Getting Down to FACTS

California's School Facilities in a Changing Climate: Funding, Equity, and Resilience

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Executive Summary

In 2018, Getting Down to Facts II documented the state of school facility funding in California, in particular the role of local property wealth in determining the distribution of funding for new and upgraded K-12 facilities, the lack of data on facility needs, and how state funding reinforced local wealth inequities. Over the past decade, there has been little change in how California's K-12 schools fund facility upgrades or new schools, despite a growing body of evidence on the consequences of funding inequity. There is also growing evidence that facility conditions—including air quality, temperature, and building age—impact student learning and educational outcomes. Our analysis of available data on the funding and condition of California's school facilities paints a troubling picture of how it is that the six million students attending California's 10,000+ public K-12 schools experience vastly different learning environments, primarily based on how wealthy their communities are. This equity challenge takes on particular salience in the absence of any statewide collection of data on facility quality and the growing threat that climate change poses to learning continuity.

In this report, we explore the question: how are K-12 facilities adapting to 21st century needs—and who is left behind? We focus on five key findings:

1. Demographic and educational shifts are creating divergent facility pressures. Widespread enrollment decline, expansion of universal transitional-kindergarten, and emphasis on hands-on learning are reshaping facility needs, but districts vary widely in their capacity to adapt.
2. Climate disruptions are a growing, systemic threat to learning and are unevenly distributed across the state. Facility resilience varies by district wealth and geography.
3. California K-12 school facility funding remains fundamentally wealth-driven: Proposition 2's reforms are only marginal, and the state's approach has now been challenged as unconstitutional by a group of plaintiffs including students and school districts.
4. The state's primary K-12 facility funding program—the School Facility Program (SFP)—reinforces wealth-based disparities, remains underfunded relative to local demand, and does not systematically assess need or set priorities.
5. There is no state agency that systematically collects or analyzes data on facility quality, and the minimal facility assessment requirements for local districts appear to be falling well short of their intended purpose.

Introduction: California's approach to K-12 facilities

California's K-12 school buildings house nearly six million students, yet the state has no systematic information about their condition, no equalized funding system to support their improvement, and no statewide planning framework to guide investment. This stands in sharp contrast to how California manages the operational side of public education.

Following *Serrano v. Priest* (1976), which held that basing school funding on local property taxes violated the state constitution, California created an equalized funding system for education which was eventually formalized as the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). The LCFF distributes per-pupil funding to districts consisting of a base amount by grade level and additional supplemental amounts based on the number and percentage of students who meet certain criteria (low-income students, English learners, foster children). Although parcel taxes and the basic aid option mean that the most affluent districts can generate additional funding above these state formulas, as a whole education funding has been fundamentally severed from local property wealth. California also requires substantial data reporting on educational outcomes such as graduation rates, English proficiency, standardized test scores, and other measures that, at least in theory, can serve as a performance accountability structure and measure of outcome equity.

California's K-12 facility finance system has none of these equalizing features. The vast majority (77% in 2024-25) of K-12 facility revenue comes from local general obligation bonds, which are repaid through a dedicated percentage levy on local assessed property value. Wealthier districts can raise substantially more revenue per pupil while taxing their residents at lower rates. The state's own facility funding programs have historically reinforced these local wealth disparities: its first-come, first-served structure and local matching requirements advantage districts that can pass bonds and self-fund projects while waiting for state reimbursement. And unlike its approach to education broadly, California collects essentially no data on facility conditions, so there is no comprehensive assessment of what types of deficiencies exist, which districts have higher needs, or whether public investment is reaching the schools most in need of it. The result is a facility finance system that is effectively the inverse of the

LCFF: one in which districts with the greatest facility needs are often least able to address them and the state plays almost no role in addressing equity gaps or setting standards.

This finding is not new. Getting Down to Facts II documented these patterns in detail, and the research literature has reinforced them since (Brunner et al., 2023; Brunner & Vincent, 2018). The state's primary mechanism for supporting local facility investment is the School Facility Program (SFP), a state grant program established in 1998 and administered by the Office of Public School Construction (OPSC). The SFP funds facility improvements, replacement, and new construction. Districts must provide a local match ranging from 35-50 percent of costs; applications are processed in order of submission; and with very limited exceptions the program does not prioritize based on facility need or scale its assistance based on financial need. The SFP has been funded through a series of statewide bond measures approved by voters, most recently Proposition 2 (2024). Because SFP grants require a local match and are distributed first-come, first-served, access to state funds is closely tied to the same local property wealth that drives local bond capacity. Section 3B describes the program in detail. Despite clear documentation of the inherent inequities of the SFP, Proposition 2 made only very minor changes to the program. Section 4 documents our findings about these distribution inequities, which reinforce the findings from GDTF II.

What has changed in the intervening years is the urgency. The state of school facilities is a more pressing policy challenge today for several reasons: the phased expansion of universal transitional kindergarten (TK) and widespread K-12 enrollment decline are transforming what districts need from their buildings; the escalation of wildfires, extreme heat, and related climate hazards is disrupting schools at a scale essentially absent a decade ago; and a group of students, parents, and districts filed a lawsuit in 2025 challenging the constitutionality of the SFP (*Miliani R. v. California*, 2025). Together, these developments demand a fresh look at whether all of California's schools can meet 21st century needs and what role state policy could play in ensuring that all schools can meet those challenges.

This report proceeds as follows: Section 2 examines the demographic and climate pressures now reshaping the demands on K-12 facilities. Section 3 explains the structure of California's facility finance system. Section 4 presents our analysis of the size and distribution of facility spending over the

past two decades. Section 5 summarizes the limited amount of data collection on facility quality. Section 6 discusses the implications of our findings.

21st Century Demands on School Facilities

Four developments are reshaping the demands on California's school buildings. First, the expansion of universal transitional kindergarten (TK), fully phased in as of 2025-26, requires classroom environments specifically designed for younger children, including in-classroom restrooms, smaller class sizes, and distinct outdoor play areas. Second, statewide enrollment has declined by over 550,000 students since its 2004-05 peak, with the steepest losses in rural and small-town districts and the strongest growth in lower-wealth inland communities; these divergent trajectories create distinct facility challenges on both ends. Third, California's expanded focus on rethinking secondary education—including Career Technical Education (CTE)—requires specialized lab space, equipment, and design that traditional classrooms cannot provide. Finally, the escalating frequency of wildfires, extreme heat events, flooding, and power shutoffs is disrupting schools at a scale essentially absent a decade ago—forcing closures, degrading indoor air quality, and in the most severe cases causing direct structural damage.

How Facilities Impact Students

Understanding these trends—and the extent to which districts can adapt to them—matters because facility conditions impact student outcomes. A growing body of research has reinforced that the physical condition of school buildings has measurable effects on student learning and engagement. Biasi, Lafortune, and Schönholzer (2024) examine the impact of bond elections on test scores in 29 states and find that investments in socio-economically disadvantaged districts in particular have significant effects on reducing achievement gaps. Investments in infrastructure upgrades such as HVAC have a particularly strong relationship with positive outcomes. Lafortune and Schönholzer (2022) study the effects of the wave of new school construction by Los Angeles Unified School District in the early 2000s, and find that students attending newly constructed schools had improved test scores and attendance, again particularly for investments in building systems. Coronado et al. document a broader

set of pathways through which facility quality shapes engagement and learning, including the role of natural lighting, classroom design, and building age (Coronado et al., 2021). Findings that link capital investments to positive effects on achievement have held across large capital renewal projects in individual urban districts (see e.g., Hashim et al., 2018) and statewide studies (see e.g., Conlin & Thompson, 2017).

Indoor environmental quality—particularly thermal comfort and air quality—has emerged as an especially important mechanism by which facility conditions impact learning. Park et al. (Park et al., 2020), in a landmark study linking 10 million PSAT scores to daily temperature data, find that each 1°F increase in temperature reduces learning by roughly one percent, and that adequate air conditioning reduces this effect. Zhang, Chen, and Zhang (2024) corroborate these findings cross-nationally, documenting significant math score declines when students are exposed to temperatures above 32°C (89.6°F). Postell et al. (2025) extend this work to lower-stakes assessments and find that even moderate heat on test days depresses performance, particularly in schools without adequate cooling. Sadrizadeh et al. (2022) document links between poor ventilation, elevated pollutant levels, and reduced cognitive function. A recent sensor study by Botana Martinez et al. (Botana Martinez et al., 2025) reveals that temperature variation within a single school building can reach as much as 14°C (57.2°F) between classrooms, suggesting that aggregate facility assessments can mask severe inequities in student-level exposure.

In some cases, the most fundamental mechanism linking facility quality to educational outcomes is whether a school can remain open at all. Miller and Hui (2022) find that even short closures (1-5 days) in California have statistically significant negative effects on school-level academic performance. This finding aligns with earlier work by Marcotte and Hemelt (2008) on unscheduled closures. The Government Accountability Office (2022) finds that districts in socially vulnerable communities face compounded recovery challenges after natural disasters—slower federal disaster reimbursement, weaker insurance coverage, and less administrative capacity—creating a feedback loop in which the most climate-exposed districts are systematically least able to restore facilities and instructional continuity.

Taken together, this evidence base provides two reference points relevant to the analysis that follows. First, facility conditions have well-documented effects on student outcomes, but those effects are context-dependent: the strongest evidence comes from disadvantaged settings and from specific features—particularly HVAC, ventilation, and basic infrastructure—that directly alter the learning environment. This means the distribution of facility quality across districts is not merely a matter of physical equity but a direct determinant of educational opportunity. Second, climate change is rapidly expanding the set of facility conditions that matter for learning, as building resilience to heat, wildfire smoke, flooding, and power disruptions becomes a prerequisite for maintaining instructional continuity. The Biasi et al. (2024) finding that high-impact facility categories disproportionately benefit districts with concentrations of disadvantaged students strengthens the case that how facility funding is distributed across districts has measurable consequences for educational equity. Beach et al. (2026) find that districts that narrowly passed G.O. bond measures experienced increases in student test scores 4-6 years after bond authorization, compared to districts whose measures narrowly failed. Observed gains were higher in low-income districts and for mathematics and could not be explained by shifts in attendance or enrollment.

California's Changing Student Population

Patterns of enrollment change

California's public K-12 enrollment reached its peak of 6.25 million students in 2005 and has since fallen by roughly 550,000, and is projected to decline by a similar number in the next decade (Figure 1).[1] Enrollment change has not been uniform: statewide, just over half of districts have lost more than 5 percent of their enrollment since 1998, with the steepest losses concentrated in rural and small-town districts—particularly in the Sierra Nevada, the North Coast, and far Northern California, where more than 58 percent of districts have declined since 1998. Urban districts are more evenly split, with nearly as many growing as shrinking, reflecting population redistribution within metropolitan areas rather than a simple urban-to-suburban shift.

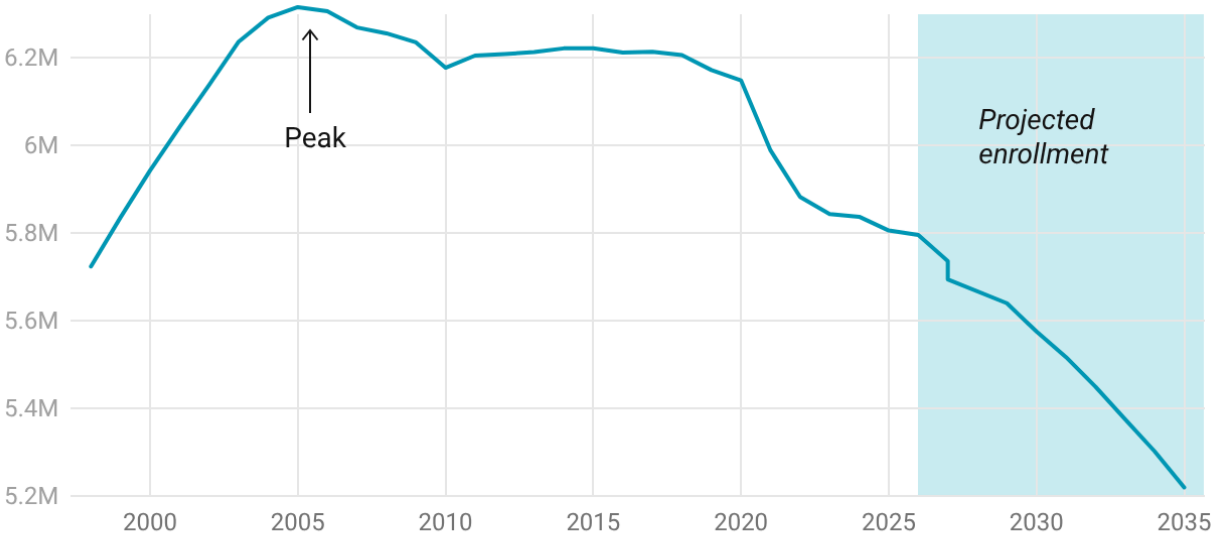
[1] All historic enrollment data is from the California Department of Education; projections are from the Department of Finance; see technical appendix for details.

The relationship between local property wealth and enrollment trajectory is especially striking: the wealthiest 20 percent of districts have seen median enrollment decline of 25 percent since 1998, while the poorest districts have gained a median of 15 percent (Figure 2), driven by growth in Inland California and the Central Valley. Rapidly growing districts are more Hispanic (median 47% versus 25%), have lower median assessed value (~$869K versus $3.4M per pupil), and lower shares of white students (30% versus 54%) than sharply declining districts, which reflect rural mountain communities aging out and losing families and affluent urban districts (e.g. San Francisco and Oakland).

These divergent trends have direct consequences for facility management. Declining enrollment districts must maintain aging building stock for a shrinking student population, driving up per-pupil maintenance and operations (M&O) costs even as their enrollment-based revenue declines. Since M&O spending typically comes out of a district's general fund, deteriorating facility quality has a direct fiscal impact on education operations. Fixed costs for heating, cooling, custodial services, and deferred maintenance do not scale down proportionally when buildings are serving fewer students. Ultimately, under-maintained buildings accumulate higher capital improvement deficits, and previous research has found that districts lacking capital funds end up diverting operating dollars to emergency facility repairs, effectively raising their M&O burden (Vincent & Jain, 2015). Rapidly growing lower-wealth districts face a different but equally urgent challenge—the need to add space or facilities to house new students, but a lower tax base from which to fund such expansions.

Together, these trends suggest that a state facilities policy framework developed during a time of rapid enrollment growth needs to be revisited. Historically, SFP bond allocations have emphasized new construction (including overcrowding relief programs which served a similar purpose) reflecting the priorities of an era when districts were absorbing hundreds of thousands of new students. Proposition 2 marks a partial shift, directing a larger share of funding toward modernization than any prior bond, but the broader policy framework has yet to fully reckon with a new reality of declining enrollment. California's facilities policy needs to be responsive to that reality—including adapting existing facilities for new purposes rather than building for growth that is no longer coming.

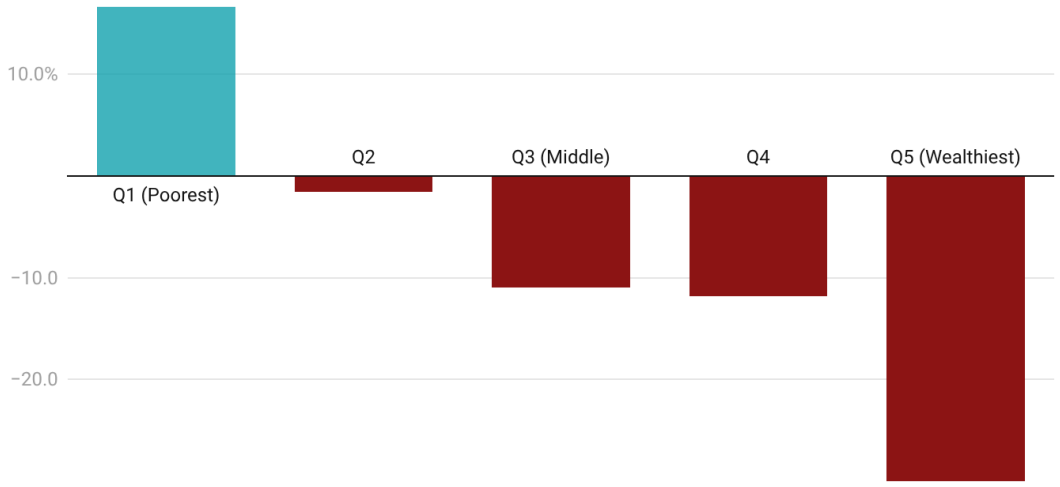
Figure 1. California public school K-12 enrollment (1998-2035)



Source: California Department of Education / California Department of Finance • Created with Datawrapper

The statewide enrollment decline is not evenly distributed. Figure 2 shows that the poorest districts—those in the bottom quintile of assessed property value per pupil—experienced median enrollment growth of roughly 13% over this period, while districts in the wealthiest quintile saw a median decline of nearly 27%. This inverse relationship has significant implications for facility policy: the districts best positioned to fund facilities locally are largely those facing declining enrollment, while those with the greatest enrollment pressure have the least local fiscal capacity.

