

# Safe route to JL School moves closer to reality

**By Nick Baptista/The Valley Springs News/ Friday, February 14, 2014**

An often controversial project to improve pedestrian safety to and from Jenny Lind Elementary School has entered the construction phase.

George Reed INC. was the successful bidder for the Jenny Lind Safe Route to School Project, according to Mark Davis, Calaveras County associate civil engineer.

The Modesto-based firm's bid was \$588,000 and includes installation of sidewalks from State Route 26 along Driver Road to the Jenny Lind campus.

Construction crews this week began setting up for construction, which is expected to begin next week. Davis said the firm is well aware of the traffic to and from school and has scheduled its work to avoid interfering with school-related traffic.

Controversy has whirled around the project since its inception more than eight years ago. Parents have expressed concern about the project running along busy State Route 26 and a proposal by Calaveras Unified School District officials for an off-highway alternate route was rejected by the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors.

The entire project is coming close to \$1 million budget, which in addition to construction includes engineering costs, environmental studies and permitting. The county received a Safe Route to School grant from the state that covers 90 percent of the cost if the project remains under budget. The county will be on the hook for any amount going over budget.

George Reed has 60 working days to complete the project, barring any extenuating circumstances, Davis said.

"I'm excited that we're going to get something for those tax dollars we pay every time we pump gas," said District 5 Supervisor Darren Spellman.

He has been at odds with school district officials over the project and was critical when the district balked at providing matching funds for construction.

Spellman said he looks forward to completion of the project and setting up the possibility to secure more state funds for similar safety projects.

CUSD School Board Trustee Sherri Reusche said efforts continue to pursue funding for an alternate off-highway route.

Those efforts hit a roadblock when one grant proposal was denied, but a new application cycle for Safe Route to School funding is coming up.