

LESS LAWN MORE LEARNING

Fact Sheet: New Rules, New Opportunities for Educational Institutions

California law (AB 1572) will soon prohibit the use of potable (drinking) water to irrigate nonfunctional turf—lawns that serve no recreational or community purpose—at all educational institutions in the state.

Educational institutions have a unique opportunity to lead by example and demonstrate how replacing nonfunctional lawn with water-wise plants can save money, conserve water, and create fun, hands-on learning opportunities.



Yarrow *Achillea* spp, California native

This fact sheet explains what's changing and how to prepare.



Functional Lawn



Nonfunctional Lawn

Photo by R. H. Dana Elementary School

WHAT IS NONFUNCTIONAL LAWN?

Nonfunctional lawn refers to irrigated lawn that is ornamental and not regularly used for recreation or public gatherings. **If the groundskeeper is the only person who ever walks on the lawn, it's likely nonfunctional.**

- Narrow strips (10 ft wide or less) along sidewalks, fences, or building edges
- Medians, frontage strips, or parking lot islands
- Decorative lawns at building entries, signage, or gateways
- Steep slopes (25% grade or more)
- Inaccessible lawns (blocked by barriers, no pathways)

Lawns used for play, sports, recreation, or community events are considered functional and are exempt from the new requirements.

Learning Laboratory: Creating Outdoor Spaces that Inspire

A fresh landscape makeover with water-wise plants adds energy and personality to your campus. It's a celebration of sustainability, school pride, and the people who make the campus special.

Campus Pride & Aesthetics: Low-water plants, trees, and pathways improve curb appeal and create a more welcoming and vibrant campus environment.

Learning & Engagement: Water-wise landscapes can become outdoor classrooms and gardens, offering hands-on learning and student-led project opportunities.

Community & Partnerships: Engaging volunteers, local organizations, and utility programs can provide resources, funding, and long-term support.

Sustainability & Reputation: Visible conservation efforts support Environmental, Social and Governance goals, enhance a school's public image, and help attract and retain students and staff.

Recognition & Leadership: Schools leading in water efficiency can earn awards, media coverage, and sustainability certifications.

Cost Savings & Efficiency: Reducing lawn irrigation can lower water, wastewater, energy, and maintenance costs, with a clear return on investment for common upgrades.

Schools should begin preparing now for the compliance deadlines. Early action gives time to plan, secure funding, and make changes at a comfortable pace. Starting with small, high-visibility areas—like entryways, courtyards, or walkways—can quickly show results, build excitement, and create momentum for larger projects down the road.



Photo by La Tercera Elementary School

GRANT SUPPORT MAY BE AVAILABLE

As campuses plan to transition nonfunctional lawns into water-wise landscapes, state and federal grants are available to help. These are just some of the available resources:

- The California Water Efficiency Partnership (CalWEP) is collecting and posting information about rebates and grants on the website: NonFunctionalTurfCA.org
- The Charter School Facility Grant Program provides annual grants to offset annual ongoing facility costs for charter schools that serve a high percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals: grants.ca.gov/grants/charter-school-facility-grant-program-sb740
- An online resource developed by the California State Library that lists all of the grants and loans offered by California state agencies: grants.ca.gov
- A database designed to help applicants find and apply for federal grants: grants.gov
- The California Financing Coordinating Committee combines federal and state resources and serves as a one-stop shop for available grants, loans and bond financing for infrastructure projects. cfcc.ca.gov

By January 1, 2027 for Public Schools and January 1, 2028 for Private Schools:

Educational Institutions must turn off potable irrigation to nonfunctional lawns. You are not required to complete landscape conversions by this date.



Photo by La Tercera Elementary School

Prioritize Trees:

Mature trees are valuable for shade, cooling, and learning, so if you're removing lawn nearby, follow best practices and work with an ISA Certified Arborist to keep their roots and canopy healthy.

YOUR WATER PROVIDER IS HERE TO HELP

Many water agencies offer:

- Lawn replacement and irrigation rebates
- Free site visits and landscape reviews
- Sample plant lists and design templates
- Tree protection tips and irrigation strategies



NonFunctionalTurfCA.org