Figure 2. Median enrollment change by quintile of local property wealth (1998-2025)



Quintiles are equal numbers of districts based on assessed property value per student in 2024

Source: California Department of Education / Eastshore Consulting • Created with Datawrapper

Transitional kindergarten (TK) growth

As of 2025-26, all children who turn 4 years old by September 1 are eligible for TK; over the span of four years, California has added a full extra grade (which has partially offset some of the enrollment decline described above).[2] California's phased expansion of universal TK requires classroom environments specifically designed for younger children: in-classroom restrooms, developmentally appropriate spaces, smaller class size caps, and separate outdoor play areas (Standards for Development of Plans for the Design and Construction of School Facilities, n.d.). Districts are required to offer TK but have flexibility in which schools provide it; when facility constraints prevent districts from offering TK at all school sites, families routinely decline seats at distant schools rather than navigate multiple transitions before kindergarten, effectively suppressing enrollment (Stavely & Thornton, 2024). Like kindergarten, TK enrollment is not mandatory for California children, so projecting enrollment has been one challenge for districts. The expansion of TK has been uneven within and across districts—not all districts have been able to meet local TK demand, due to either staff or

[2] Note that 25% of 4-year-olds were already eligible for TK before this phase-in.

space constraints; there is not a clear statewide effort to identify barriers to full implementation. The most recent year of enrollment data is 2024-25, the year before universal eligibility; TK enrollment statewide averaged below 75% of kindergarten enrollment. There are some demographic differences: districts with TK enrollment below the expected rate in 2023-24 and 2024-25 had higher percentages of unduplicated and Hispanic students than other districts, and lower assessed value per pupil.

California's TK expansion has driven substantial enrollment growth; over 150,000 students enrolled statewide in 2023-24, up from 115,000 the prior year. But take-up rates have fluctuated, from a pre-expansion peak of 83% to 70% in 2023-24, leaving an estimated 74,000 eligible children unenrolled (Hill et al., 2025). Researchers have identified facilities as a central obstacle to expansion. Although 88% of districts reported having sufficient classroom space to meet projected TK enrollment by full expansion in 2025-26 (up from 82% in 2022-23), facilities remained a top-cited challenge in open-ended survey responses, with LEAs flagging difficulties developing age-appropriate classroom spaces, bathrooms for young children close to classrooms, outdoor learning spaces, and play structures (V. Wang et al., 2025). The districts that projected a shortage of TK space reported needing 488 additional classrooms—about half of the shortfall projected in surveys the prior year, but a persistent gap. These constraints reflect the demands of TK: state standards require new TK classrooms to be at least 1,350 sq ft and include age-appropriate bathrooms, compared to just 960 sq ft for grades 1-12, meaning TK cannot simply repurpose typical elementary classrooms without costly renovation. These space constraints directly suppress TK enrollment: when TK is not offered at a child's neighborhood school, families routinely decline seats rather than face multiple transitions before kindergarten, as documented in Oakland Unified, San Juan Unified, and other districts (Stavely & Thornton, 2024).

There has been some dedicated state funding for TK facilities: in 2018 the legislature appropriated $100 million in General Fund dollars for the creation of full-day kindergarten facilities (Education Finance: Education Omnibus Trailer Bill, 2018). The law states that "priority for grants shall be given" to districts that meet financial hardship criteria or that serve a high proportion of FRPM students. In 2021 eligibility was expanded to include TK and preschool and appropriated an additional $490 million (Education Finance: Education Omnibus Budget Trailer Bill, 2021). Appropriations ultimately totalled $687.2 million, of which $34.1 remains (a fifth round of $31.6 million was approved

by the SAB in January 2026). To qualify, districts must demonstrate school board approval to operate a TK program and lack of adequate facilities relative to the state requirements.

The original TK facilities program included explicit prioritization for districts meeting financial hardship criteria or serving high proportions of FRPM-eligible students. Changes to the SFP made by Proposition 2 in 2024 permit districts to use SFP funds for TK retrofitting or new classrooms, but folding TK into the general SFP means that this prioritization language no longer applies; TK facility funding is now subject to the same application and matching requirements as other SFP projects. There has been no additional earmarked funding for TK facilities, nor any statewide assessment of the remaining gaps between current facility conditions and TK classroom standards or of which districts face the largest unmet needs. TK was created in part to address the gap in kindergarten preparation between students whose families could afford preschool and those who could not. Without knowing whether facility constraints are preventing lower-wealth districts from offering TK—or from offering it in adequate spaces—the state cannot assess whether these constraints are reproducing the very inequities the program was designed to address.

Redesigning secondary education

There has been a growing focus on redesigning secondary education, driven by many factors beyond the scope of this report, including shifts in pedagogy, evidence that hands-on learning models increase student engagement and long-term outcomes, and the desire to connect students with potential career pathways while still in high school. This focus is particularly important for students who are less likely to enroll directly in a four-year college—those for whom strong CTE pathways and sector-aligned learning may be the most consequential part of their high school experience.

California has signaled a clear state interest in supporting this transition. The Golden State Pathways Program funds districts to build integrated career pathway programs spanning grades 9 to 14. The $10 million Secondary School Redesign Pilot Program, administered by the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), funds a range of redesign models aimed at moving California's secondary schools away from "factory-model" institutions toward rich, student-centered learning environments—including pathways and internships that help prepare students for careers and school

structures that redesign schedules and staffing (California Department of Education, 2025). Proposition 2 dedicated $600 million to the Career Technical Education Facilities Program (CTEFP), discussed in Section 3B.

What these investments share is an implicit assumption that schools have the physical capacity to participate. CTE pathways in health sciences, advanced manufacturing, agriculture, and construction require specialized facilities—lab space, industrial ventilation, equipment storage, and room configurations that bear little resemblance to a standard classroom. New construction has historically dominated CTEFP apportionments, reflecting the fact that CTE programs often cannot be accommodated by retrofitting existing classrooms. The Secondary School Redesign Pilot selected fourteen networks spanning nearly 70 districts; the CTEFP is a competitive grant program with a 50/50 local match requirement. In both cases, the districts best positioned to benefit are those that already have capital funds, bond capacity, and administrative infrastructure to navigate the application process. The equity concern is not simply that some schools lack modern CTE facilities—it is that the state's own redesign agenda will advance unevenly along lines that track existing wealth, reproducing a pattern documented throughout this report.

A 2023 analysis documented substantial variation across districts in students' access to CTE pathways, citing course availability and scheduling constraints as key factors (Boochever et al., 2023). The facility dimension of that access gap—whether districts, particularly lower-wealth ones, have the physical infrastructure to offer meaningful CTE programs—remains essentially undocumented. There is no statewide inventory of high school CTE facility adequacy, and no research on whether competitive grant programs like the CTEFP channel resources equitably. Understanding which high schools have the physical capacity to support new learning models—and which do not—is important for understanding the equity implications of California's secondary school redesign agenda. The state already requires districts to consult their CTE advisory committees and document CTE accommodation in all new high school construction applications (School Facilities Funding Process: Career Technical Education Facilities, 2007), which means some facility-level data on CTE capacity exists within OPSC's records—but it has not been compiled or analyzed systematically. Connecting this information with existing data on student access to CTE coursework and pathway completion rates could help identify

where facility constraints are binding—that is, where students lack access to CTE programs because of facility constraints. Such an analysis could provide a basis for structuring future CTEFP funding rounds to direct resources toward the districts where facility gaps are most acute, rather than relying on a competitive process that rewards application capacity.

Climate Change and School Facilities

California's school facilities face a growing range of climate-related stresses that affect both the physical condition of buildings and the day-to-day experience of students: higher average temperatures and periods of extreme heat, increased risk of floods, more severe wildfires, and coastal flooding and erosion (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2022). Extreme heat is among the most immediate concerns: a large share of California school buildings—particularly older ones in inland communities—lack adequate air conditioning, and as temperatures rise, both classrooms and outdoor spaces become unsafe for learning and physical activity. California's SB 1248 (passed in 2024) acknowledged this directly by restricting outdoor physical activity at schools above certain heat thresholds, but the underlying infrastructure challenge—costly HVAC upgrades and shading for exposed schoolyards—remains largely unaddressed in many districts (Pupil Health: Extreme Weather Conditions: Physical Activity, 2024).

Wildfires and wildfire smoke present a related challenge, forcing school closures across wide regions even when fires are not nearby, degrading air quality for students with asthma and other respiratory conditions, and in the most severe cases causing direct structural damage that removes classrooms from use for months or years. The inability to use outdoor spaces and ventilation during episodes of poor outdoor air quality may also compound heat impacts. The Los Angeles fires in January 2025 showed how quickly wildfire can lead to extended, multi-school closures affecting tens of thousands of students (EdTrust & undauntedK12, 2025). Flooding from both coastal sea-level rise and increasingly intense precipitation events poses risks to schools in low-lying areas, threatening building foundations, mechanical systems, and site accessibility (Healthy Schools Network, 2025; Pew Charitable Trusts, 2017).

These hazards do not occur in isolation: a single weather event can simultaneously trigger evacuation orders, power outages, transportation failures, and air quality emergencies, creating cascading disruptions that are harder to recover from than any single hazard alone.

Climate Hazards: Distribution and Exposure

Geographically, these risks are unevenly distributed across the state: extreme heat falls hardest on inland valley communities, wildfire smoke affects foothill and rural districts most acutely, and coastal flooding concentrates risk among Bay Area and Southern California districts. This diversity of climate exposure means that no single adaptation strategy fits all districts. The wildfire impacts concentrate heavily in the wildland-urban interface—a belt from Sonoma/Marin counties in the North Bay through the Sierra foothill counties and down through Los Angeles / Ventura / San Diego counties. Extreme heat risk concentrates in the Central Valley and Inland Empire.

Using school-level hazard data covering five climate threats—extreme heat, wildfire, flooding, sea level rise, and extreme precipitation—we constructed district-level composite risk scores (California School Hazards Database, see methods for details). When weighted by enrollment, the counties facing the highest composite climate risk are Shasta (9.14), Nevada (8.87), Calaveras (8.75), Imperial (8.69), and Tuolumne (8.66). These counties fall into two distinct climate profiles: inland mountain/foothill counties where wildfire is the dominant threat (Shasta, Nevada, Calaveras, Tuolumne), and desert counties where extreme heat drives the risk (Imperial).

Extreme heat scores are heavily concentrated: 80 percent of districts score 2.0 or below, with a statewide median of 1.0. Twenty-three districts—representing over 101,000 students—score above 4.0 on the 5-point heat scale. These high-heat districts are concentrated in just two counties: Riverside (65,500 students across 4 districts, including Coachella Valley Unified and Desert Sands Unified) and Imperial (34,900 students across all 16 of the county's districts). Researchers at UCLA find that inland, low-income, and majority-minority districts in California face the largest gaps in cooling infrastructure and the greatest unmet need for facility upgrades to achieve heat-resilient standards (UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation, 2023).

Wildfire risk is more broadly distributed than heat, with a statewide median of 2.7 and roughly one in five districts scoring above 3.0. Twenty-eight districts, serving approximately 27,700 students, score above 4.0. Unlike the geographic concentration of heat risk, high-wildfire districts are spread across the state's mountain and foothill regions: San Diego County leads with 14,100 students in 6 high-risk districts, followed by Placer (4,500 students), San Bernardino (2,900), and El Dorado (2,400). The five highest-scoring wildfire districts are all small, rural districts, in Trinity, Shasta, Placer, and Siskiyou counties.

Heat and wildfire risk do not overlap at the extremes: no district in the state scores above 4.0 on both heat and wildfire. This reflects the geographic separation of California's climate zones: desert and Central Valley regions that drive extreme heat are distinct from the mountain and coastal-inland zones where wildfire risk is highest. For facilities planning purposes, this means that districts can generally anticipate one dominant climate threat rather than compounding extremes, though many districts face moderate risk across multiple hazard types.

In total, approximately 129,000 students attend schools in districts with extreme exposure (scoring above 4.0) to either heat or wildfire. The distribution of this exposure is strikingly unequal:

- Extreme heat affects far more students (101,000) than wildfire (28,000), driven by the large enrollment in Riverside and Imperial County districts.
- Wildfire risk affects more districts (28 vs. 23) but smaller ones, as high-fire-risk districts tend to be rural.
- Only San Bernardino County has districts scoring above 4.0 on both hazard types (though in different districts—heat-exposed districts in the desert east, wildfire-exposed districts in the mountain west).

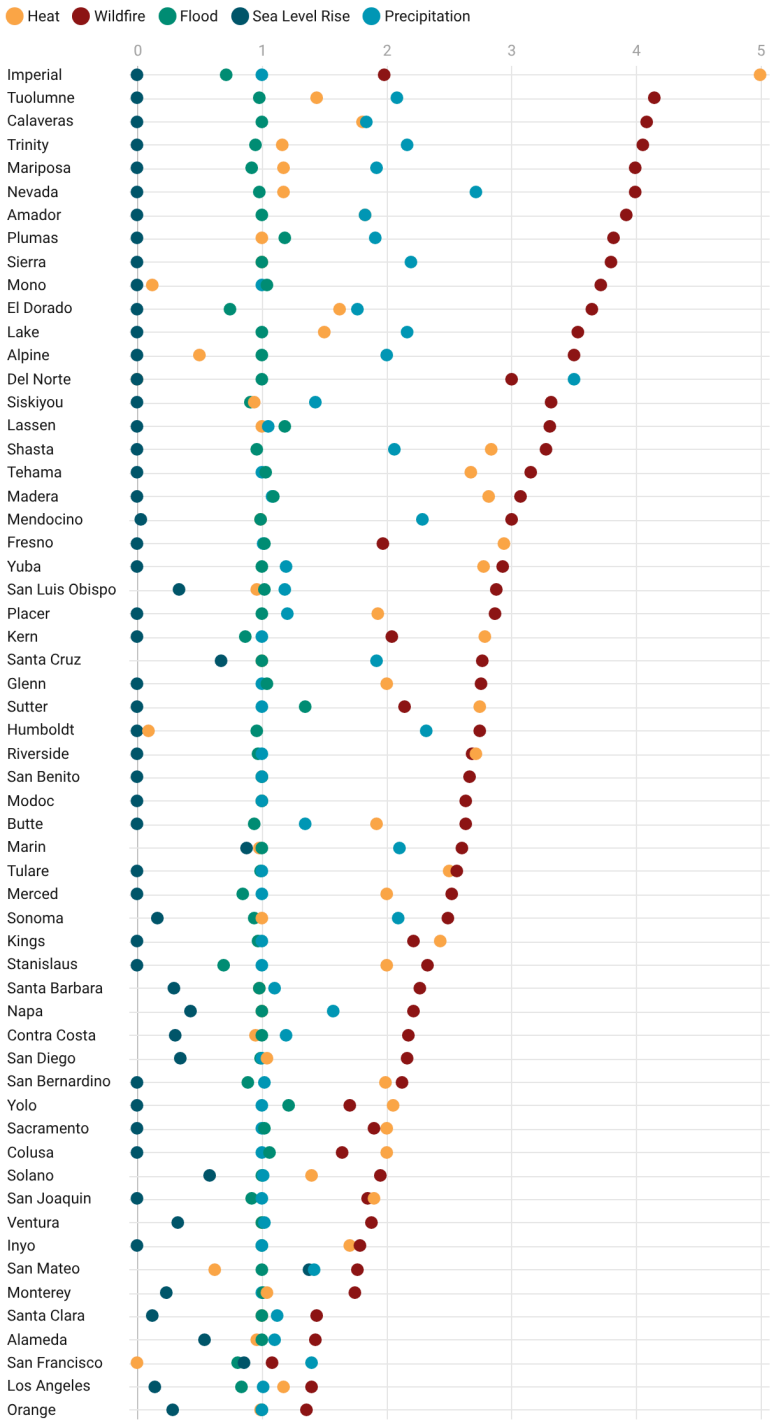
Figure 4 shows county-level median scores across all five hazard types, illustrating how climate risk profiles differ considerably by geography. Desert counties in the south and east score highest on heat; foothill and mountain communities face the greatest wildfire exposure; coastal counties score higher on flood and sea level rise. Few counties face extreme scores across multiple hazard types simultaneously, but many face moderate exposure to two or more.

