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Change of plans: local district says it can't build school on \$750K land it bought

by Tristan Balagtas

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Change of plans: local district says it can't build school on \$750K land it bought

ELLENSBURG, Wash. -- The idea of a brand-new school has some kids in Ellensburg excited.

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They say they already know what it needs.

"A sturdy slide because back there, the slide actually broke - the plastic slide, but a metal slide, but like a metal that wouldn't heat up," said 5th grade student Kerry Wert.

But, the district tells me there's been a slight hiccup, to the tune of \$750,000.

Executive Director of Business Services Brian Aiken, says the district bought a piece of land for three-quarters of a million dollars, using money from its capital fund.

And this land was supposed to be home to its future elementary school, but after more research done by the Department of Ecology, contractors, and engineers, it was determined a hefty portion of it is considered to be wetlands; and if it were to be built upon, that would cause some major financial woes for the district.

"What it means to us is we have to mitigate it by transferring those wetlands to some other place, and that typically means either relocating it or buying land somewhere else and creating a wetlands," said Aiken.

The district says based upon initial studies done over a year ago, it was under the impression the property would be an ideal site for a new elementary school to be built, on relatively soon.

But, after further research it was able to have done after the \$59.5 million dollar bond passed, building a school there is just not feasible right now.

"We know a lot more now, than what we knew before, but you don't have the money to do all that until the bond passes, and that's sort of a catch-22 for us," said Aiken.

Now, the district says its hoping to build two new schools around the property of the current Mount Stuart Elementary School.

One school will be for kindergarten thru 2nd grade, and another for 3rd thru 5th, allowing the district to stay within its budget for construction.

The district says it hopes to start construction at the Mount Stuart elementary school early next year, and that somewhere down the line, the land that was originally purchased for the new elementary school will likely be home to a brand-new middle school.