



CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR

Elaine M. Howle, State Auditor

FACT SHEET

Date: May 31, 2012

Report: 2011-116.2

The California State Auditor's Office released the following report today:

Department of General Services

*Strengthening the Division of the State Architect's Workload Management and Performance Measurements
Could Help It Avoid Delays in Processing Future Increases in Workload*

BACKGROUND

In addition to being responsible for supervising the design and construction of projects at K-12 schools and community colleges, the Division of the State Architect (division), within the Department of General Services (General Services), must review plans for school construction projects to ensure that they comply with the Field Act (act) and building standards. The division issues an approval letter, which is required before construction can begin, when it is satisfied that a set of plans meets legal requirements. To process and approve school district plans, the division's approval process encompasses three sequential phases: bin time (the time between the division's receipt of a complete application and the start of its review), plan review time, and client time (the time it takes the districts' design professionals to make corrections based on the division's comments). When construction is completed according to approved plans and required documents are filed, the division certifies the project. Between July 2008 and September 2011, the division received at least 7,869 applications for school projects, with an estimated value of \$17 billion.

KEY FINDINGS

During our review of the division's implementation of the act, we noted the following:

- The division's bin time and plan review time have an impact on the total time it takes for the division to approve plans, yet the division has only established a goal for the length of bin time and has not set a goal for plan review time, which lasted approximately four and a half weeks on average in the quarter ending September 2011.
- Although the division has been successful in maintaining its average bin time below its goal of six weeks since January 2010—prior to that some projects had been in the bin between 11 and 13 weeks—its success appears to be largely related to decreased workload and not policy changes. The average number of new project applications the division received decreased substantially during the period we reviewed—by approximately 25 percent.
- While state law allows it to take specific actions that include temporarily employing additional staff, having existing staff work overtime, and contracting for plan review services—in the recent past the division was prohibited from using plan review contractors and staff overtime.
- The statistics published by the division in the monthly reports regarding the length of time projects spend in the bin and in plan review do not reflect current activities and are distorted.
 - ✓ Rather than providing information on current activities, the division only reports on projects that have concluded all plan review activities—after they have been approved or voided by the division, or cancelled by the school districts—and thus, well after bin and review times have occurred.
 - ✓ The monthly report contains information for projects that the division's database shows never entered the bin for review and are counted as having taken zero days to complete the plan review and client time phases of the approval process—thus, understating the averages.
 - ✓ The monthly report overstates the average length of time spent during the client phase because it includes information on projects that exceed the time limits defined in its policy for voiding projects.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We made several recommendations to the division regarding its plan review process including that it develop goals for the time it spends during the plan review phase and measure and report on how it meets those goals. Further, we recommended that it develop policies and procedures that ensure it receives, reviews, approves, and documents approval of all relevant plan changes before the start of related construction. Also, the division should develop policies for using its authority to contract for additional plan review resources to expedite plan reviews. Finally, we made recommendations that would allow the division to more accurately report on its plan review activities to stakeholders and provide relevant information to management.

