



DELIVERY

Closing Out a Project Cleanly

A California school-construction closeout guide integrating contract handoff, district operations, DSA certification, state-funded expenditure reporting and lessons learned.

FOR DISTRICT LEADERS

Use this guide as a planning and discussion framework. State-program rules change over time, and project-specific legal, election, procurement, accounting, accessibility, and regulatory requirements should be confirmed with the district's appropriate professionals.

What this guide helps you do

- Start closeout and certification tracking at project setup.
- Manage contract, operational, financial and regulatory closeout as parallel tracks.
- Verify DSA inspection/certification documents before project teams demobilize.
- Transfer the final record to district control and feed completed work back into the facilities plan.

Treat closeout as a construction-phase process, not an end-of-job task

DSA's certification process makes the principle explicit: certification depends on documents and actions throughout construction. The project inspector, design professionals, testing laboratories, contractor and district each contribute to the record that allows DSA to determine whether the project can be certified.

Create the closeout and certification matrix at project setup. Tie every required document to a responsible party, due point, review status and final repository location.

OFFICIAL CALIFORNIA SOURCE

DSA - Project Certification for Schools
[Open official source](#)

OFFICIAL CALIFORNIA SOURCE

DSA - PR 13-02 Project Certification Process
[Open official source](#)

Manage four parallel closeout tracks

A project is not truly closed because the campus is occupied. Contract, operational, financial and regulatory closeout must all be completed.

Contract / construction	Punch list, final changes, record drawings, O&M; manuals, warranties, spare materials, training.	Have all contractual deliverables been received and verified?
Operations / facilities	Asset data, keys, controls sequences, maintenance requirements, manufacturer contacts, staff training.	Can maintenance staff operate and service the facility tomorrow?
Financial	Final contract values, invoices, retention, credits, claims, consultant closeout, final project cost.	Is the financial record complete and reconciled?
Regulatory / state	DSA verified reports, inspection card, certification deficiencies, OPSC expenditure reporting for funded projects.	Can the district prove regulatory and funding closeout?

Understand the DSA certification timeline and consequences

DSA explains that once it is aware a project is fully constructed, occupied or otherwise in use, it works with the project team to finalize certification requirements. If certification is not complete, DSA can issue notifications identifying deficiencies. DSA's current certification page describes the 60-day and 120-day notification process and the public Certification Box for unresolved project certification.

DSA also states that certification is critical because it documents the safety of school construction and because DSA may be unable to approve new proposed projects associated with uncertified construction.

OFFICIAL CALIFORNIA SOURCE

DSA - Project Certification

[Open official source](#)

OFFICIAL CALIFORNIA SOURCE

DSA - Project Certification Guide

[Open official source](#)

Use the inspection and verified-report record throughout construction

The DSA 152 Project Inspection Card is not a final-week document. DSA states that the project inspector signs applicable blocks and sections as work progresses, in accordance with the construction oversight process. Final verified reports are also part of certification.

Maintain a live certification log showing inspection-card status, testing and special inspection reports, deviations and resolutions, construction change documents, deferred submittals, required verified reports, fees and other outstanding items.

OFFICIAL CALIFORNIA SOURCE

DSA - Construction Oversight

[Open official source](#)

OFFICIAL CALIFORNIA SOURCE

DSA - PR 13-02

[Open official source](#)

Close the contract documents deliberately

Punch list

Use one controlled list with item number, location, responsible party, target date, correction evidence and verification status. Distinguish incomplete contract work from owner-requested changes, warranty issues and maintenance items.

Record drawings and project files

Transfer final project records into a district-controlled repository. Do not rely on a consultant or contractor cloud account remaining available indefinitely. Preserve native files where contractually required in addition to PDFs.

Operations and maintenance information

Organize O&M; manuals by system and location. Record warranty start/end dates, required preventive maintenance, claim contacts and installed equipment data. Complete operator training with the staff who will actually maintain the systems.

CONTRACT VERSUS STATE REQUIREMENTS

DSA certification is a regulatory closeout process. O&M; manuals, warranties, training and record-document formats are primarily contractual/owner requirements. Make them explicit in the contract documents and consultant scopes so they are enforceable.

Reconcile final cost and state expenditure reporting

Before final financial release, reconcile original contract values, amendments, approved changes, allowances, credits, payments, retention, claims and remaining obligations. Close consultant agreements and owner costs so the district can determine the true final project cost.

For SFP-funded projects, OPSC provides Form SAB 50-06 and related expenditure schedules. OPSC's progress/expenditure guidance and forms should be incorporated into the financial closeout checklist.

OFFICIAL CALIFORNIA SOURCE

OPSC - Forms

[Open official source](#)

OFFICIAL CALIFORNIA SOURCE

OPSC - Substantial Progress and Expenditure Guide

[Open official source](#)

Do not release apparent savings too early

A favorable budget variance is not necessarily available cash. Outstanding invoices, unresolved changes, claims, punch-list work, testing, consultant closeout and regulatory requirements may remain. Validate final exposure before moving funds to another project.

