Seventy years without drinkable water, at a public school — Westley, Stanislaus County

Grayson Elementary School, in the unincorporated community of Westley, was built in 1952. As of late 2024, it still had never had suitable drinking water in its entire history — and the school's students had been living with monthly water shutoffs as a result.

70

Years Grayson Elementary operated without a reliable source of drinkable water, since its 1952 construction.

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Water shutoffs per month the school endured under its one-well system — requiring a generator, trucked-in water for flushing, and portable toilets each time.

What happened

Westley, an unincorporated Stanislaus County community, is a formally recognized disadvantaged unincorporated community under California's SB 244 framework. Grayson Elementary, built there in 1952, draws water from the local housing authority's well — water the housing authority itself has deemed undrinkable. Under the one-well system that resulted, the housing authority shut off the school's water once a month; each time, the district had to bring in a generator, truck in water for flushing, and set up portable toilets. The crisis became visible in November 2024 when a pipe broke inside the school and the district discovered corroded interior pipes — originally believed to be the 1952 originals, until drawings showed many had actually been replaced in 2013, meaning the underground pipes (not yet inspected as of the reporting we reviewed) may be the real source of the persistent problem. The housing authority has since announced a second well with a filtration system, which the district believes could finally deliver drinkable water as soon as the following school year. The California Attorney General's office, in a formal SB 1000/SB 244 letter to Stanislaus County, separately documented that Westley's sewer system needs "major repairs" and that its wastewater system is already at capacity — meaning the water problem is not Westley's only infrastructure gap.

Impact — what we know, and what we don't

- **Funding and cost for the new well/filtration system:** Not specified in the sources reviewed.
- **Westley's population:** Not captured in this pass.
- **Whether the new system has since come online:** Not confirmed as of this research pass — the most recent reporting describes it as "announced," not completed.
- **Farm-labor context:** Not directly addressed in the school-focused reporting reviewed; Westley's SB 244 disadvantaged-community designation and its location in rural Stanislaus County farm country are documented, but we don't have an occupation-specific figure for the community.

Part of a larger pattern

A public elementary school going seventy years without drinkable water is this project's most direct illustration of water insecurity as a multi-generational, institutional failure — not a recent crisis, but a status quo nobody fixed for seven decades. It sits alongside **Keyes'** resolved arsenic consolidation and **Cowan Tract's** unresolved private-well contamination as three very different outcomes for Stanislaus County's disadvantaged unincorporated communities.

Sources

- CBS News (Sacramento), "California school could finally provide clean drinking water after 70 years." Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.
- California Attorney General's Office, SB 1000/SB 244 letter to Stanislaus County regarding its General Plan Environmental Justice Update. Access: not-captured — a public URL exists for this source and this project has not recorded it.

Full citation detail and source archive: **Data**. Back to **water insecurity in the Central Valley**.