

Chapter 7: Education

Introduction and Setting

Public schools play an important role in the neighborhood and the community. In addition to their education role, they serve the larger community as a place for a wide range of activities, including meetings, special programs, after school play, latch-key programs, youth and adult sport programs, and even precinct voting. Coordination between school districts and the County is important to ensure that educational facilities will be available to serve future population.

A quality learning environment is dependent upon many factors, including the design of the school, class sizes, site location and school enrollment capacities. For school districts in rural counties, the need for early planning and coordination to meet future needs is especially critical, because development typically occurs through many relatively small projects, rather than a few large projects where school sites can be provided as an integral part of development.

There are currently 13 separate school districts serving Nevada County, including Tahoe-Truckee Unified School District, Pleasant Ridge Unified School District, Ready Springs Unified School District, Chicago Park School District, Clear Creek School District, Grass Valley School District, Nevada City School District, Pleasant Valley School District, Twin Ridges School District, Union Hill School District, Special Education Consortium District, Nevada Joint Union High School District and Sierra College Extension. The Placer County School Board serves as an administrative body to Tahoe-Truckee Unified School District.

Each of the school districts has identified needs for additional funding to increase staffing levels, facilities, equipment and programs. Five of the school districts are reported to be experiencing over-crowded conditions at certain schools. At some schools this situation is being corrected with the use of portable classrooms on the school grounds. The Nevada Joint Union High School District, which has had a significant increase in enrollment, is beginning preliminary planning for selection of a new high school site.

Higher education facilities serving the County are provided by Sierra Community College District, which provides two-year degree programs, continuing education, job training, job placement and skill enhancement programs for Placer and Nevada Counties. The District currently serves over 16,000 students, of which approximately 80 percent come from Placer County. The Sierra Community College campus is located in Rocklin, which is approximately 25

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miles south of Nevada County. The District is currently in the process of constructing buildings on a new site in Grass Valley. The Western Nevada County Center, scheduled to open in the fall of 1996, is projected to serve 950 day students and 1,300 evening students. The center will provide an extension of Dorsey Drive to connect E. Main Street and Ridge Road.

Additional discussion of school facilities in the County is contained in Section 11 of the Nevada County Master Environmental Inventory, which is part of Volume 3 of the General Plan.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies

All of the school districts in Nevada County have identified significant additional funding needs and five of the districts are experiencing overcrowding. Planning and coordination for the development of new facilities is critical to meet the needs of future growth.

Additional goals, policies and objectives generally related to education are located in Chapter 1: Land Use; Chapter 2: Economic Development; Chapter 3: Public Facilities and Services; and Chapter 5: Recreation.

Goal 7.1

Facilitate the development and maintenance of schools and educational facilities to ensure the economic and cultural vitality of the County.

Objective 7.1

Support and encourage public schools that are physically and functionally integrated with their surrounding neighborhoods or service areas.

Directive Policies

Policy 7.1

The County will encourage location of future school sites which are physically and functionally integrated with their surrounding neighborhoods and community, and will cooperate with school districts and other governmental agencies to coordinate school facilities planning and site acquisition.

Policy 7.2

The County will encourage consideration of appropriate access in the location of new school sites, so that elementary and middle schools have access from collector or local streets, while high schools have access from arterial streets. The County will encourage the location of new school sites so that they can be linked with planned bikeways, greenways and pedestrian access wherever possible.

Objective 7.2

Encourage coordinated school facilities planning and site acquisition among school districts and other local government agencies.

Directive Policies

Policy 7.3 Encourage all school districts serving the County to develop and to regularly update a Facilities Master Plan which specifies a districts' policies and requirements for facilities based upon realistic school growth projections. The County shall review all proposed facility sites in the school districts' Facilities Master Plans for consistency with the General Plan.

Policy 7.4 The County will encourage the joint use of school and park facilities to provide more efficient educational and recreational services.

Objective 7.3

Support service levels that are equal to or exceed state standards for classroom size, school enrollment and school size, for all schools.

See: Policy 7.3

Objective 7.4

Cooperate in securing adequate funds to construct and/or renovate schools to keep pace with growth and enrollment.

Directive Policies

Policy 7.5 The County will cooperate with the school districts and municipalities in the County, to the extent feasible, to explore methods for securing adequate funding of new school facilities. This may include the development of local funding mechanisms, as well as the utilization of state funds when available. Local resources to be considered may include the reservation or dedication of school sites, developer fees, development agreements, Mello-Roos CFDs, assessment districts, redevelopment funds, general obligation bond proceeds, special taxes, and other legal funding mechanisms.

Policy 7.6 The County shall encourage all school districts within the County which are impacted by growth to do appropriate studies, based on realistic school growth projections, and develop an impact fee program, if found to be necessary, providing for the maximum school fee permitted under the School facilities law, or applicable portion thereof, to offset the costs identified as the appropriate

share of the school facility capital improvements necessary to serve future development.

Objective 7.5

Coordinate, to the extent allowed by law, the capacity, financing and availability of school facilities with the timing of new development.

Directive Policy

Policy 7.7

For any development requiring a discretionary permit, where the affected district determines adequate school facilities are not available to serve the proposed development, the County will work with affected school districts in securing project-sponsored mitigation.

Objective 7.6

Encourage higher education programs and facilities be made available to the Nevada County area to serve the community's needs.

Directive Policies

Policy 7.8

The County will continue to place a high priority on the establishment of higher education facilities and programs in the County including a four-year college campus. In addition to supporting the location of a campus of Sierra College in the County, the County will cooperate in the consideration of joint reciprocal use of facilities, equipment and personnel resources to establish mini-college centers in the County to provide additional access to higher education.

Policy 7.9

The County strongly encourages school districts to fully mitigate the impacts of their facility improvement projects on public services and facilities which include, but are not limited to, roads and water and sewer facilities.