Figure 3. Heat, wildfire, and precipitation scores by county

County	Max heat	Max wildfire	Mean heat	Mean wildfire	Mean precip.
Shasta	3.00	5.00	2.84	3.28	2.06
Nevada	1.50	4.00	1.17	4.00	2.72
Calaveras	2.00	4.75	1.81	4.09	1.84
Imperial	5.00	2.00	5.00	1.98	1.00
Tuolumne	2.00	5.00	1.44	4.15	2.08
Amador	1.83	3.92	1.83	3.92	1.83
Trinity	2.00	5.00	1.16	4.06	2.17
Lake	2.00	4.00	1.50	3.53	2.17
Madera	3.00	4.20	2.82	3.07	1.08
Sierra	1.00	3.80	1.00	3.80	2.20
Mariposa	1.17	4.00	1.17	4.00	1.92
Plumas	1.00	3.82	1.00	3.82	1.91
Yuba	3.00	3.50	2.78	2.93	1.19
Tehama	3.00	4.00	2.68	3.16	1.00
El Dorado	2.00	5.00	1.62	3.65	1.77
Marin	1.00	3.00	0.98	2.60	2.10
Del Norte	0.00	3.00	0.00	3.00	3.50
Riverside	5.00	4.00	2.72	2.69	1.00
Santa Cruz	1.00	4.00	1.00	2.77	1.92
Mendocino	1.06	3.06	0.99	3.00	2.29
Sutter	3.00	3.00	2.75	2.14	1.00
Tulare	3.00	4.00	2.50	2.56	1.00
Placer	2.69	5.00	1.93	2.87	1.20
Alpine	0.50	3.50	0.50	3.50	2.00
Fresno	3.00	4.00	2.94	1.97	1.01
Butte	2.20	4.00	1.92	2.64	1.35
Glenn	2.00	4.00	2.00	2.76	1.00
Kern	4.00	5.00	2.79	2.04	1.00
Sonoma	1.00	4.00	1.00	2.49	2.09
Kings	3.00	3.00	2.43	2.22	1.00
Siskiyou	2.00	5.00	0.94	3.32	1.43
Lassen	1.00	4.00	1.00	3.31	1.05
Merced	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.52	1.00
San Luis Obispo	2.00	3.50	0.96	2.88	1.18
Napa	1.00	4.00	1.00	2.22	1.57
San Mateo	1.00	3.00	0.62	1.77	1.42
Humboldt	1.00	4.00	0.09	2.75	2.32
San Bernardino	5.00	5.00	1.99	2.12	1.02
Stanislaus	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.33	1.00
Yolo	2.67	3.00	2.05	1.70	1.00
Solano	2.00	2.78	1.40	1.95	1.01
Sacramento	2.00	3.00	2.00	1.90	1.00
Mono	0.50	4.00	0.12	3.72	1.00
Colusa	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.64	1.00
San Joaquin	2.00	3.00	1.90	1.85	1.00
San Benito	2.00	4.00	1.00	2.67	1.00
Modoc	1.00	3.00	1.00	2.64	1.00
Santa Barbara	1.00	3.00	0.98	2.27	1.10
Contra Costa	1.60	3.20	0.95	2.18	1.19
San Diego	3.50	5.00	1.04	2.17	1.00
Inyo	4.00	2.33	1.70	1.79	1.00
Ventura	1.00	3.12	1.00	1.88	1.02
Alameda	2.00	3.00	0.96	1.43	1.10
Monterey	2.00	4.00	1.04	1.75	1.00
Santa Clara	1.00	4.00	1.00	1.44	1.12
Orange	1.00	3.00	0.99	1.36	1.00
Los Angeles	3.00	4.00	1.17	1.40	1.01
San Francisco	0.00	1.08	0.00	1.08	1.40

Source: California School Climate Hazards • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 4. Median climate hazard scores by county



Represents county's mean score for each climate hazard

Source: California Schools Climate Hazards • Created with Datawrapper

Climate impacts on learning time

Fortunately, there is a statewide data source that allows us to assess how climate change is affecting districts in the most concrete way—by forcing them to send students home. The California Department of Education (CDE) requires districts to submit a J-13A attendance waiver when schools close due to emergencies. We obtained J-13A records covering school years 2015–16 through 2024-25 and categorized each record's free-text emergency description into standardized types. The dataset contains 4,830 closure records spanning 845 unique districts, affecting a cumulative 19,732 school-sites and totaling approximately 10,932 emergency days of lost instructional time.

Climate and weather events account for 79.3 percent of all emergency closure records (3,831 of 4,830), and 87.8 percent of total emergency days (9,593 of 10,932). Non-climate emergencies—including threats and violence, infrastructure failures, illness outbreaks, and COVID—represent 19.7 percent of records. Seismic events account for less than 1 percent.

Figure 5. Five leading climate-related closure categories

Category	Records	Schools Affected	Emergency Days
Wildfire	1,537	7,924	5,005
Storm/Flooding	697	3,995	1,245
Inclement Weather (Unspecified)	745	2,421	1,476
Power Shutoff (PSPS)	464	1,444	1,122
Snow/Ice/Freeze	192	556	399

Source: California Department of Education J-13A data from 2016-2026, analyzed by author.
Created with Datawrapper

Wildfire alone accounts for nearly a third of all records and roughly half of all emergency days in the dataset. When smoke and air quality closures (88 records, 364 schools) are combined with wildfire, fire-related disruptions represent the single largest source of instructional time loss.

Across the dataset, 26% of submissions involve power disruption of some kind—either utility-initiated Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS) or general power outages. This underscores the vulnerability of school operations to the state's energy infrastructure, whether triggered by climate events, aging grid infrastructure, or both. Power shutoffs represent an indirect but significant pathway through which climate risk translates into educational disruption.

Even over the past ten years the volatility and increase in climate disasters is evident. Each year is dominated by a distinct type of climate disruption, reflecting California's rotating hazard landscape:

2015-16 and 2016-17: Early baselines. The J-13A dataset begins with relatively modest numbers (204 and 472 records respectively), with predominantly storms and inclement weather.

2017-18: The fire siege. Wildfire dominated with 377 closure records affecting 1,702 schools and generating 1,398 emergency days—driven by the Thomas Fire, the Wine Country fires, and other major blazes in the fall and winter of 2017. An additional 40 smoke/air quality closures affected 250 schools. This was the first year the data captured climate disruption at a statewide scale.

2018-19: Camp and Woolsey fires; PSPS emerges. Wildfire records peaked at 504, affecting 2,493 schools—driven by the Camp and Woolsey fires in November 2018. Notably, Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS)—utility-initiated preemptive blackouts to reduce wildfire ignition risk—appeared in the data for the first time in a small number of records, foreshadowing the massive PSPS disruptions to come.

2019-20: Proliferating PSPS. Power shutoffs surged to 338 records affecting 1,023 schools with 854 emergency days, making PSPS the single largest closure category that year. Wildfire remained significant (184 records, 786 schools). PSPS closures represent a distinctive form of climate disruption—not a direct weather event but a regional infrastructure response to wildfire risk that itself causes widespread educational disruption. PSPS frequency increases with red flag events (low humidity, high wind events that elevate fire risk, such as the event preceding the

January 2025 Los Angeles fires), and have escalated as utility companies face increased scrutiny and liability.

2020-21 and 2021-22: A brief lull. Total records dropped and there was no single dominant disaster type, although PSPS events continued and wildfire persisted at moderate levels.

2022-23: Atmospheric rivers and flooding. Storms and flooding surged to 220 records (1,104 schools), while inclement weather added another 195 records (584 schools). Together, precipitation-driven closures dominated, reflecting the historic atmospheric river events that struck California in early 2023.

2023-24: Storms continue. Storm/flooding remained the leading category (136 records, 1,958 schools), accompanied by widespread inclement weather closures. This year saw the largest number of schools affected in any single category-year combination for storms.

2024-25 (partial): Fire returns. The data for 2024-25 are already dominated by wildfire (179 records, 1,901 schools), driven by the January 2025 Los Angeles fire events. Smoke/air quality closures (42 records) and PSPS events (43 records) also returned in force.

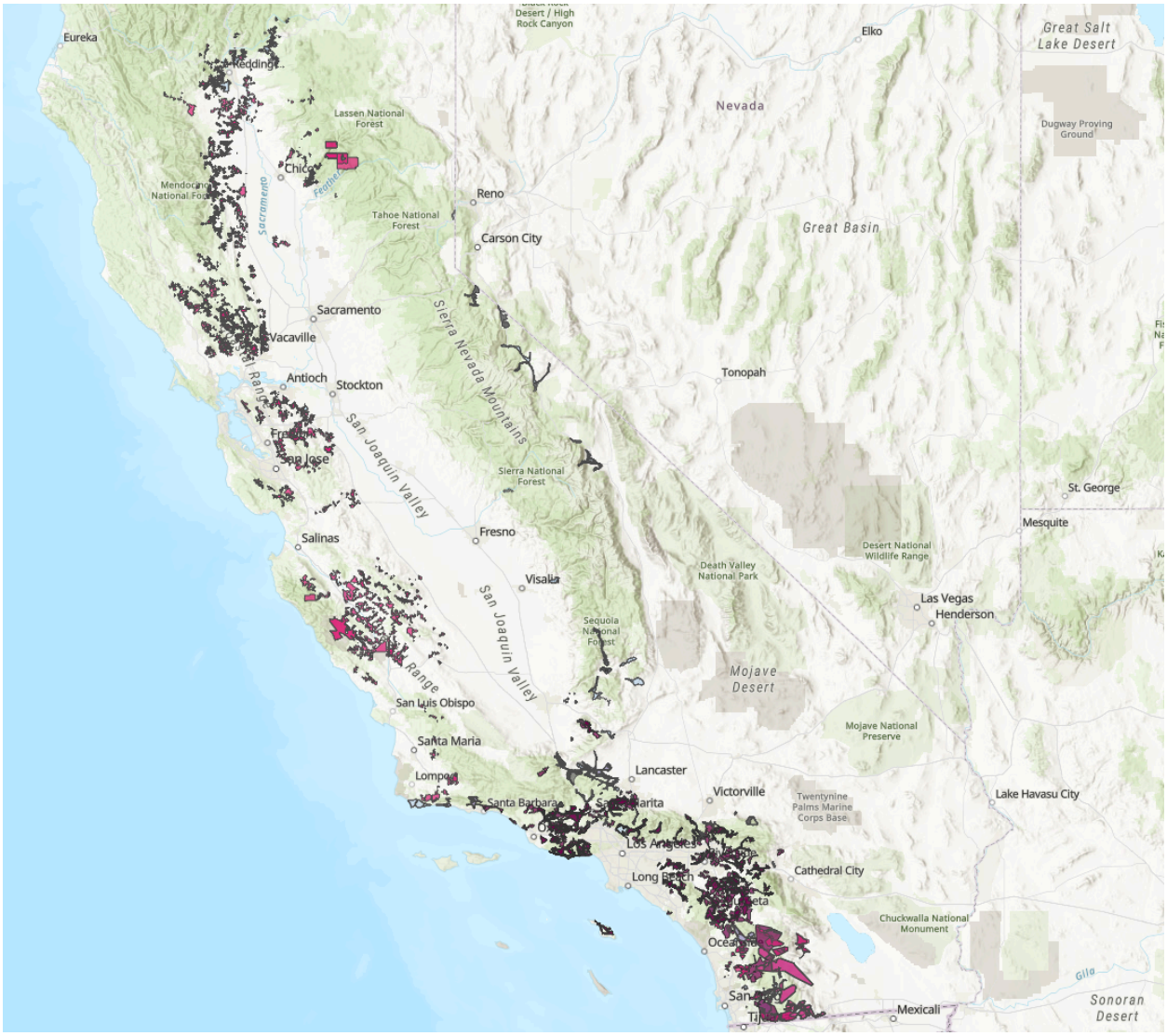
While year-to-year totals fluctuate with the severity of individual disaster seasons, the overall trajectory shows climate-related school closures operating at a scale that was essentially absent from California's educational landscape a decade ago. The data reveal:

- In any given year from 2016-17 onward, between 156 and 467 districts filed J-13A requests (representing roughly 17 to 50 percent of California's 936 school districts).
- Peak years (2017-18 and 2018-19) saw 2,579 and 3,314 school-sites affected, respectively.
- Even in "quieter" years, hundreds of schools still experienced emergency closures.
- In 2023-24 there were 3,404 schools affected despite only 406 total records, suggesting fewer, larger-scale events.

While wildfire, storms, and PSPS events dominate the current data, two categories bear watching for future growth. Extreme heat closures remain rare (15 records total), but this likely reflects

heat's status as a slow-building hazard that does not always trigger formal school closures—even as research documents significant impacts on learning and student health. Smoke and air quality closures occurred in concentrated bursts during major fire years (2017-18 and 2024-25), suggesting these events may intensify as wildfire seasons lengthen.

Figure 6. Distribution of Public Safety Power Shutoffs since October 2021



Source: California Public Utilities Commission (2026)

The map shows that PSPS events are heavily concentrated in foothill and coastal range communities with the greatest wildfire risk—the Sierra Nevada foothills, the coastal ranges of Northern California, and parts of Southern California. These are often the same communities already facing elevated wildfire smoke closure rates.

It is important to emphasize that emergency closures reflect not just climate risk but the capacity of an individual school or district to manage that risk. Schools with inadequate air conditioning, for example, may be forced to send children home when a neighboring school with upgraded systems can remain open. Schools in areas with broad infrastructure challenges (poorly maintained roads or sewer systems) will be more likely to have to close when routes to school become impassable from flooding or mudslides. The J-13A reporting also does not reflect limitations on outdoor activities such as recess, P.E., or school sports, or the many times that students must eat lunch in uncomfortably cramped lunchrooms or school hallways when weather makes eating outside unsafe.

Targeted investments for climate resilience

The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) provided an early and authoritative framing of these challenges in its 2022 report, *Climate Change Impacts Across California: K-12 Education*. The LAO identified five major climate hazards facing schools—extreme heat, drought, flooding, wildfire, and coastal erosion—and documented a dramatic escalation in wildfire-related closures, from an average of roughly 70 schools per year between 2008-09 and 2016-17 to more than 1,600 schools annually from 2017-18 through 2019-20, affecting approximately 950,000 students per year in the latter period. The report emphasized that climate impacts would impose both predictable costs (higher utility bills, facility modifications, technology for remote learning) and unpredictable ones (relocating schools, emergency repairs, post-disaster services), and that lower-income families and districts with smaller budgets would be disproportionately affected due to fewer resources to mitigate disruptions. The LAO raised several questions for the Legislature that remain largely unanswered: whether the state should fund statewide facility risk assessments, reserve a portion of future school facility bonds for climate resilience projects, update the SFP and facility regulations to incorporate climate impacts, and provide additional support to districts with fewer resources to prepare and respond. Notably, the LAO also flagged the absence of

a statewide school facility inventory as a barrier to identifying which sites face the greatest climate risk—a data gap that, as Section 5 of this report documents, persists today (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2022).

State funding relevant to these challenges has primarily focused on HVAC upgrades, driven largely by heightened attention to indoor air quality during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the federal level, Congress appropriated roughly $190 billion in ESSER funds nationally; California received about $20 billion, of which approximately 10 percent went to facilities and about half of that to HVAC upgrades. These funds were largely spent by late 2024.

In 2020, California adopted the California Schools Healthy Air, Plumbing, and Efficiency Program (CalSHAPE) to provide about $1 billion in funding for ventilation (focused on HVAC and CO_2 monitors) and plumbing upgrades. CalSHAPE was designed to be a large-scale, state-level complement to federal ESSER and ARP facility investments, with a focus on HVAC system assessment, repair, and upgrade across California's K-12 schools. However, the program was closed to applications in 2024, despite not allocating all its funds, and all spending must be completed by 2026. There have been legislative proposals aimed at giving districts access to more CalSHAPE funds and at shaping how the program's remaining dollars are handled, most notably AB 832 in 2025, but as of 2026, the program's statutory authority has not been extended, and unspent funds are scheduled to be returned to ratepayers.

California's facility funding system does not include a dedicated stream for climate resilience, and the SFP contains no criteria for prioritizing districts based on climate vulnerability. Proposition 2 made some progress: districts receiving funding must now have an approved district facilities master plan, and the bond explicitly added outdoor greening, shade structures, and certain energy-related investments as eligible uses—uses that had previously been ambiguous or excluded from SFP reimbursement.

