School districts get $52M

Funds to pay for controversial construction plan

By Michelle Mitchell
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Two Coachella Valley school districts have received about $52 million for school construction projects from the state allocation board.

This includes about $875,000 for the performing arts building at Palm Springs High School, which has been protested by community members because it involves the demolition of a school building designed by renowned midcentury architects Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison.

That project was on hold until the state funding was allocated and will now move forward, Assistant Superintendent of Business Services Lisa Howell said.

The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation wrote to the State Allocation Board in May in an effort to block funding for that project.

"We'd like to be able to say that it's not over until the bulldozer shows up, but we've pretty much exhausted all our options and never intended to get into a protracted, expensive legal battle," said Ronald Marshall, president of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation.

The group sent Palm Springs Unified its own report on the historic significance of the building, but hopes that even if this building isn't saved, the district may be more likely to consider the historic merit of other buildings, Marshall said.

The State Allocation Board also gave Desert Sands Unified about $2.1 million for the construction of La Quinta High School's medical Career Technology Education classroom buildings.

Palm Springs Unified received about $47.1 million for Rancho Mirage High School, which is under construction, about $2 million for playground modernizations at Vista Del Monte, Katherine Finchy, Sunny Sands, Julius Corsini and Bubbling Wells elementary schools.

These projects were initially funded by the district's bond money, which will be replenished by the state funding, Howell said.

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