For state-funded projects, follow the current OPSC process for project savings/overspending and use of savings. The forms library identifies the applicable schedules that accompany or follow the expenditure report.

OFFICIAL CALIFORNIA SOURCE

OPSC - Forms and Project Savings Schedules

[Open official source](#)

Finish with a district handoff and lessons learned review

Closeout is successful when the project team can leave without taking critical knowledge with them. Confirm that the district controls the final record, facility staff understand the systems, warranty obligations are calendared, asset information is updated and the project is reflected correctly in the facilities master plan.

Conduct a short lessons-learned review

- What scope assumptions proved wrong?
- Which change drivers were avoidable?
- Did the design and consultant scopes cover actual needs?
- Were agency-review and certification responsibilities clear?
- Which products or systems performed well for maintenance?
- What should change in district standards, budgets, schedules or contract language?

Feed those lessons back into the next project. Closeout should improve the district's standards and facility dataset, not simply archive the last job.

Frequently Asked Questions

Practical questions district leaders commonly ask when moving from planning into implementation.

Is substantial completion the same as project certification?

No. Substantial completion is a contractual milestone. DSA certification is the state process for determining that the school construction project complied with applicable code and documentation requirements.

When should the certification checklist be created?

At project setup and actively managed throughout construction. DSA's process depends on documentation generated before, during and after construction.

What is the DSA 152 Project Inspection Card?

It is a DSA inspection card used by the project inspector to document required inspection stages as work progresses. DSA provides a manual and connects the card to its construction oversight procedure.

What happens if a project is occupied before certification is complete?

DSA's certification page describes a notification process for deficiencies, including DSA 301-N and DSA 301-P notices. Unresolved projects can appear in the public Certification Box.

Why does DSA certification matter for future projects?

DSA states it may be unable to approve new proposed projects associated with existing uncertified construction. Certification also provides the official record that the project met applicable safety-of-design-and-construction requirements.

Who is responsible for missing certification documents?

Responsibility depends on the document and project role. DSA PR 13-02 identifies forms and roles for design professionals, contractors, inspectors, laboratories and others. Maintain a project-specific responsibility matrix.

When should retention be released?

Follow the construction contract, applicable law, district procedures and confirmation that required conditions are satisfied. Regulatory certification and contractual final payment are related but not identical processes.

What should happen to final project files?

Transfer them into a district-controlled repository with consistent naming and a clear authoritative record set. Preserve the formats needed for future maintenance and capital planning.

How do state-funded projects close financially?

Use the current OPSC expenditure-reporting and audit guidance. Form SAB 50-06 records total project expenditures, and additional schedules address project savings/overspending as applicable.

When is contingency truly available for another project?

After remaining obligations, claims, invoices and closeout/certification exposure are understood and the district's approved program procedures allow the transfer.

Questions to Ask Next

- Do our contracts identify all closeout and certification deliverables?
- Is there one current log for punch-list and certification items?
- Are DSA 152 and verified-report requirements being tracked before the end of construction?
- Have record drawings, O&M; manuals, warranties, training and asset data been verified?
- Are final changes, credits, invoices, retention and claims reconciled?
- Have OPSC expenditure reports and state-funded closeout requirements been completed?
- Can district staff find and use the final project record without a consultant account?
- Has the facility inventory/master plan been updated to reflect completed work?

VALLEY OAK PROJECT ADVISORS

We help school districts translate facility needs into clear, financially responsible, and deliverable capital programs - from assessments and master planning through project delivery and closeout.

Official California Resources

Every link below goes directly to an official California state source from OPSC, the State Allocation Board, CDE, or DSA.

DSA	Project Certification for Schools Current certification process, inspection card, notifications and closeout definitions. Open source
DSA	PR 13-02 Project Certification Process Prescribed certification process and required forms. Open source
DSA	Project Certification Guide Detailed closeout and certification guidance. Open source
DSA	Construction Oversight Project inspector, construction documents, testing/report review and field oversight. Open source
DSA	Construction Projects for Schools Certification requirements and consequences of uncertified projects. Open source
OPSC	Forms SAB 50-06, DLOPE and project savings/overspending schedules. Open source
OPSC	Substantial Progress and Expenditure Guide State-funded project progress and expenditure reporting guidance. Open source
OPSC	Cal School Construction - Project Close Out OPSC role and links to state school construction resources. Open source

Source note: This guide intentionally limits external references to the California Office of Public School Construction (OPSC), State Allocation Board materials hosted by OPSC, the California Department of Education (CDE), and the Division of the State Architect (DSA).

Prepared September 2026. Always verify the current version of forms, regulations, and agency guidance before acting.