Schools as sites of climate resilience

Finally, the current framing of climate and facilities tends to focus narrowly on protecting school buildings from climate impacts. But schools are more than buildings—they are the most widely

distributed public infrastructure in the state, located in virtually every community, and already serve informally as gathering points during emergencies. When wildfires, extreme heat events, or power shutoffs strike, schools are often where families turn for shelter, cooling, clean air, and information. The facility investments needed to protect instructional continuity—upgraded HVAC and air filtration, backup power systems, shade structures, thermal comfort—are the same investments that would enable schools to function reliably as community resilience hubs. Recognizing this dual role reframes the cost calculus: climate-resilient school facilities are not a new category of spending but the same modernization investments the state is already making, directed with climate awareness. This framing also connects to the enrollment trends discussed elsewhere in this report. Surplus space created by declining enrollment could be repurposed for community resilience functions—cooling centers, clean air rooms, emergency supply storage, mental health services—strengthening schools' role as neighborhood anchors while making productive use of underutilized facilities. Extending that logic to encompass the community resilience role of schools would be a natural and important next step.

District adaptations

These data demonstrate that climate disruption is no longer an occasional or localized phenomenon for California schools. It is a systemic, recurring feature of the educational landscape. Only a few of the newest school facilities across the state were designed and built in the era of these new environmental pressures. The new climate reality that these data reveal carries several implications for educational facility planning and policy:

1. Educational facility resilience affects instructional access. Nearly 10,000 emergency days of lost instruction over this period are directly attributable to climate and weather events. Buildings that can withstand extreme weather, maintain safe air quality, and operate during power disruptions protect not only physical safety but instructional continuity.

2. The hazard mix is diversifying. No single preparedness strategy is sufficient. Districts must contend with wildfire, flooding, extreme heat, poor air quality, and grid instability, often in overlapping sequences within the same school year.

3. PSPS closures highlight infrastructure interdependence. A school's ability to remain open in an environment of increasing environmental volatility is not just a matter of district planning, but dependent on statewide and regional energy infrastructure resilience. Districts in high fire-risk areas face compounding disruptions from both direct fire events and preemptive utility shutoffs.

4. Statewide planning is critical and lacking. The current effort to expand the state's extreme heat plan to include schools is important, but the veto of two bills that would have required a statewide climate plan for schools represents an unfortunate missed opportunity to mitigate both the educational and fiscal consequences of underinvesting in climate resilience before instruction is impacted. A statewide or regional strategy is especially necessary for ensuring the continuity of energy access for schools.

District climate planning

The absence of statewide climate planning for schools is mirrored by a corresponding gap at the local level. An exploratory analysis conducted by UC Berkeley and Ten Strands reviewed hundreds of publicly accessible district facilities master plans (FMPs) statewide and found that climate preparedness is largely absent from local planning (forthcoming). Only 264 of California's 936 school districts have a publicly accessible FMP, and just 108 have been adopted or updated within the last five years—the time frame that will be required under Proposition 2. We scored 208 plans on several metrics including climate risk planning, which received the lowest scores by a wide margin. Well over half the plans scored at only a minimal level, acknowledging climate change in passing without any substantive assessment or strategy, and an additional 14 percent made no mention of climate at all. Just one plan in the entire dataset achieved the highest score. Energy efficiency and outdoor greening scored somewhat better but remained inconsistent—most plans mentioned relevant projects without integrating them into a coherent strategy. Perhaps most tellingly, the analysis found little to no alignment between climate planning documented in FMPs and the actual implementation of climate mitigation measures by the same districts. The districts least likely to have FMPs at all—smaller, more rural districts with lower bonding capacity—are the same districts that face the greatest barriers to accessing state facility funding through the SFP.

Green schoolyards

One of the most well-documented strategies for climate adaptation is the development of "green schoolyards": removing heat-absorbing surface materials such as asphalt, planting trees, installing shade structures, and incorporating natural features that can mitigate stormwater runoff. Despite evidence that exposure to such amenities benefits student mental and physical health, very few districts have implemented them. Research by Green Schoolyards America found that 85 percent of California's K-12 public school grounds have less than 10 percent tree canopy coverage—and that on an 81-degree day, unshaded asphalt can reach 107 degrees, while asphalt shaded by trees registers roughly 30 degrees cooler. As extreme heat events intensify across the state, the character of school grounds has direct implications for whether students can safely occupy outdoor spaces during the school day. California has begun to mobilize around this: the California Schoolyard Forest System, launched in 2022 through a partnership between the California Department of Education, CAL FIRE, Green Schoolyards America, and Ten Strands, aims to achieve 30 percent canopy coverage on child-accessible school grounds statewide by 2030. CAL FIRE has provided planning and implementation grants for participating districts, with an explicit equity focus on heat-vulnerable communities.

In the absence of state coordination, districts are taking a range of approaches to manage climate impacts, including HVAC upgrades and air filtration improvements, emergency preparedness protocols, and backup power capacity. These efforts have proceeded without a dedicated state funding stream, without a statewide vulnerability assessment, and without any systematic analysis of whether lower-resourced districts can afford to implement them. The same structural inequities that shape access to capital funding generally are likely to shape climate adaptation capacity as well.

A recurring theme throughout this analysis is the absence of systematized data on climate impacts and risks to school facilities. The state has no statewide facility inventory, a gap the LAO flagged in 2022 as a barrier to identifying which school sites face the greatest climate risk. The FIT does not capture climate readiness, modernization needs, or energy efficiency. CalSHAPE funded the installation of CO2 monitors, but there is no ongoing monitoring requirement or statewide data system to collect or analyze the readings—the state bought hardware without building an information infrastructure. The J-13A data analyzed in this report is the best available proxy for understanding climate disruption

to schools, but it undercounts actual impacts by excluding limitations on outdoor activities, heat-related learning loss, and the many days when students attend school under degraded conditions rather than being sent home. And as the FMP analysis demonstrates, district-level planning rarely includes systematic climate risk data. California cannot build a climate resilience strategy for its schools without first building the data infrastructure to understand where the risks are greatest and which facilities are least prepared.

How California Funds School Facilities

Local Revenue Sources

General obligation bonds

School districts are the primary vehicle for local school facility finance in California, and their main tool is the voter-approved general obligation (GO) bond. GO bonds are *ad valorem* tax measures—the debt is repaid through a dedicated property tax levy applied to assessed property value within the district. Districts have a maximum bonding capacity set by statute, which represents the total amount of outstanding debt a district may carry: 1.25 percent of assessed property value for elementary and high school districts, and 2.5 percent for unified districts.

Two constitutional provisions govern how these bonds are approved. Proposition 46 (1986) restored the authority of school districts to issue GO bonds, with bond proceeds authorized for the acquisition or improvement of real property—generally interpreted to include land acquisition, construction, and the expansion, renovation, or permanent improvement of school facilities. Bonds approved under Proposition 46 require a two-thirds supermajority of voters and have fewer accountability requirements. Proposition 39 (2000) lowered the approval threshold to 55 percent, but in exchange imposed additional conditions: at least two-thirds of governing board members must approve placing the measure on the ballot, the ballot measure must include a specific list of projects, an independent financial audit is required, and a citizens' oversight committee must be established to monitor expenditures. Proposition 39 bonds are also subject to a tax rate cap of $60 per $100,000 of assessed value for unified districts and $30 per $100,000 for elementary and high school districts.

Because of its lower voter threshold, Proposition 39 has become the dominant mechanism for local school facility bonds.

A few structural features are important for understanding how local bond revenue flows through district finances. Districts pass a bond authorization establishing the total amount voters have approved and then issue bonds in tranches over time as projects are ready to proceed. This means that the full authorized amount does not appear in district finances all at once. Once bonds are issued and proceeds are received, the actual capital expenditures appear in the district's capital accounting funds; the cost of carrying the debt — principal and interest repayment—flows separately through the debt service funds and is supported by the dedicated property tax levy rather than the district's general operating revenue. GO bonds are legally restricted to capital expenditures and may not be used for operating costs such as salaries, maintenance, or supplies.

Developer fees

Districts may levy developer fees on new construction to mitigate the impact of growth on school facilities. These are one-time, per-square foot fees intended to help fund capital projects needed to accommodate additional students generated by new development. Revenues must be used for facilities purposes—such as new construction, capacity expansions, or land acquisition—and cannot support general operations or routine maintenance. Fee levels are capped statewide and adjusted periodically by the State Allocation Board, and districts must demonstrate a reasonable relationship between projected development and facility needs.

The School Facility Program (SFP)

The School Facility Program (SFP) was established in 1998 to provide state grants for the construction of new school facilities and the modernization of existing ones. The program is administered by the Office of Public School Construction (OPSC) on behalf of the State Allocation Board (SAB), which approves all grants.

Two core programs. The SFP funds two main categories of projects: *new construction* (for districts that cannot house their projected student enrollment) and *modernization* (for existing buildings that are at least 25 years old for permanent structures or 20 years old for portables). Each program also has a suite of supplemental grants for specific project characteristics such as site acquisition, site development, geographic remoteness, new school allowances, and career technical education facilities, among others.

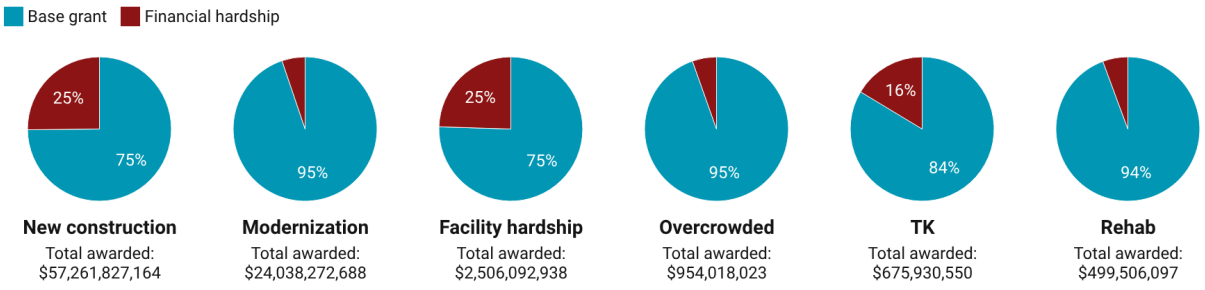
How grant amounts are calculated. Grants are structured as a per-pupil amount, set in state law and adjusted annually each January by the SAB based on the RS Means (The Gordian Group) Class B Construction Cost Index. As of January 2026, the base new construction grant is $16,411 per elementary pupil, $17,358 per middle school pupil, and $22,086 per high school pupil. Modernization grants are $6,249, $6,608, and $8,653 per pupil, respectively. Importantly, the grant is not calculated from actual project costs—the district must demonstrate that total construction costs (state and local share combined) are at least 60 percent commensurate with the grant amount. Districts can spend more than this if they have additional funds, so the data from OPSC is not an overall sum of the amount of actual spending.

District matching requirements. Districts must provide a local match: before Proposition 2, this match was 50 percent of a new construction grant and 40 percent for modernization. Proposition 2 introduced a sliding scale: districts may increase the state match by up to 5% (to 65% and 55%, respectively) based on a calculation of points: 1-4 for bonding capacity per student, 2-8 for unduplicated pupil percentage, 2 for enrollment below 200, and 2 for a project labor agreement. Districts with 10 or more points receive the highest state match, those with fewer than 6 points receive the original state match. Our analysis estimates that at least one-third of the state's students will be in districts eligible for the maximum match (Hinkley, 2024b). The match is calculated based on the grant formula, not the actual cost of construction, which means districts bear full responsibility for cost overruns beyond the combined state-local grant (and districts with additional resources can elect to spend more on a project than the state's project cost calculation).

Financial hardship. Districts that cannot provide their required local match may apply for financial hardship assistance, which can reduce or eliminate the local contribution. To qualify, a district

must demonstrate it has made all reasonable efforts to raise local revenue—defined as levying developer fees at the maximum allowable rate and meeting at least one of the following: carrying debt at or above 60 percent of its bonding capacity, having a total bonding capacity under $5 million, or having held a successful bond election under Proposition 39 within the prior two years. There is no specific set-aside for financial hardship funding, and in practice a very small percentage of projects receive it—16.5% of all SFP funding has gone to financial hardship, but it has been concentrated in new construction and facility hardship.

Figure 7. Financial hardship as a share of total program spending (1998-2025)



Includes all SFP funding from 1998-2025 (including to districts no longer active). Values adjusted to 2025$ using Turner Construction Index

Created with Datawrapper

Application and priority funding process. Districts submit funding applications to OPSC after establishing eligibility and obtaining approvals from the Division of State Architect (DSA) and CDE. Applications are processed in order of receipt date (first-come, first-served); processing times for regular applications are several years (for example, projects receiving apportionments in 2025 were primarily submitted in 2022). Once the SAB grants an "unfunded approval," applications wait in line for funds to be apportioned; typically, this happens twice a year when the state sells bonds.

In addition to new construction and modernization, the SFP includes several specialized sub-programs. The Charter School Facilities Program (CSFP) and Career Technical Education Facilities Program (CTEFP) operate through competitive application rounds, and both received dedicated allocations of $600 million each under Proposition 2. The Facility Hardship and Seismic Mitigation Programs serve districts with imminent health and safety threats to existing buildings—such as

structural failure, contamination, or disaster damage—and are processed ahead of other SFP applications on OPSC's workload list.[3]

Funding history and the Proposition 2 update. The SFP has been funded through a series of statewide bonds since 1998 (see Section 4A for a full funding history). After voters rejected Proposition 13 in 2020, four years passed without new bond authority before voters approved Proposition 2 in November 2024, providing $10 billion in new bond authority, including $8.5 billion for the SFP (the remaining $1.5 billion is for community colleges).

Proposition 2 also introduced several changes to the program: (1) a sliding scale for the state match that can increase the state share up to 55 percent for new construction and 65 percent for modernization, based on a points-based scoring system that rewards higher-need districts (districts earn up to 16 points; at least 6 are needed to receive an increased match); (2) a five-year Facilities Master Plan (FMP) requirement—districts must submit a board-approved FMP covering enrollment projections, facility inventory, capital budget, deferred maintenance plan, and alignment with the district's Local Control and Accountability Plan; and (3) a small school district set-aside of 10% of both modernization and new construction funds for districts with 2,500 pupils or fewer.

The more ambitious equity reform proposed in the failed 2020 measure was not carried forward into Proposition 2. Proposition 13 (2020) would have replaced the SFP's first-come, first-served application system with need-based prioritization for modernization funding—prioritizing projects based on a district's financial hardship status, the concentration of low-income students and English learners, and the severity of facility conditions, including imminent health and safety threats (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2020). Taken together, these provisions were intended to counteract the structural advantages that wealthier districts hold under the current system: their greater ability to quickly pass local bonds, complete projects using their own funds and seek reimbursement, and navigate a complex application process with dedicated staff. Proposition 2 retained only the most modest version of these reforms—a five-percentage-point sliding scale that maxes out at 65% for

[3] Several earlier sub-programs, including the Critically Overcrowded Schools program and the Joint Use Program, had dedicated funding under the 2002–2006 bond acts but were not carried forward as separate allocations in Proposition 51 or Proposition 2; overcrowding relief and joint use projects remain eligible through the standard new construction program.

districts with the highest combination of need-based points—while leaving the first-come, first-served queue intact. Early modeling of the impact of the sliding scale showed it would have a minimal impact on the distribution of funding by district wealth (Hinkley, 2024a, 2024b).

Legal challenge to California's facility funding model

In October 2025, Public Advocates filed a lawsuit challenging California's SFP modernization funding programs as unconstitutional under the state's equal protection clause and education clause (*Miliani R. v. California*, 2025). The plaintiffs—individual parents, students, educators, and community organizations from low-wealth districts—allege that the SFP's reliance on a 60/40 state-local matching formula, combined with a first-come, first-served application process, systematically favors wealthier districts. Because higher-wealth districts can more easily pass local bonds (and for larger amounts), they access proportionally more state matching funds, while low-wealth districts struggle to raise the 40% local share. The complaint also documents severe facility conditions in plaintiff districts: 100-year-old buildings, failing HVAC systems in extreme heat areas, sewage backups, leaky roofs causing classroom water damage, asbestos, mold, and portable classrooms decades past their intended lifespan. The complaint argues that the minor funding formula adjustments in Proposition 2 do not address the program's structural inequities. The suit seeks declaratory and injunctive relief to reform the SFP allocation system.

