the Project meets the conditions of Class 14 because the Project will not increase the daily or annual student attendance beyond pre-fire conditions and will not result in an increase in building area that equates to the size of ten classrooms (9,600 square feet); and

WHEREAS, the County Superintendent has considered whether the Project is subject to any of the exceptions to the exemption set forth in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2; and

WHEREAS, County Superintendent has determined that the Project meets the conditions of CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(a) because the Property is not located in a particularly sensitive environment that will cause the Project to result in a significant effect; and

WHEREAS, County Superintendent has determined that the Project meets the conditions of CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(b) because the Project will not contribute to any significant impacts resulting from successive projects of the same type in the same place over time; and

WHEREAS, County Superintendent has determined that the Project meets the conditions of CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(c) because the Project will not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances; and

WHEREAS, County Superintendent has determined that the Project meets the conditions of CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(d) because there are no officially designated state scenic highways in the vicinity of the Project site, and as such, the Project will 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; and

WHEREAS, County Superintendent has determined that the Project meets the conditions of CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(e) because the Project will not be located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code; and

WHEREAS, County Superintendent has determined that the Project meets the conditions of CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2(f) because the Project will not result in the substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Board of Trustees of the Orange County Department of Education ("Board") hereby make the following findings:

SECTION 1. The foregoing recitals are true and correct and are a substantive part of the Resolution.

SECTION 2. That the Board has determined after evaluating the Project through its own independent judgement and analysis that the Project is categorically exempt from CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301 (Class 1, Existing Facilities), 15302 (Class 2, Replacement or Reconstruction), 15303 (Class 3, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures), and 15314 (Class 14, Minor Additions to Schools) and that none of the exceptions set forth in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 apply to the Project.

SECTION 3. That the Board hereby approves the Project.

SECTION 4. That the Superintendent of Schools, or his designee, is instructed to file and/or record the Notice of Exemption prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act, consistent with this Resolution, attached hereto as Exhibit "A," with any and all appropriate public agencies or entities, subject only to minor, non-substantive revisions, if necessary.

SECTION 5. The Notice of Exemption constitutes a record of these proceedings and will be kept at the Orange County Superintendent of Schools, Purchasing & Contracts Department at 200 Kalmus Drive, Building A, Costa Mesa, California under the control of the Executive Director, Business Operations; and

SECTION 6. This Resolution shall take effect immediately upon adoption.

PASSED and ADOPTED by the Governing Board of the Orange County Superintendent of Schools on July 9, 2025, by the following vote:

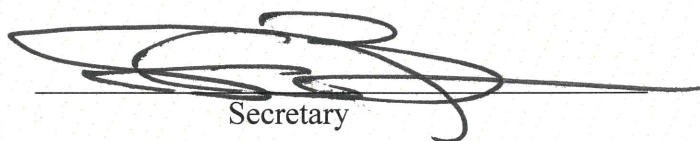
AYES: 5

NOES: 0

ABSENT: 0

ABSTAINED: 0

I, Stefan Bean, Secretary of the Orange County Board of Education, the Board, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of a resolution passed and adopted by said Board at a regularly scheduled and conducted meeting held on said date, which resolution is on file in office of said Board.


Secretary