

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

September 12, 2023

Protecting Vulnerable Students from Extreme Heat on School Campuses

Throughout Los Angeles County, the impacts of climate change are already evident. Severe storms, drought, and temperature extremes have become more frequent occurrences, and hotter, longer heat waves are threatening the health and wellbeing of County residents. Across the County, residents are experiencing greater numbers of very hot days and heat waves that are extending later in the summer, and scientists predict further occurrences of extreme heat in the future. A study by UCLA forecasts that coastal areas and central Los Angeles will experience up to three times the number of days with temperatures above 95°F, and the San Fernando and San Gabriel Valleys will have even more instances of extremely hot weather.

Among the most heat-vulnerable Californians, children are particularly susceptible to heat stress and other heat-related illnesses. As instances of heat-related illness increase with rising average air temperatures, experts have shown almost half of those getting sick are children. Children’s bodies are not able to regulate temperature as effectively as adults, and they often rely on adult assistance to prevent overheating.

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Unfortunately, heat exposure was believed to be the cause of a student's death during Physical Education class in late August in Lake Elsinore, as a 12-year-old boy collapsed at school.

The County is engaging in efforts to cool neighborhoods, known as urban heat island reduction. The urban heat island refers to areas that are artificially hotter due to surfaces that absorb heat and lack vegetation, particularly trees. This issue is especially pronounced in low-income populations and communities of color, who are most impacted by the urban heat island effect.

Sadly, due to the nature of their design, many schools are some of the hottest locations in the County. Play yards dominated by asphalt increase heat risk, and the lack of trees on many campuses result in fewer opportunities for cooling shade. Fortunately, there are opportunities for schools to avail themselves of federal and State resources to modernize school campuses to make them more resilient against extreme heat. Governor Gavin Newsom recently announced another \$73 million from CAL FIRE for school districts to replace asphalt with green spaces, trees, and vegetation. The Green Schoolyard Grant program helps schools convert pavement to green spaces and create drought-tolerant natural areas on school grounds. The California School Facilities Program provides grants for new construction that can be used for schoolyard heat mitigation, and both the California Conservation Corps Energy Program and the California Schools Healthy Air, Plumbing, and Energy Program provide resources for cooling equipment upgrades. Similarly, Measure W, which funds the Los Angeles County Safe, Clean Water Program, was passed by voters in 2018 and provides approximately \$300 million annually for local and regional stormwater projects, including

removal of hardscape and other nature-based solutions. A report by Los Angeles Waterkeeper assessing the first three rounds of that program found that schools and school districts still represent significant unrealized opportunities for funding, even though Measure W specifically prioritized greening of schools, among other Community Investment Benefits. Other notable funding opportunities for school resilience and efficiency include the state Urban Greening Program, as well as the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Inflation Reduction Act, and American Rescue Plan, among others.

While additional efforts must be implemented to cool exteriors of schools, school facilities represent an opportunity to provide refuge during instances of extreme heat. A number of schools across the County already serve as cooling centers for students and their families on hot days. Augmented cooling centers operated by the County or city partners offer residents an opportunity to escape the heat in a public air-conditioned facility. Currently, the County does not have a centralized database to assess which schools are offering this service or information about the challenges that are preventing other schools from participating in these cooling efforts.

Fortunately, the County has already embarked on a number of initiatives to address extreme heat, with lessons learned and best practices that can be shared immediately with school districts, so students, educators, and families are empowered to minimize the detrimental impacts of extreme heat. The County's cool roof ordinance, passed in 2018, has helped to make our building stock more heat resilient, and our Department of Parks and Recreation extended the summer swim season starting in 2022 to enable access to pools for a greater portion of the year. The County is

participating in the #HeatRelief4LA communications campaign to raise awareness of heat risks and cooling resources, and the Ready LA County website outlines heat preparedness tips and resources. The Chief Sustainability Office (CSO) is working with County departments to create the first Urban Forest Management Plan for LA County, which will prioritize increasing tree canopy and shade equity to help address the urban heat island effect. The Department of Public Health also sponsors residential tree planting and education projects in partnership with Public Works, helping the County better understand how to communicate the benefits of trees and shade to the community, thereby increasing community support for greening projects. The Los Angeles County Office of Education has also launched a Green Schools Initiative, focused on supporting positive environmental actions for the 80 school districts across the County. Through this initiative, they advocate that education must be part of climate solutions to prepare students to lead in efforts toward a clean economy and a sustainable future.

As the incidents of extreme heat precipitated by climate change only continue to increase, it is imperative that the County partner with our schools to safeguard the health and wellness of children, especially in communities that are most susceptible to extreme heat. The County can provide guidance and technical assistance to districts most in need of aid while learning the greatest challenges that schools are experiencing with respect to extreme heat.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS request that the Los Angeles County Office of Education:

1. With guidance from the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and the Chief

Sustainability Office (CSO), conduct a survey of County School District Superintendents to determine which districts are utilizing campuses for cooling center purposes, identifying key features and outcomes such as cooling hours/activities and participation levels; and for schools that are not implementing these programs, assess cooling needs among the student population and what, if any, cooling resources students utilize outside of school hours; and

2. Work with the Chief Executive Office – Office of Emergency Management and the Department of Public Health to partner with school districts to disseminate information regarding nearby available cooling centers in advance of instances of extreme heat.

I, FURTHER, MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS direct the Chief Sustainability Officer, the Department of Public Health, the Internal Services Department, and the Department of Public Works to work with the Los Angeles County Office of Education to convene interested school districts and raise awareness of federal and state funding opportunities to support climate resiliency and cooling at schools, and provide technical assistance to school districts in heat-vulnerable areas that are interested in pursuing these funding opportunities, including but not limited to CAL FIRE's Green Schoolyards Grant Program; the County's Safe, Clean Water Program; the California Schools Healthy Air, Plumbing, and Efficiency Program; and the state Urban Greening Program.

I, FURTHER, MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS direct the Department of Public Health, in collaboration with the Chief Sustainability Officer and the Department of Public Works, to work with the Los Angeles County Office of

Education to develop toolkits targeted at students, families, and school staff on best practices to safeguard public health and wellness to address extreme heat conditions, including tips to address air quality issues that regularly accompany extreme heat events.

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