Size and Distribution of School Facility Spending

There have been many analyses of the history of facility spending, focusing on the questions of how much, where it flows, and the relative responsibility of local districts versus the state (Brunner & Vincent, 2018; Brunner et al., 2023; Vincent & Jain, 2015). In 2022, California's State Auditor found that the SFP's first-come, first-served model disadvantages financially challenged districts: wealthier districts can self-fund projects and later seek state reimbursement, while poorer districts must wait—sometimes years—for state funding before beginning work (California State Auditor, 2022). The OPSC was also faulted for not regularly preparing funding need estimates and for failing to maintain a centralized database of school building ages. The audit urged legislators to pass a bond for at least $7.4

billion in modernization funding to cover "existing and anticipated" requests over the next five years, and to adopt reforms to the SFP that would prioritize projects based on local need.

State Facility Spending Amounts

State facility funding has always arrived in irregular waves—substantial during periods of political alignment and enrollment growth, and absent during budget crises—while the need has mounted steadily. Between 1998 and 2006, voters approved more than $35.4 billion in statewide bonds (in constant 2024 dollars) for school facilities. But during the ten-year stretch from 2006 to 2015, only one bond was authorized, and between 2016 and 2024, none were approved at all (Figure 8).

Figure 8. California Statewide K-12 School Facility Bond Measures (1998–2024)

Year	Proposition	Nominal $	2024 $	Result	Enrollment
1998	Prop. 1A	$6.7	$17.4	Passed	5,724,093
2002	Prop. 47	$11.4	$26.2	Passed	6,138,847
2004	Prop. 55	$10.0	$21.7	Passed	6,292,172
2006	Prop. 1D	$7.3	$13.1	Passed	6,306,873
2016	Prop. 51	$7.0	$10.1	Passed	6,212,591
2020	**Prop. 13**	**$9.0**	**$10.9**	**Failed**	**6,149,178**
2024	Prop. 2	$8.5	$8.5	Passed	5,837,690

Amounts are in billions and represent K-12 amounts in each bond. Adjusted to $ 2024 using the Turner Construction Cost Index

Created with Datawrapper

In 2020, voters rejected Proposition 13, which would have provided $9 billion for K–12 facilities and introduced equity-based reforms to the SFP application process (the proposed reforms and their comparison to Proposition 2 are discussed in Section 3B). Another ballot measure, Proposition 15, which would have required commercial property to be reassessed and significantly increased the bonding capacity of most districts, also failed.

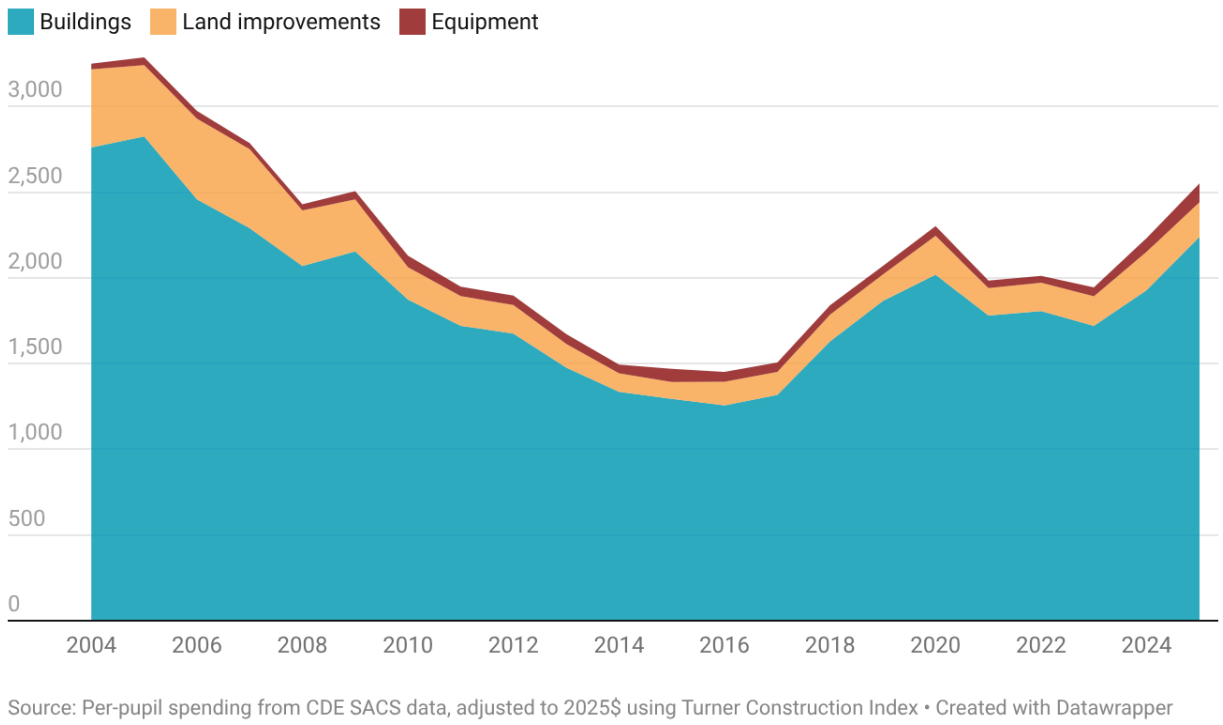
As a result of Proposition 13's failure, the SFP's funds were nearly exhausted by 2021. The Governor funded the program with general fund allocations until a new bond could be placed before

voters. In November 2024, voters approved Proposition 2, authorizing $10 billion in bonds, including $8.5 billion for the SFP (the remaining $1.5 billion is for community colleges).

The pace of applications from districts to the SFP program illustrates how severely demand has outrun state capacity. By October 31, 2024, the queue of district applications for modernization funds had hit $4 billion; modernization applications received beginning in November 2024 have been added directly to a "beyond bond authority" list which totals $1.5 billion as of March 2026. Demand for new construction funding has been lower but is still on pace to exhaust bond authority in the next 1-2 years: $2.2 billion in new construction applications (including those already apportioned and processed) have been submitted against the $3.3 billion available. The funds must be authorized in the state budget in order to be sold, as they are repaid using general fund revenues (unlike local bonds, there is no specific revenue source tied to them). The 2025-26 budget included $1.5 billion, of which about half has been sold, and the Governor's 2026-27 budget contains the same, at this rate funding will be spent down over about 5 years.

Per pupil capital spending reflects these cycles—adjusted for inflation, capital spending in the 2004-25 period was highest in 2004, dipped significantly throughout the Great Recession and its aftermath, and has recovered gradually in the past half-decade, boosted some by federal stimulus funds.

Figure 9. California per-pupil capital spending



Local Bond Measures

Local general obligation bonds continue to fund the vast majority of district facility spending; thus, the ability of districts to pursue facility improvements depends primarily on property wealth and voter support. There tends to be an increase in local bond measures in the years when a state K-12 bond is on the ballot as districts anticipate applying for SFP matching funds, even though by the time they pass their bond measures they will be many years down the queue for state funds. Local bond measures are less likely to pass during recessionary periods. Figure 10 demonstrates the pattern of high bond passage rates during the housing boom of pre-2009, followed by more modest volume of bonds and a steep drop in passage rates in the wake of the pandemic, driven by a 52% local bond passage rate in 2020, a historic low. 2024 was a record year for bond measures—292, of which 75% passed, over $41 billion.

Figure 10. Local general obligation bond measures (2004-2024)

Period	Number proposed	% Passed	Amount proposed	Amount passed
2004-2008 (Pre-Recession)	427	80	$87,569	$79,410
2009-2013 (Recession)	230	79	$35,897	$32,805
2014-2019 (Recovery)	505	87	$69,494	$62,650
2020-2025 (Recent)	576	67	$96,596	$79,409
2020	170	52	$31,534	$20,845
2022	113	70	$20,065	$17,525
2024	292	75	$44,993	$41,035

$ in millions, adjusted to $2025 using Turner Construction Index. Source: CDIAC
Created with Datawrapper

Figure 11. Local bond attempt and pass rates by district bonding capacity (1998-2025)

Quintile	Median attempted per pupil	Median passed per pupil	% ever attempted	% ever passed	Pass rate
Q1 (Poorest)	$13,379	$9,264	71.4%	66.1%	80.7%
Q2	$28,625	$21,712	87.5%	83.6%	82.1%
Q3 (Middle)	$37,805	$24,503	83.9%	76.1%	83.6%
Q4	$40,648	$31,825	86.0%	81%	91.1%
Q5 (Wealthiest)	$68,525	$55,504	81.7%	78.9%	88.8%

Quintiles are enrollment-weighted based on bonding capacity per student in 2023-24. All dollar values adjusted to 2025$ using Turner Construction Index
Source: CDIAC, CDE • Created with Datawrapper

Bond activity varies significantly based on local property wealth, as we discuss below. The poorest districts are least likely to put a measure on the ballot *and* least likely to pass it. Their median passed amount per pupil ($9,264) is less than 20% of the wealthiest quintile ($55,504). Just two-thirds of the poorest districts have ever passed a bond and fewer than 75% have attempted one in the past 27 years. The biggest disadvantage for poor districts isn't that their measures fail at the ballot—it's that

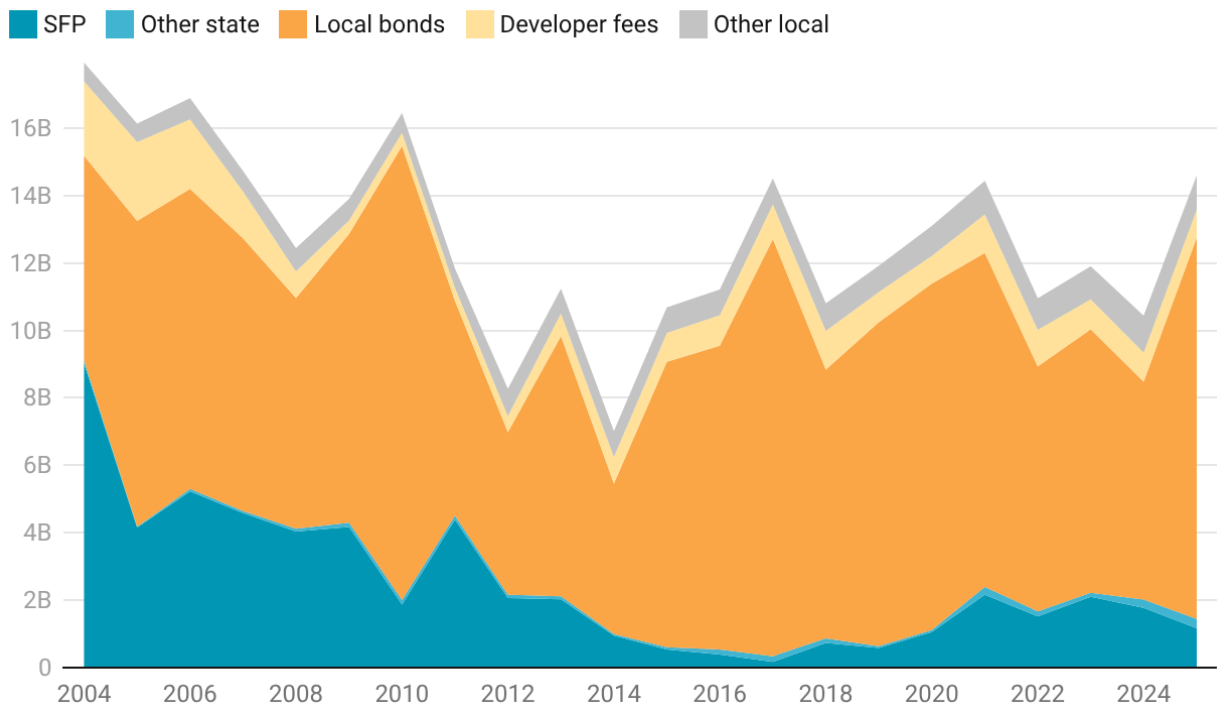
they don't try, and when they do, they ask for far less per student. Of the 230 active districts that have not passed a bond, 185 have never attempted one, and the vast majority of those (75%) have fewer than 500 students.

State and Local Shares of Facility Revenue

The burden for capital spending on facilities shifted significantly from the state to local districts from 1986-2015 (Brunner & Vincent, 2018). Our analysis of the past 20 years indicates that this trend continues. Using district financial data from fiscal years 2004-05 to 2024-25, we find that the share of total capital revenues raised by districts has grown from 74% in 2005 to almost 90% in 2024-25 (down from a peak of 97% in 2017) (Figure 12).[4] The overall revenue fluctuation reflects higher capital revenues following state bond passage, and a dip during the Great Recession. (Data fluctuations also reflect the behavior of larger districts; Los Angeles Unified accounted for 56% of local bond revenues statewide in 2010, one of the peaks in Figure 12). Developer fees were a much more significant funding source during the housing boom leading up to 2007 and tend to shrink during recessionary periods. SFP revenues have never regained their value in real dollars from the early years of the program.

[4] We limited our analysis of SACS data to fiscal year 2003-04 and later years, as that was the first year the new SACS accounting structure was required for all districts. For analysis of pre-2003 data, see Brunner and Vincent (2018).

Figure 12. Composition of capital revenues by period (2004-2025)

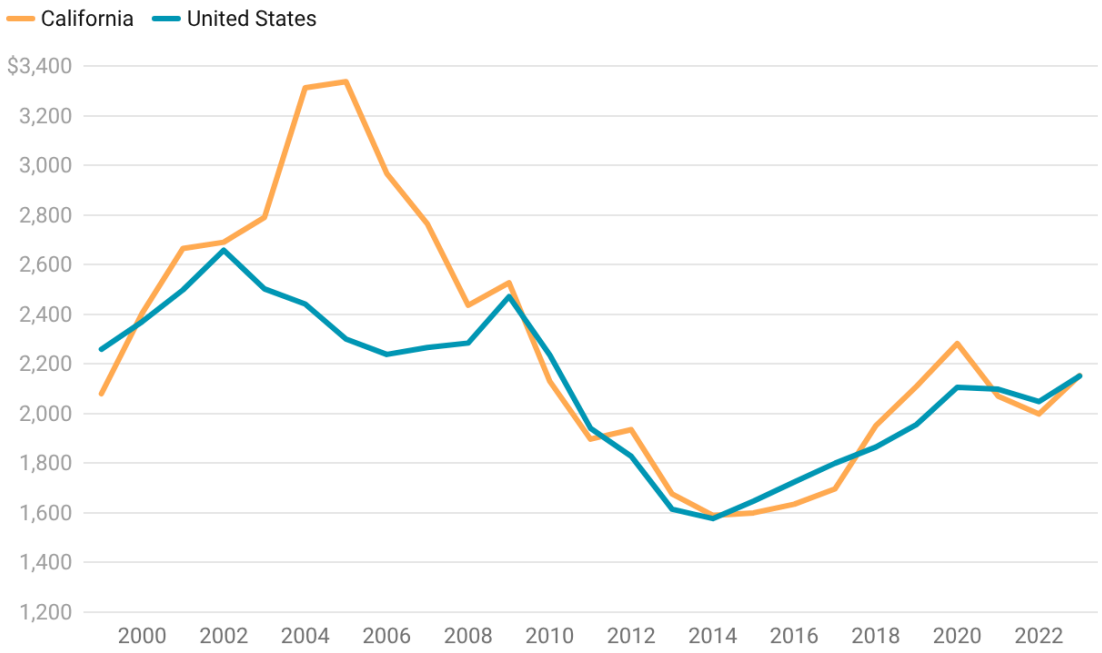


Values in 2025$ adjusted using Turner Construction Index

Created with Datawrapper

California's capital expenditures per student tend to parallel national trends, rising much faster than the U.S. during the buildup of property values in the early 2000s, before declining significantly during the housing crisis and subsequent Great Recession. It's important to recognize that construction costs in California are higher—significantly in some regions—than national averages, so these expenditures likely do not reflect equal amounts of investment.

Figure 13. California and national capital expenditures per pupil (1999-2023)



NCES F33 District fiscal files. Annual facilities spending is sum of total state and local capital expenditures. In 2025$ adjusted using the Turner Construction Index.

Created with Datawrapper

Distribution of Capital Revenues by District

The distribution of these local and state capital revenues remains significantly uneven across districts, with inequity driven by local property wealth: assessed value (AV) and bonding capacity (BC) per student. California's districts can have outstanding bonds at any one time of up to 1.25% of assessed property value for elementary and high school districts, and 2.5% of assessed property value for unified school districts (this is their "bonding capacity"). This difference means that distributional analyses by AV and BC look slightly different from each other: ESD and HSD districts appear to have significantly lower wealth when using BC versus AV.[5] For reference: in 2025-26 there are 515 ESDs (55%

[5] The intent of this difference is that ESDs and HSDs overlay each other, so the cumulative K-12 bonding capacity applied to a property owner should total 2.5%, whether they live in a USD or HSD/ESD area. In practice, consolidations over the years—any combination of an ESD with an HSD produces a USD—mean that many ESDs overlay USDs.

of districts, 21% of enrollment), 76 HSDs (8% of districts, 10% of enrollment), and 345 USD (37% of districts, 70% of enrollment).

