

# New seismic safety code rattles Peninsula school budgets

**Andrea Koskey, San Francisco Examiner, 8-4-11**

The Redwood City Elementary School District is one of many on the Peninsula struggling to find funding to make sure buildings meet state regulations.

Two years after the Redwood City Elementary School District finished modernizing the last of its 16 school buildings, the state released a list of seismically unsafe schools in California, and nine were in the Peninsula city.

That put the district between a rock and a hard place because it had already done work, but that work did not meet the new standards.

The problem facing Redwood City and many districts statewide is deep budget cuts and new safety requirements without any funding.

The state did try to help by passing a \$10.4 billion bond in 2006 to retrofit state buildings. Nearly \$200 million was set aside for schools, but few districts have qualified for the money.

In order to dole out the money, schools were ranked 1 to 5 based on vulnerability, with Category 1 being the worst. Initially, schools in Category 1 qualified for money, and eventually the state allowed those in Category 2 to also apply.

In San Mateo County, though, of the roughly 100 schools appearing on the list compiled by the State Allocation Board in 2002, none are in Category 2, leaving districts to find money on their own.

"We're in tier 3," said Don Dias, director of facilities for the Redwood City district. "So we missed out on the funding."

The state of the nation's economy and tight budgets might make it difficult for Redwood City to seek a new bond, Dias said.

However, all of Redwood City's elementary school buildings are inhabitable, Dias said, and the state's requirements are merely a code update.

"California buildings are the safest buildings in the world, period," he said. "[But] even without this, but we are always trying to get better."

In addition to Redwood City, more than 7,400 schools statewide were included on the list released in 2002. The cost for all these schools to be upgraded would be \$4.7 billion, far more than the amount set aside, which makes funding even more scarce.

California has nearly 17,000 schools in more than 1,000 districts. So far, nine districts — including Redlands Unified, Oakland Unified and San Bernardino City — qualified for state money under original guidelines.

The original list, though, included buildings located in wrong districts and buildings no longer in existence or that were sold by districts. The state began re-examining the list in 2008.

The Hillsborough City School District had 16 buildings listed, but it only has four schools. Even so, district officials took matters in their own hands and successfully passed a bond in 2003 for \$66.3 million worth of upgrades.

"Most of what we did was a result of our own seismic report," Hillsborough Superintendent Anthony Ranii said. "It was a planned bond."