



Media Release

School district in Kern County celebrates new drinking water system funded by state grants

Completed water treatment facility provides safe drinking water for 1200 students and staff

Since its launch in 2019, the SAFER program has provided \$62 million to 224 California schools, benefitting about 35,000 students and staff

September 25, 2024

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BAKERSFIELD – The State Water Resources Control Board yesterday joined the [Rio Bravo-Greeley Union School District](#) in Bakersfield to celebrate the completion of a new treatment plant that secures safe drinking water for the district’s 1,200 students and staff. The new facility was made possible through the coordinated efforts of multiple agencies and state grants from the State Water Board’s [Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience \(SAFER\)](#) drinking water program and from the [Department of Water Resources](#).

“Through this project and hundreds of others like it around the state, California is working to ensure ready access to safe drinking water at school districts like Rio Bravo, small rural communities, and for all Californians,” said Sean Maguire, member of the State Water Board.



Board member Maguire joins Superintendent Jennifer Hedge on Sept. 25 to celebrate the opening of the school district’s new water facility

Approximately five miles west of Bakersfield, the campus of the Rio Bravo-Greeley Union School District includes an elementary school, a middle school, a district office, and employee housing. The campus has been dependent on a water system that in 2015 and 2018 was cited for exceeding allowable levels for two contaminants, nitrate and 1,2,3-TCP. To ensure access to safe drinking water for the school district’s students

and staff, the board has funded the delivery of bottled water to the school since 2015.

Unlike other small, struggling water systems that can be consolidated into the larger and more established systems of nearby communities, this school district is too isolated to be merged into another system and requires on-site treatment. In 2018, the [California Department of Water Resources](#) provided UC Davis with \$5 million in funding from [Proposition 50](#)—the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002—to study the implementation and cost efficiency of full-scale nitrate treatment systems. As a result of a pilot project associated with [the study](#), the system at the school district was fully funded.

While the facility is now complete, the school district requires further financial assistance to pay for the new facility's operation and maintenance. Often, such ongoing expenses can present the biggest hurdles to sustainable solutions for small, rural communities. To resolve this issue for the school, the board is providing \$178,000 to help this system with operational needs. The funding will cover the costs for the contract operator, treatment supplies, laboratory sampling fees and the disposal costs of brine waste to a remote location. It also includes a budget for project administration and training of district facilities staff to help with the day-to-day operation and maintenance of the treatment facility.

"We at the Rio Bravo-Greeley Union School District are thrilled that our water treatment facility is finally complete," said Jennifer Hedge, District Superintendent. "It has been a long journey, but we now have regular, reliable and easy access to this necessary resource—safe drinking water."



The school's new water system includes a well, a treatment facility to remove the two contaminants, 150,000-gallon storage tank, a 5,000-gallon pressure tank, chlorination system and distribution system.

Since 2019 when the SAFER program began, the board has provided \$62 million to 224 schools throughout California to help them come into compliance with drinking water standards and implement long-term solutions, benefitting about 35,000 students and staff.

During that same period the SAFER program has provided about \$112 million to support technical assistance, planning and construction for projects to secure safer drinking water in Kern County alone.

Established after Gov. Gavin Newsom signed [SB 200](#) in 2019, SAFER uses a set of tools, funding sources and regulatory authorities to help struggling water systems provide safe and affordable drinking water and fulfill the [Human Right to Water](#). SAFER

is driven by collective responsibility: water systems, nonprofit organizations, governments, a community advisory board and other stakeholders work together to develop and implement sustainable drinking water solutions.

For more information about the SAFER program, visit the board's [website](#).

The State Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.



The SAFER Program includes projects funded by the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, which is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide initiative that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment—particularly in disadvantaged communities.