The importance of assessed value for understanding facilities equity

The relationship between assessed property value per student and other measures of student need (e.g. unduplicated pupil percentage) is non-linear. Districts with shares of unduplicated students well above the state median do have lower property values on average, but throughout most of the distribution the relationship is not direct—there are districts with high unduplicated pupil percentages that have very high bonding capacity per pupil (Figure 14). Because the ability to raise local facility funds is so directly tied to property values, we use AV per student as a primary indicator of resource capacity, and quintiles of AV per student as a primary measure of equity. We also present analysis based on BC. This framing is often new (or even counterintuitive) to stakeholders more familiar with the structure of the LCFF and education policy generally. In conversations about reforming facility funding, legislators often point to unduplicated pupil percentage as the guiding metric for evaluating equity in education programs.

In recent years, California policymakers have been particularly focused on prioritizing small districts, on the theory that they are disadvantaged in accessing facility improvements because they have smaller administrative capacity. This focus is reflected in Proposition 2 set-asides for small school districts (10% each of both the modernization and new construction programs). But the targeting is not precise: small is defined as fewer than 2,501 students, which includes more than half of all California districts (54.7%). Median district size in California in 2024-25 was 2,000. Of those districts qualifying as "small," 270 have 500 or fewer students.

Emphasizing unduplicated pupil percentages and small districts has meant that larger, less rural, and less white districts with very low per-pupil assessed property values—many of the same districts experiencing growing enrollment and climate impacts— do not factor into the current equity narrative, even as they face some of the greatest gaps between facility need and local bonding capacity.

Figure 14. Assessed property value per student and unduplicated pupil percentage

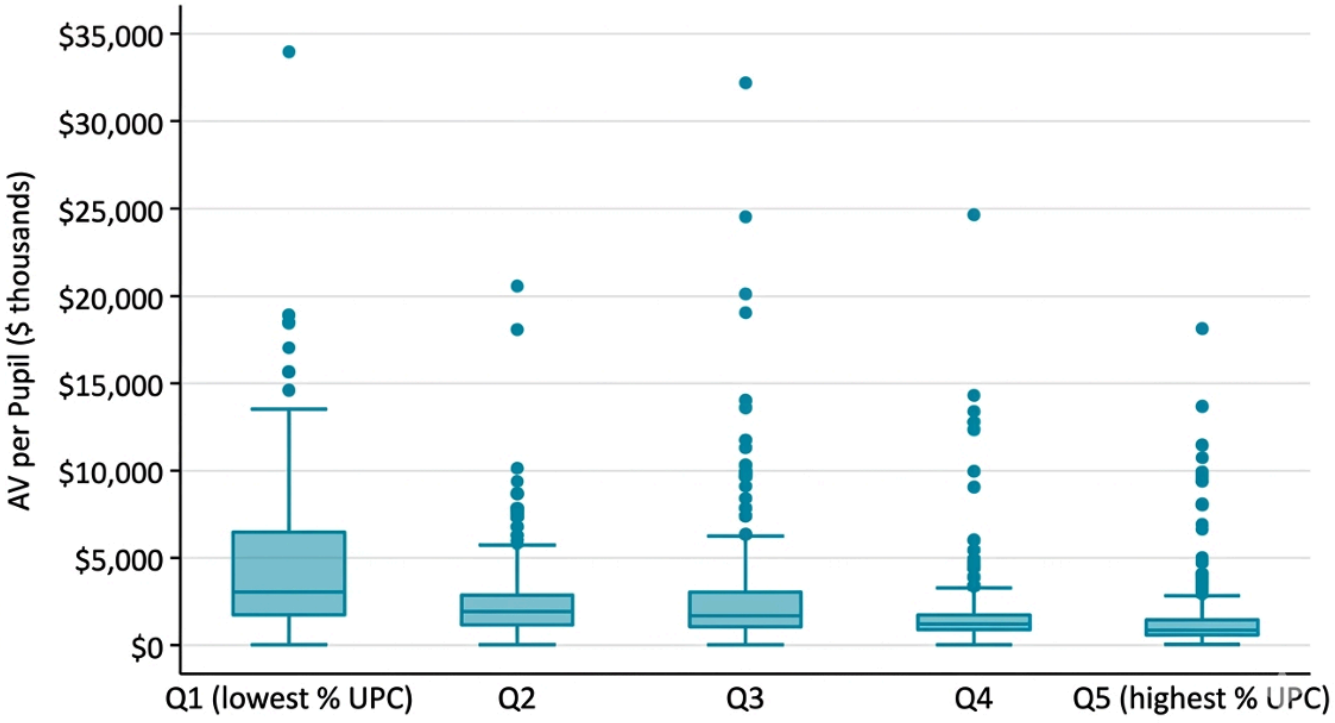
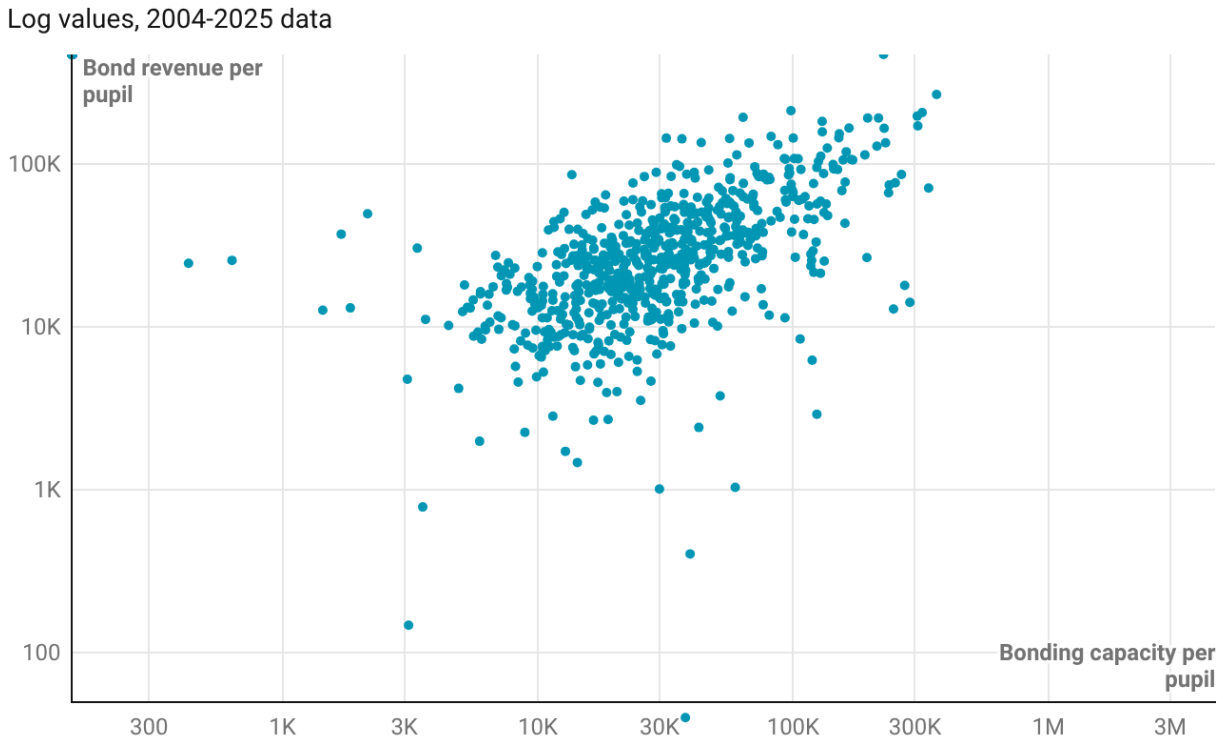


Figure 15 replicates an analysis from our previous report and confirms that districts with greater property wealth have generally raised more local facility funds, though with considerable variation around that trend. Note that both axes are in log scale—actual per-pupil bonding capacity in 2023-24 ranged from $377 to $4.5 million, and bond revenue per pupil ranges from $220 to $375,825.

Figure 15. Bonding capacity per pupil and local G.O. bond revenue per pupil



Bonding capacity per pupil for 2023-24, bond revenue total 2004-2024 from SACS, in 2025$ adjusted using Turner Construction Index, using average enrollment over district's active period.

Created with Datawrapper

The characteristics of districts vary systematically with their per-pupil bonding capacity, with implications for who benefits from both local and state facility funding (Figure 22).

Figure 16. District characteristics and per-pupil bonding capacity (1998-2025)

Quintile	Median AV per pupil	Median BC per pupil	Mean % UPC	Mean % Black or Hispanic
Q1 (Poorest)	$520,543	$8,127	75%	68%
Q2	$952,913	$14,108	68%	57%
Q3 (Middle)	$1,375,489	$21,102	63%	52%
Q4	$1,981,289	$26,703	60%	48%
Q5 (Wealthiest)	$4,080,670	$63,418	50%	38%

Quintiles are enrollment-weighted based on assessed value per student in 2023-24.
All dollar values adjusted to 2025$ using Turner Construction Index

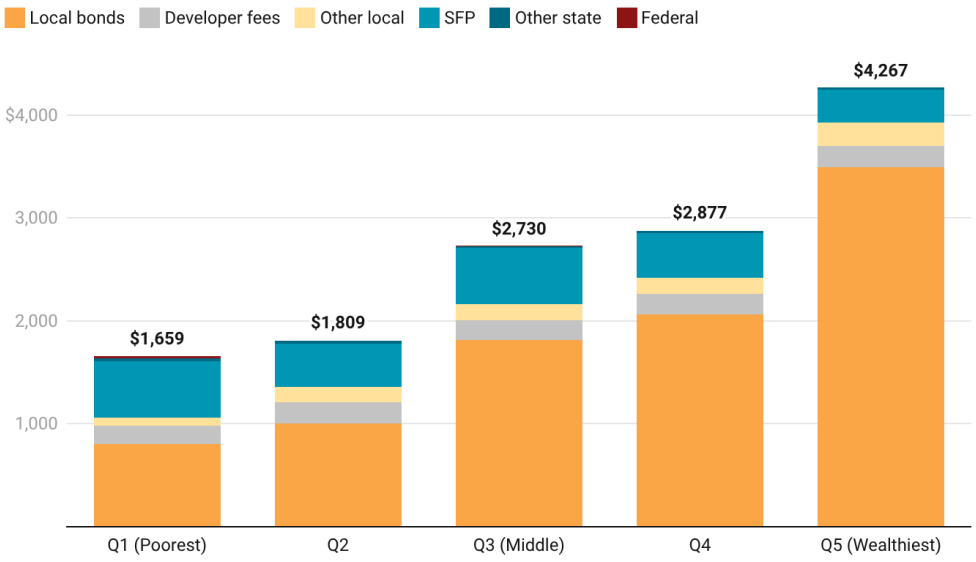
Source: CDE, Eastshore Consulting • Created with Datawrapper

The distribution of capital funding

Districts with higher levels of local property wealth raise significantly more capital revenue per student: nearly 4.5 times as much local bond revenue (AV quintile) and 3-4.5 times as much other local revenue.

Quintiling by bonding capacity rather than assessed value reorders districts somewhat, with unified districts ranking higher relative to their assessed value. Figure 18 shows that the overall pattern holds under this alternative ranking, confirming that the wealth-spending relationship is not sensitive to how local fiscal capacity is measured.

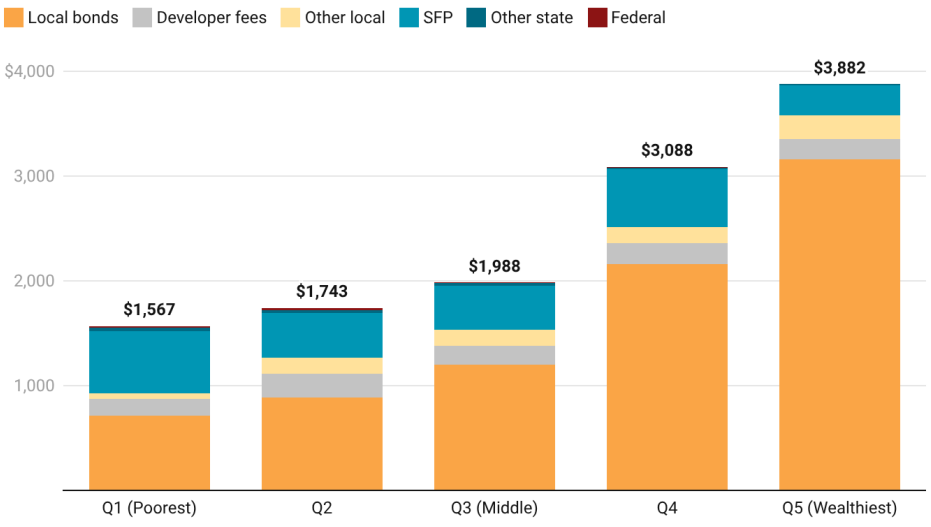
Figure 17. Capital revenues per pupil by assessed value quintile (2004-25)



Quintiles are based on assessed value per student in 2023-24. Each quintile contains the same # of districts.
Capital revenues are from 2004-25, adjusted to 2025$ using Turner Construction Index

Created with Datawrapper

Figure 18. Capital revenues per pupil by bonding capacity quintile (2004-25)

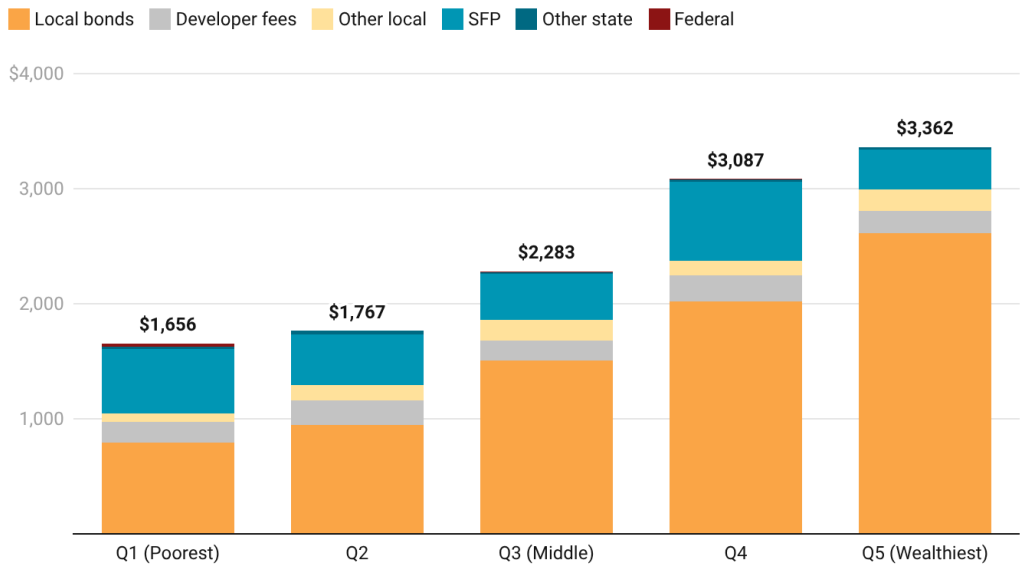


Quintiles are based on bonding capacity per student in 2023-24. Each quintile contains the same # of districts.
Capital revenues are from 2004-25, adjusted to 2025$ using Turner Construction Index

Source: CDE SACS • Created with Datawrapper

Figures 17 and 18 give equal weight to each district regardless of size, with quintile boundaries drawn to include an equal number of districts. Figures 19 and 20 redefine quintiles by enrollment, so that each group contains an equal share of students. This shifts the quintile boundaries: large districts near the middle of the wealth distribution move up, because fewer districts are needed to fill the lower quintiles when those districts are large. LAUSD, for example, ranks in Q3 by assessed value per pupil when districts are counted equally, but falls in Q4 under enrollment-based quintiles. At the same time, the very wealthiest quintile compresses, since California's highest-AV districts tend to be small communities whose extreme per-pupil figures carry less weight when averaged by enrollment. The result is a somewhat flatter gradient—but a persistent one.

