

MID VALLEY TIMES

Drinking water flows again at Indianola Elementary

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SELMA —For the first time in over four years, access to safe drinking water is flowing through the campus fountains of Indianola Elementary once again.

According to an announcement, Selma Unified and California Water Service (Cal Water) completed a water system extension project last month to treat the school's contaminated well for 1,2,3-Trichloropropane (TCP). TCP is a man-made chemical some experts say can cause serious health risks.

“Our students and staff can begin the school year knowing they have access to safe, reliable drinking water, allowing them to focus on what matters most —teaching, learning and growing,” Selma Unified Superintendent Ed Gomes said in a statement.

TCP is a toxic chemical contaminating water wells across the Central Valley. The compound is a byproduct of agricultural soil fumigants that were commonly used across the region from the 1940s to the 1980s. Scientists at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency report that the chemical is highly carcinogenic, as studies on mice revealed that consuming or inhaling TCP can cause tumors to develop in multiple organs.

Indianola Elementary sources its drinking water from a single groundwater well, which the district previously operated on its own. In June 2019, state investigators found that the well contained levels of TCP above safe drinking limits and declared that the district's water system was out of compliance with state regulations.

As a result, the school shut off all campus water fountains. Students and staff were provided access to clean drinking water through coolers and a water bottle delivery service as administrators worked to solve the issue.

Cal Water has treated affected water sources in Selma for years using granular-activated carbon to remove TCP from drinking water. District officials applied for financial aid through the California Water Resource Control Board and secured a \$3.2 million grant to connect Cal Water's Selma system to the school.

With technical assistance from Self-Help Enterprises —a community development company based in Visalia —the project began in September 2025 and was completed in August 2026.

Students returned to their classrooms this year with working water fountains for the first time since many of them were in kindergarten, said Selma Unified spokesperson Jenna Perkovich. Others were even learning how to use a drinking fountain for the first time.

"It's really cool to see them get excited about water," Perkovich said in footage provided by Cal Water. "Ultimately, we want our students and our staff to be safe."

In the footage, Estela Paladox, a parent and teacher at Indianola Elementary, said that her son had been frustrated by the lack of available water fountains on campus since he started at the school. She believes that having access to drinking water is something "every human being deserves," and said she is excited that her son will now have reliable access to safe water while at the playground or in the classroom.

"We're grateful that this is finally being solved," Paladox said. "This is something that might not seem heroic, but it is."