

http://www.bostonherald.com/news/local_regional/skul02122003.htm

State halts funding for new schools construction

by *Kevin Rothstein*

Wednesday, February 12, 2003

The Massachusetts Board of Education said yesterday it will not consider new requests from communities seeking state money to help build new schools.

The decision means cities and towns not already on the waiting list will for now have no help from the state aid program that pays for up to 90 percent of school building projects.

"We're not going to look at any new applications," said Heidi Perlman, spokeswoman for the state Department of Education. "It's just irresponsible to incur any new costs to the state when the state's economy is in such crisis."

Current construction projects as well as those approved for funding will not be affected by the decision. But to the 62 communities who have told the state of their intentions to seek help, the move means they will be on their own.

"Those districts will be told we're freezing the program indefinitely," Perlman said.

The decision threatens to wreak havoc in communities that have sometimes spent considerable resources preparing renovation plans. In some cases, local voters were to decide Proposition 2 1/2 overrides based on assumptions about state aid.

"What happens to those projects?" said Mike Gilbert, field director for the Mass. Association of School Committees. "There are probably a number of projects that have been submitted to the department where communities are going out on overrides this spring."

In a memo to local officials, state Education Commissioner David Driscoll said yesterday the moratorium would last at least until the end of the fiscal year that ends June 30.

Through its School Building Assistance Program, the state has already promised more than \$5 billion in long-term assistance. Another 350 projects have been approved for funding.

The state generally pays for 60 to 70 percent of school building costs. In communities with school desegregation plans in place, state aid can reach 90 percent.

Without the state assistance, local communities would either have to cancel their projects or see their costs

skyrocket, said Chris Martes, executive director of the Mass. Association of School Superintendents.

“No one wants to be on the hook for the whole amount,” he said.

Copyright by the Boston Herald and Herald Interactive Advertising Systems, Inc. No portion of BostonHerald.com or its content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission. [Privacy Commitment](#)