Figure 19. Capital revenues by assessed value quintile (enrollment weighted, 2004-25)

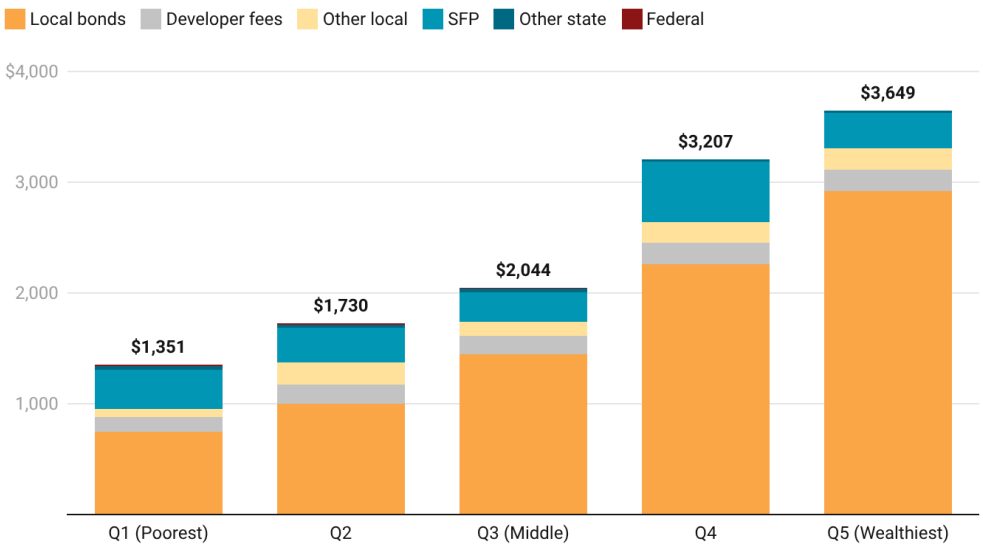


Quintiles are enrollment-weighted based on assessed value per student 2023-24..
Capital revenues are from 2004-25, adjusted to 2025$ using Turner Construction Index

Source: CDE SACS • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 20 applies the same enrollment-based quintile approach to bonding capacity. Because LAUSD is already in Q4 under the bonding capacity measure regardless of how quintiles are defined, the enrollment-weighted version here mainly affects how revenues are averaged within each group rather than reshuffling which districts appear where. The gradient remains comparable to Figure 19, reinforcing that the pattern of capital funding inequality is consistent across both measures and both weighting approaches.

Figure 20. Capital revenues by bonding capacity quintile (enrollment weighted, 2004-25)

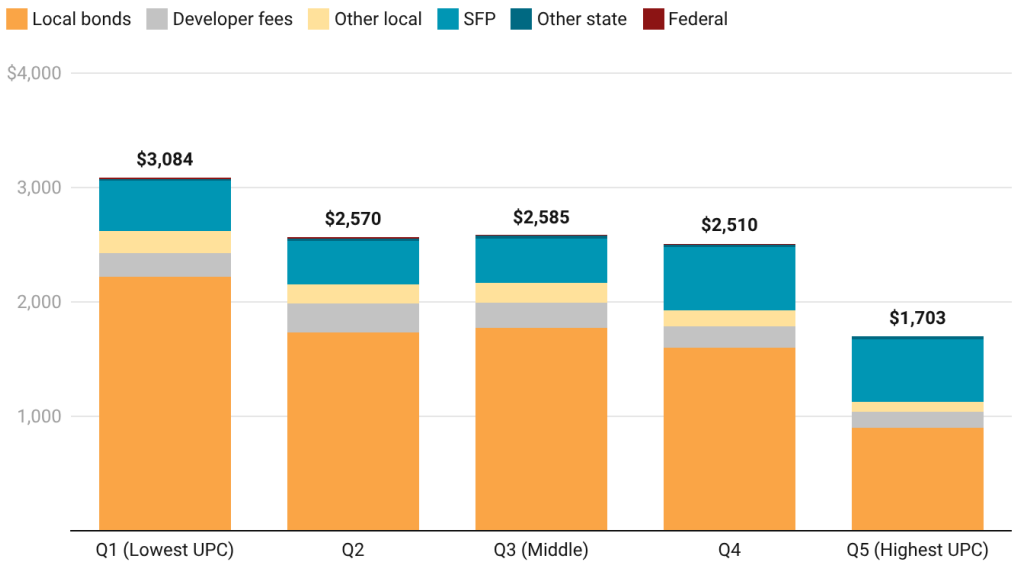


Quintiles are enrollment-weighted, based on bonding capacity per student in 2023-24.
Capital revenues are from 2004-25, adjusted to 2025$ using Turner Construction Index

Source: CDE SACS • Created with Datawrapper

Unlike the steep wealth gradient in Figures 17-20, capital revenues are more evenly distributed across quintiles defined by student disadvantage—but the disparity runs in the same direction, with districts serving the lowest shares of unduplicated students receiving the most capital funding per pupil. The gap between the lowest and highest unduplicated pupil percentage quintiles is roughly $1,400 per pupil—about half the gap seen across assessed value quintiles (Figure 21). SFP funding is more equally distributed within these quintiles than local bond revenue, in part because faster-growing districts are more likely to receive SFP new construction funding, and growing districts tend to have higher unduplicated pupil percentages.

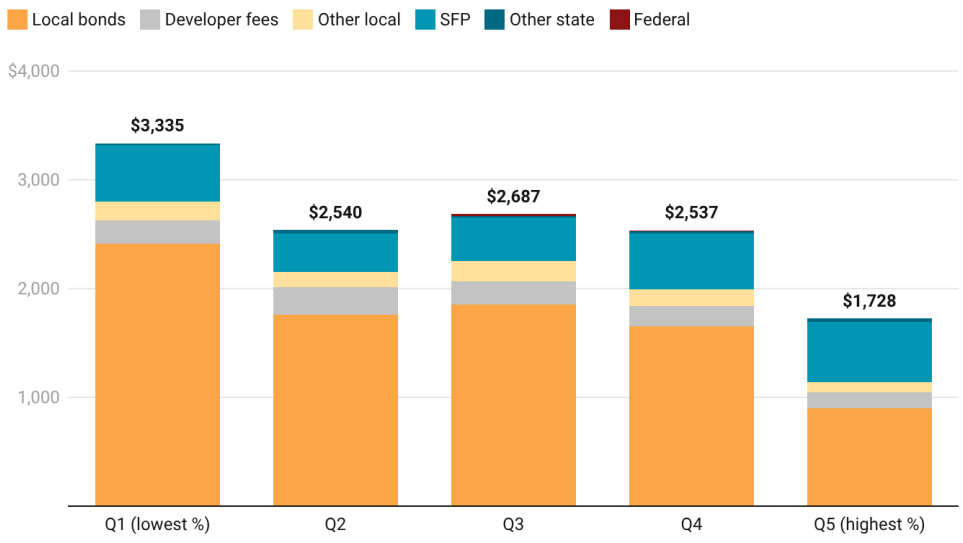
Figure 21. Capital revenues per pupil by unduplicated pupil percentage quintile (2004-25)



Quintiles are % of unduplicated students 2024-25, even # of districts (active in 2025)
Capital revenue data from SACS, 2004-25, calculated per pupil in 2025$, adjusted using Turner Construction Index
Created with Datawrapper

The disparity is somewhat sharper when districts are grouped by the share of Black and Hispanic students. The quintile with the lowest share of Black and Hispanic students received more than 2.5 times the local bond revenue of the quintile with the highest share, and almost twice the overall capital revenue per pupil (Figure 22). Overall, a district's share of Black and Hispanic students is more correlated with per-pupil capital revenues than its unduplicated pupil percentage, but neither reflects the same stark disparities as local property wealth.

Figure 22. Capital revenues per pupil by Black-Hispanic % quintile (2004-25)

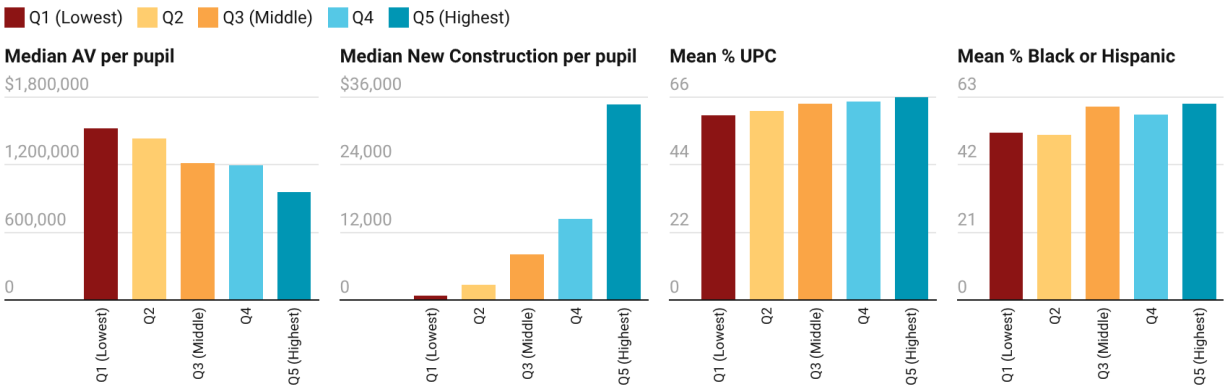


Quintiles are % of Black and Hispanic students 2024-25, even # of districts (active in 2025)
Capital revenue data from SACS, 2004-25, calculated per pupil in 2025$, adjusted using Turner Construction Index
Created with Datawrapper

District Access to Local and State Facility Funding

State SFP funding reaches a different set of districts than local bond revenue—but the type of SFP funding matters considerably for equity. There is a significant difference in the characteristics of districts receiving new construction versus modernization funding. To receive state new construction funds through the SFP, a district must show that it has "unhoused students"—i.e., that existing classroom capacity is insufficient to meet current or projected enrollment over a five-year horizon. Our analysis of 1998-2025 SFP awards reinforces previous analyses: districts receiving new construction funds have lower bonding capacity per student, higher shares of unduplicated students, and higher shares of Black and Hispanic students compared to districts that have never received new construction funding. This reflects where enrollment growth has been concentrated: the communities that have grown fastest since 1998 tend to be lower-wealth districts, particularly in California's inland regions. Within the universe of districts that have received new construction funding, those receiving the most funding per student have much lower bonding capacity per pupil than districts receiving lower amounts per student.

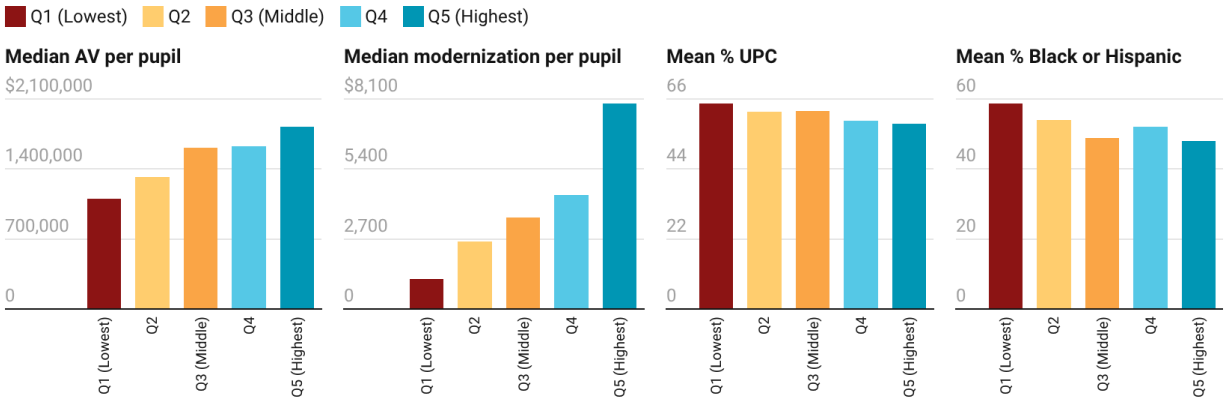
Figure 23. Characteristics of districts receiving new construction funding (1998-2025)



Quintiles are enrollment-based based on amount of SFP new construction funds received per student, 1998-2025.
All dollar values inflated to 2025$ using Turner Construction Index

Source: OPSC SFP, CDE • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 24. Characteristics of districts receiving modernization funding (1998-2025)



Quintiles are enrollment-based based on amount of SFP modernization funds received per student, 1998-2025.
All dollar values inflated to 2025$ using Turner Construction Index

Source: OPSC SFP, CDE • Created with Datawrapper

Modernization funding shows a starkly different pattern. While new construction funds flow disproportionately to lower-wealth districts—driven by the unhoused student requirement—modernization funding is more accessible to districts with greater local capacity. The modernization program's matching requirement means that districts able to raise more local dollars can also access more state funds; as a result, the districts receiving the most modernization funding per pupil tend to have the highest assessed values and lower shares of unduplicated and Black and Hispanic

students—nearly the inverse of the new construction pattern. SFP modernization therefore reinforces rather than offsets the local wealth disparities in capital funding documented above.

How California Assesses Facility Need

A throughline connecting every policy and outcome evaluation of California's approach to school facilities is the absence of basic data. Multiple authoritative bodies, including the State Auditor, the LAO, and academic researchers, have called attention to this gap over a period spanning more than two decades. This vacuum represents several missed opportunities. The state does not have a comprehensive inventory of its school buildings—the CDE's school database has no open date for more than 50% of California's 10,591 active schools, and the dates it does have reflect only the age of the school entity, not the building itself. No agency systematically collects information on building age, condition, or the presence and adequacy of key systems like HVAC, air filtration, or seismic reinforcement. The agencies that collect data on school construction and upgrades as part of their administrative functions—OPSC and the Division of State Architect (DSA)—do not publish any analysis of that data or use it to inform decisions about program priorities or future bond measures.

This data vacuum has concrete policy consequences. Without reliable information on the condition and needs of the existing building stock, the state cannot determine the appropriate size of bond measures, cannot target funding to the schools and districts with the greatest need, cannot evaluate whether its investments are improving conditions, and cannot assess the climate vulnerabilities of school infrastructure at scale. The adoption of an FMP requirement for districts seeking funding under Proposition 2 presents an opportunity to build this data infrastructure—but only if the state invests in the systems, standards, and technical support necessary to make facility master plans a genuine planning tool, and if the agencies choose to make that a priority. There have been legislative efforts to mandate such statewide planning, both vetoed by Governor Newsom. In 2023, SB 394 (Master Plan for Healthy, Sustainable, and Climate-Resilient Schools) passed the legislature almost unanimously. SB 394 would have directed state agencies to create a master plan for healthy, sustainable, and climate-resilient schools (Master Plan for Healthy, Sustainable, and Climate-Resilient Schools, 2023). On September 22, 2024, a similar bill was passed and subsequently vetoed. The

legislation would have directed the California Energy Commission to coordinate with other state agencies to create a comprehensive master plan to align funding for school facilities with California's climate goals, including reducing greenhouse emissions, climate adaptation, and extreme heat mitigation (Climate Resilient Schools Act, 2023; Master Plan for Healthy, Sustainable, and Climate-Resilient Schools, 2024).

Both bills would have required the California Energy Commission to lead the master plan development. Key required elements included assessments of a representative sample of public school buildings and grounds statewide, and a set of priorities, benchmarks, and milestones for health, resilience, and decarbonization of public school campuses — with explicit direction to prioritize schools and communities disproportionately impacted by climate-related hazards and structural inequities.

The cost of building a statewide facility data system is modest compared to the billions the state invests in school construction and modernization; the cost of continuing without one is borne by students attending schools whose conditions no one can systematically measure or address.

California's primary mechanism for assessing school facility conditions is the Facility Inspection Tool (FIT), developed by OPSC following the Williams lawsuit settlement of 2004. The FIT is a self-reported visual inspection in which districts evaluate 15 facility components—spanning cleanliness, electrical systems, exterior conditions, interior surfaces, restrooms and fountains, safety, structural integrity, and HVAC—against the standard of “good repair” established in Education Code Section 17002(d)(1) (“clean, safe, and functional”). Districts are required to report FIT results in their School Accountability Report Cards (SARCs), submitted to the county, and to report aggregate FIT scores in their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs). However, SARCs are not universally submitted to CDE, reporting on the CDE website is incomplete, and FIT data are not rolled up into any comprehensive, analyzable statewide dataset.

The FIT is designed to identify the minimum functional threshold, not to capture modernization needs, ADA compliance gaps, energy efficiency deficits, or climate readiness. The FIT's visual inspection methodology falls well short of constituting a true facilities assessment. California is among 21 states

that do not require comprehensive facility assessments beyond this kind of surface-level visual review (Government Accountability Office, 2020).

