



Media Release

State Water Board helps Tuolumne County grade school secure safe drinking water

Consolidation with local utility eliminates frequent school closures

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SACRAMENTO – The State Water Resources Control Board joined Curtis Creek School and Tuolumne Utilities District in Sonora yesterday to celebrate consolidation of the school’s water system with the district, which has made safe and affordable drinking water a reality at last for the school’s approximate 440 students and faculty.

The consolidation project was fully funded by a grant of \$2.2 million from the State Water Board’s [Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience \(SAFER\)](#) drinking water program, and took only 13 months to complete.

“I want to congratulate the utilities district, the school and all involved for executing this project so quickly, which is a testament to their goodwill and cooperation,” said Laurel Firestone, a member of the State Water Board. “Consolidations can be complex, but with good coordination they are the quickest path to a sustainable supply of safe drinking water. We strongly recommend them as a solution for small water systems, especially schools, that don’t have operational capacity for the difficult task of running a water system.”

A small, rural school in Tuolumne County founded in [1865](#), Curtis Creek’s water system relied on a well that suffered from coliform contamination and could not maintain state standards for capacity and pressure. Over the years, due to well and pump failures and water quality violations, the school often had to close, forcing parents to find immediate day care or stay home for up to three days with their children while repairs took place. The utilities district helped the school apply for funding from the SAFER program in September 2021; by November 2022, the consolidation was complete and the school had reliable access to safe drinking water for the first time in its history.

“After the completion of the water consolidation project, we experienced zero school closures due to well or pump failures,” said Curtis Creek School Superintendent Dawn Mori. “These improvements were crucial in preventing school closures, providing safe water, and increasing the safety of the campus in the event of a fire.”

“As a parent of a student attending Curtis Creek Elementary School, I saw firsthand the disruption that school closures had on students and families. As the engineer and project manager on the project, I am incredibly proud of the cooperation of all parties



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involved to expeditiously complete the project and deliver clean, safe and reliable drinking water to the students and staff of the school,” said Jennifer Batt, Associate Engineer II for the utilities district.

Of the 389 water systems currently considered to be failing on the [Human Right to Water](#) list, 56, or about 14%, are schools. The board is currently supporting over 400 schools statewide, inclusive of those on the list, with technical assistance and other funding to ensure they can provide safe and reliable drinking water for students and staff. Since 2019, the SAFER program has provided \$48 million to schools to help them come into compliance with drinking water standards and implement long-term solutions.

Background

The State Water Board launched the SAFER drinking water program in July 2019 after Governor Newsom signed SB 200 establishing the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund. Using short- and long-term strategies, the SAFER drinking water program ensures Californians who lack safe, adequate, and affordable drinking water receive it as quickly as possible and establish that the water systems serving them are sustainable. In doing so, SAFER minimizes the disproportionate burdens experienced by some communities and advances justice for people of all incomes, races, and cultures.

Since July 1, 2019, 95 consolidations have been completed with funding and technical support from SAFER, providing 78,000 people in communities around the state with safe drinking water.

The Curtis Creek consolidation project included the construction of approximately 5,700 linear feet of 12-inch diameter water main with a master meter connection, fire-hydrant rehabilitation, and the disconnection of the existing well from the potable water distribution system. Approximately 200 linear feet of pipeline was installed to separate the potable water and irrigation distribution systems, and additional fire hydrants were placed along the newly constructed water transmission main. In addition to providing safe drinking water, the project improved fire protection for the school and surrounding community, which are located in a rural county susceptible to drought and fire.

The State Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.



The SAFER Program includes projects funded by the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, which is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide initiative that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment—particularly in disadvantaged communities.