Even on its own limited terms, the FIT has proven unreliable. In 2024, the State Auditor found that districts did not use the tool correctly and that schools reported as being in good condition had significant safety and maintenance deficiencies (Whisenhut, 2024). A 2020 PPIC study—the most comprehensive analysis of FIT data to date—scraped and analyzed nearly 9,000 SARCs but could access records for only approximately 72 percent of the K–12 student population, finding significant inconsistencies in how districts reported overall ratings (Gao & Lafortune, 2020). Even on the FIT's very low bar, 38 percent of California K–12 students attended a school with at least one deficiency in 2018–19—almost certainly an understatement, since the tool captures only the most visible and immediate problems. The PPIC study also found essentially no statistical relationship between FIT scores and the level of capital investment a school had received, suggesting the tool fails to capture meaningful variation in facility quality. Districts with higher per-student capital expenditures and higher assessed property values generally had better conditions, while schools in suburban areas and small towns showed higher deficiency rates—patterns the authors attribute to differences in local wealth and spending capacity.

Taken together, California's facility reporting system produces data that is fragmentary, methodologically weak, and structurally inaccessible for statewide analysis. The PPIC study was only possible because researchers built a custom scraper to extract data from thousands of PDF documents, underscoring just how inaccessible and unstructured California's facility condition data remains—our own analysis in 2025 found majority of SARCs on CDE's website are still PDF files, slightly fewer are in text format (which could be used to construct a dataset), and the majority are external links to district websites. The state lacks information about what school facility improvements are needed, where needs are greatest, or whether public investment is reaching the schools that need it most. This context is essential for understanding why significant unmet need persists across the state. In its 2025 report, the state auditor recommended that the Department of General Services (DGS) be directed to engage stakeholders in a revision of the tool that would include a broader range of deficiency ratings (to differentiate between cosmetic and extreme deficiencies), reporting of multiple deficiencies (rather

than reporting them unduplicated, masking the scale of deficiencies), requiring category-level reporting (so that HVAC and sewer assessments would be reported separately, for example). This process is expected to conclude in October 2026.

Conclusion: Implications

Core Tensions in California's Education Finance System

As the plaintiffs argue in *Miliani R. v. California*, there is a fundamental tension between California's approach to operational funding for schools and how it funds school facilities. *Serrano v. Priest* rejected the validity of an education funding system based on property wealth; LCFF is the most recent iteration of the system developed in response to the court's holding, by distributing funding to districts based on attendance and measures of student need. A facilities funding system that simply ensured that facilities funds per student were equal across districts, while more equitable on its face, would not reflect the differences in building age, condition, history of investment, and local needs. A facilities funding regime would need to be different—both needs and spending are "lumpy" in a way that education operations are not. Facility needs come in cycles and facility construction and upgrade costs cannot be spread evenly over time. The only way to ensure that all students have access to the same baseline of facility quality would be to develop criteria for prioritizing funding based on need. This could mean funding programs that address specific types of deficiencies (age, disrepair, air quality metrics, etc.) or priority programs (such as increased TK capacity or science labs). Without any such prioritization written into the state program, and without any state-level data on facility conditions, the SFP has functioned instead as a reimbursement system that rewards districts with the organizational capacity and local fiscal resources to initiate projects on their own—systematically channeling state dollars toward wealthier districts.

Even a system that allocated state funds based on local fiscal capacity would not ensure that the state's funding is directed to the highest-priority use. Many dynamics go into the decision by district leadership about whether to pursue local bond measures or facility upgrades—political appetite for bond elections, competing budget priorities, staff capacity to navigate the application process, and the ability to front-fund projects while awaiting state reimbursement.

On the accountability side, the existing mechanisms are inadequate. Research has demonstrated that the FIT reporting required through the LCAP and the Williams Act complaint framework are insufficient as tools for identifying and remediating facility deficiencies. The FIT is a self-reported visual inspection tool that captures a snapshot in time; it does not comprehensively assess building systems and their lifecycle, and analyses have found essentially no correlation between FIT assessments and cumulative capital investments, suggesting the tool fails to capture meaningful variation in facility quality.

Programs within the SFP designed to address equity or facility emergencies—financial hardship and facility hardship—have not compensated for the program's structural bias toward wealthier districts. Financial hardship funding represents a significant source of SFP revenue for a handful of individual projects, but the total amounts allocated through these programs remain vanishingly small relative to total modernization funding.

The State Auditor criticized OPSC for having no data to indicate how large the next statewide bond should be, a strong indictment of the state's capacity to plan strategically for facility investment. The rapid exhaustion of Proposition 2 funding, with applications consuming available bond authority before the bond was even approved, illustrates the scale of the mismatch between available state resources and accumulated local need. And as enrollment likely continues to decline across the state, the allocation of nearly 40% of bond funding to new construction is fundamentally misaligned with need. The state's facility needs have shifted decisively toward modernization and the need to renovate aging infrastructure and increase resilience of existing buildings.

Policy Opportunities

Strengthening the state role in promoting educational equity. Proposition 2's sliding scale for district matching contributions represents a step toward aligning the SFP with the equity principles embodied in LCFF. But the 5% range is too narrow to meaningfully alter the wealth-based inequity that has characterized the program since 1998. A more progressive approach could widen this range substantially—other states have matching ranges as wide as 10-80% in recognition of the uneven resource distribution that characterizes our nation's education system. Alternatively, the state could

move toward a formula-based allocation system akin to LCFF, distributing facility funding through annual per-pupil grants adjusted for property wealth, as recommended by the LAO. States that use lump-sum aid programs such as per-pupil grants have been found to have the lowest within-state inequality in capital spending (W. Wang & Duncombe, 2009). Such a system would decouple facility investment from the unpredictable cycle of statewide bond elections and provide districts with a stable, plannable funding stream.

Statewide facility data and planning. Proposition 2's facility master plan (FMP) requirement is a significant policy advance if implemented in a way that expands the state's insight into facility conditions. If FMPs were linked to a statewide data collection effort and uniform facility assessment standards, they could provide the foundation for need-based funding that California has lacked since the SFP's inception. Evaluations of the state's approach to facility assessment and funding have uniformly recommended a statewide facility inventory and conditions assessment. More than two decades after the first such recommendation, California still cannot generate a list of its schools in the worst physical condition—it does not even have an estimate of building ages. The findings point to data infrastructure as a prerequisite for equitable investment in any future bond measure. County offices of education and the CDE will need resources and technical capacity to support smaller and rural districts in meeting any new planning requirements. Without such support, FMP mandates risk becoming another mechanism that disadvantages the districts least able to navigate complex application processes.

Need-based targeting. The prioritization of small school districts in facilities funding policy reflects the real challenge posed by lower administrative capacity that comes with being very small. The nearly half of California districts with fewer than 500 students do face bigger hurdles in developing and passing bond measures and managing the complexities of financing large capital investments. The targeting for them is very broad, however: the new small district set-asides and the technical assistance program funded by Proposition 2 are available to districts under 2,501 students, not just to the very smallest. The financial hardship threshold of $15,000,000 applies to 307 (about one-third) of districts, of which 20% are in the highest quintile of BC per pupil, 33% in the highest quintile of AV. A majority of the poorest 20% of districts do not qualify under the $15,000,000 threshold. A financial hardship

threshold based on enrollment, a set-aside for financial hardship funds, and prioritization of apportionments for districts facing significant financial hardship, are all relatively minor adjustments that could have significant impacts on who receives funding. Prioritization could also be driven by facilities assessments, targeting funding to schools with facility challenges that are linked to learning loss—such as poor air quality, overcrowding, lack of laboratory facilities or recreational space, and excessive indoor heat.

Climate resilience. The evidence presented in this report makes clear that climate change is no longer a future concern for California's school infrastructure—it is a present reality that is already disrupting the educational mission. Climate-related events account for nearly 80% of emergency school closure records in our data, with power infrastructure failures serving as a critical cross-cutting vulnerability. Yet facility planning, funding criteria, and building standards have not been updated to reflect this reality. The evidence makes clear that facilities planning will need to incorporate climate risk at every stage: site selection, design standards, building systems (particularly HVAC, air filtration, and power resilience), and ongoing maintenance priorities. The findings suggest the need for standardized climate vulnerability assessments for school facilities, planning tools that help districts anticipate and prepare for the hazards most relevant to their region, and dedicated funding mechanisms for climate adaptation and resilience upgrades. Legislation has been introduced in the current legislative session to address the SFP's lack of climate criteria. AB 1822 (2026) would require the SAB to prioritize facility projects that address extreme heat and climate change (School Facilities: Project Priorities: Extreme Heat and Climate Change, 2026).

Enrollment decline response. California's public K–12 enrollment has declined significantly since its peak in 2004-05, and projections indicate continued contraction in most regions. This trend poses real fiscal challenges—particularly for maintenance and operations, as discussed below—but it also presents an opportunity. Surplus space created by declining enrollment could enable facility improvements that would otherwise displace students, accommodate community uses that strengthen schools' role as neighborhood anchors, or support innovative educational programming such as expanded TK, career technical education, or mental health services. Realizing this potential would require proactive planning, clear guidance on surplus property disposition, and state support for

districts navigating these transitions. Without such support, surplus facilities risk becoming deferred maintenance liabilities rather than assets.

Maintenance sustainability. Enrollment decline compounds the structural challenges facing school maintenance and operations. The LCFF's per-pupil funding formula creates a built-in gap for shrinking districts: the number of buildings to maintain stays roughly constant even as enrollment-driven revenue falls. Fixed costs for heating, cooling, grounds maintenance, and basic safety do not scale down proportionally with enrollment. This is particularly consequential in the context of climate change, which is increasing the operational demands on building systems—more extreme heat events mean higher cooling costs, wildfire smoke means greater reliance on air filtration, and more intense storms mean more frequent repairs.

Data and Methods

This study documents the level and distribution of school facility funding across California's K-12 school districts, drawing on a district-year panel dataset covering school years 1998-99 through 2024-25. The study updates and extends the methods used in the Getting Down to Facts II analysis of school facility financing (Brunner & Vincent, 2018).

Data Sources

School Facility Program (SFP). Data on state facility grants come from the California Office of Public School Construction (OPSC), which administers the School Facilities Program on behalf of the State Allocation Board (https://data.ca.gov/dataset/opsc-open-data). We compile project-level records covering 1998 through 2025 from the OPSC open data portal and supplementary files. Programs covered include new construction, modernization, overcrowding relief, facility hardship, critically overcrowded schools, rehabilitation, charter school facilities, career technical education (CTE) facilities, transitional kindergarten (TK) and full-day kindergarten, and joint use projects. We retain completed projects only and aggregate project-level awards to the district-year level, with year defined by the date of the last State Allocation Board action.

Local General Obligation Bond Elections. Data on local bond elections come from the California Debt and Investment Advisory Commission (CDIAC; treasurer.ca.gov/cdiac), covering measures from 1998 through 2025. For each K–12 school general obligation bond measure, we record the election date, proposed bond amount, and outcome (pass or fail). Because CDIAC records do not include CDE district codes, we match bond elections to districts using a name-and-county crosswalk.

Assessed Property Value. Annual assessed property value data by school district are compiled by CC+S from data provided by Eastshore Consulting (Oakland, California) and the State Controller's Office. Assessed value is the property valuation used for calculating general obligation bond tax rates and statutory bonding capacity limits under California law. Data coverage is near-complete for recent years; we use 2023–24 assessed values as the primary basis for bonding capacity and wealth quintile calculations.

Enrollment and Student Demographics. Annual enrollment data come from the CDE Census Day Enrollment files, covering school years 1998–99 through 2024–25. We use total K–12 enrollment as the primary enrollment measure, with racial and ethnic composition available by year. Enrollment projections through 2035 come from the California Department of Finance (DOF) Demographic Research Unit (dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/public-k-12-graded-enrollment). Student need indicators come from CalPADS (the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System), specifically the unduplicated pupil count (UPC)—students who are English Learners, foster youth, or eligible for free or reduced-price meals (FRPM). CalPADS data and racial/ethnic composition are drawn from 2024–25 and applied as time-invariant district characteristics.

District Financial Expenditures (SACS). District-level expenditure data come from the California Department of Education's Standardized Account Code Structure (SACS) unaudited annual financial reports, available for fiscal years 2003–04 through 2024–25. We use SACS data to measure facility investment from the expenditure side—capturing what districts actually spend on capital projects, maintenance and operations, and debt service from all funding sources combined—complementing the revenue-side data from SFP grants and bond records. We draw on seven capital-dedicated funds (the Building Fund, Capital Facilities Fund, State School Building Lease-Purchase Fund, County School Facilities Fund, Special Reserve for Capital Projects, Capital Project Fund for Blended Components, and the Bond Interest and Redemption Fund) as well as facility-related spending from the General Fund. Within the capital funds, revenue categories included in the analysis are SFP apportionments, general obligation bond proceeds, developer fees, parcel and other local taxes, community redevelopment funds, other state revenues, and federal grants. This follows the GDTF II methodology for capital revenue analysis and excludes debt financing instruments such as certificates of participation and lease-revenue bond proceeds, interfund transfers, and interest income.

Climate Hazard Data. Climate hazard data come from the California Schools Climate Hazards Dataset produced by the Climate Adaptations Solutions Accelerator through School-Community Hubs (CASA Schools) project at UC Santa Barbara's Bren School of Environmental Science & Management (Curtin, Chen, Vaquero, and Glass; datadryad.org/dataset/doi:10.5061/dryad.1jwstqk3g). The dataset scores five climate hazards—extreme heat, wildfire, extreme precipitation, flooding, and sea level

rise—across approximately 10,000 California public schools on a standardized 0–5 scale; a composite score (the sum of all five) is also available. Extreme heat and precipitation scores are derived from downscaled climate model projections for the 2025–2030 period, calibrated against a 1961–2005 historical baseline. Wildfire scores use U.S. Forest Service Wildfire Hazard Potential data; flood and sea level rise scores reflect the share of school property within FEMA flood zones or projected sea level rise inundation areas. School-level scores are aggregated to the district level by computing the mean and maximum across all schools in each district.

Emergency School Closures (J-13A). Data on school closures due to emergencies were obtained directly from the California Department of Education (CDE), covering school years 2015–16 through 2024–25. These records document closures caused by wildfires, extreme heat, flooding, Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS), smoke and air quality events, and other emergencies. We classify each record by primary cause category using rule-based keyword matching on the free-text emergency description field, developed with assistance from Claude (Anthropic).

National Comparison Data (NCES F33). For national comparisons of capital spending, we use the NCES Public Elementary/Secondary Education Finance Survey (F33; nces.ed.gov/ccd), covering fiscal years 1999 through 2023. District-level records are collapsed to state-year totals and compared to California on measures including total capital outlay per pupil, state capital revenue, long-term debt issued, and interest on debt. Capital spending variables are adjusted to constant 2025 dollars using the Turner Construction Cost Index.

Methods

Inflation adjustment. All facility-related dollar amounts are adjusted to constant 2025 dollars before any aggregation or analysis. We use the Turner Construction Cost Index for capital expenditures, capital revenues, SFP awards, and bond amounts. The Turner index tracks changes in construction labor, materials, and equipment costs nationally and is more appropriate for school facility investment than a general consumer price index. General Fund operating expenditures are adjusted using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Debt service payments and assessed property values are left in nominal

dollars: bond obligations are contractual nominal amounts, and assessed values represent legal thresholds that operate in current-dollar terms.

Per-pupil measures. We construct per-pupil measures for SFP awards, bond amounts, and expenditures by dividing annual dollar amounts by the district's enrollment in that year. Cumulative per-pupil measures over the study period are calculated as the sum of annual per-pupil amounts. This means cumulative per-pupil funding reflects the flow of investment relative to district size at the time each award was made, rather than dividing a lump-sum total by a single year's enrollment.

Bonding capacity. We calculate gross bonding capacity based on California's statutory limits: 1.25 percent of total assessed property value for elementary and high school districts, and 2.5 percent for unified school districts. Bonding capacity per pupil divides gross bonding capacity by enrollment.

Wealth quintiles. To examine how facility funding varies across the distribution of district property wealth, districts are sorted into quintiles based on assessed value per pupil using 2023–24 assessed values, following the approach in Brunner and Vincent (2018). We report both unweighted quintiles (each containing approximately one-fifth of districts by count) and enrollment-weighted quintiles (each containing approximately one-fifth of total student enrollment). The enrollment-weighted version reflects the funding environment experienced by the typical California student.

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted. Most fundamentally, California lacks any systematic statewide data on the physical condition or adequacy of school facilities. We rely on financial measures—revenues received and expenditures made—as proxies for facility investment, but these cannot speak to the actual state of school buildings. The Facilities Inspection Tool (FIT), the only required statewide facility condition assessment, has been found by the State Auditor to be unreliable. This data gap is itself a finding of the study.

The SFP data capture only the state share of facility project costs; the local matching contribution is not recorded in the state dataset. SFP measures therefore understate total project

investment, and the degree of understatement varies with district financial hardship status. The bond and SACS data partially address this gap by capturing local facility revenue and spending, but they do not link directly to specific SFP projects.

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