

An act to add to the Education Code.

LEGISLATIVE DIGEST

Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching: Ensuring a Three Component Approach to School Improvement

Existing law establishes various educational programs for pupils in elementary, middle, and high school to be administered by the State Department of Education.

This bill would require that districts institutionalize and develop a cohesive and comprehensive component for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. The component is to be developed as the third primary and essential facet of school improvement and fully integrated with the existing instructional and management/governance components.

The third component is to be designed in ways that end the fragmentation and marginalization of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching by focusing schools on the need to (1) unify all student/learning supports, (2) institutionalize a leadership infrastructure for developing, over time, a comprehensive and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching, and (3) weave together available school, home, and community resources to build and sustain the system.

The bill would require the State Department of Education to adopt regulations and guidelines for districts to (1) adopt the third component as a primary and essential facet of school improvement and (2) assist schools in uniting and consolidating all efforts to prevent and minimize the impact of problems interfering with learning and teaching.

To these ends, the bill would require each elementary, middle, and high school to develop a school plan based on State Department of Education guidelines. The bill would require school plans for addressing barriers to learning and teaching to include (1) multi-tiered continuum of integrated intervention subsystems that interweave school-community-home resources to promote healthy development, prevent problems, respond quickly when problems arise, and play an appropriate role in helping students with severe and chronic problems and (2) a circumscribed set of specific arenas for supportive interventions that enhance the capacity of each school to provide in-classroom supports to enable learning, provide supports for transition concerns confronting pupils and their families, enhance home involvement, respond to and prevent crises, outreach to increase community engagement, and provide special assistance to students and families.

By imposing additional duties on school districts, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program. Therefore, the state will reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state.

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF _____ DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. The Legislature hereby finds and declares all of the following:

(a) The situation in many public schools across the state, as measured by absenteeism, increasing substance abuse, school violence, sporadic parental involvement, disconnected students, dropouts, and other indicators, suggest that the state is in immediate need of improving how schools address such barriers to learning and teaching.

(b) Current evidence indicates that school improvement efforts to enable learning are hindered when such barriers are ineffectively addressed.

(c) The State Department of Education, other state agencies, local school districts, and local communities all devote resources to addressing barriers to learning and teaching. As a result, considerable resources are expended to help schools address such barriers. These are widely referred to as *Learning Supports*. Learning Supports are the in- classroom and school-wide resources, strategies, and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual supports intended to enable all pupils to have an equal opportunity for success at school and beyond.

(d) There is a growing consensus among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners that current policies and practices related to Learning Supports are marginalized in school improvement efforts. This has led to deploying resources in an ad hoc, fragmented, duplicative, categorical manner. This has resulted in misuse of sparse resources and failure to reach many students and families in need of support. A unified, comprehensive, and equitable system is essential to improve the effectiveness of addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

(e) To implement a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports, the state must systematically realign and redefine existing resources rather than continuing to address barriers to learning and teaching in a piecemeal and fragmented way.

(f) Institutionalization and development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable learning supports system requires adoption of a school improvement component for addressing barriers to learning and teaching as the third primary and essential facet of school improvement. This component must be fully integrated with the existing instructional and management/governance components and all school improvement efforts.

(g) The third component needs to be designed in ways that (1) unifies all student/learning supports, (2) institutionalizes a leadership infrastructure for developing, over time, a comprehensive and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching, and (3) weaves together the resources of school, home, and community with the aims of strengthening students, schools, families, and communities. The component will provide a unifying concept and context for linking with other organizations and agencies as needed and can be a focal point for braiding together school-community-home resources.

(h) Improvement of learning supports at every school is essential in meeting the aims of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as well as various other federal, state, and local initiatives. In ensuring that each student is able to achieve academically, relate effectively, and graduate into a promising post school life, the state needs to ensure that an effective system of supports is developed.

(i) School plan for addressing barriers to learning and teaching should include (a) multi-tiered continuum of integrated intervention subsystems that interweave school-community-home resources to promote healthy development, prevent problems, respond quickly when problems arise, and handle severe and chronic problems and (b) a circumscribed set of specific arenas for supportive interventions that enhances the capacity of each school to provide in-classroom

supports to enable learning, provide supports for transition concerns confronting pupils and their families, enhance home involvement, respond to and prevent crises, outreach to increase community engagement, and provide special assistance to pupils and families. In the aggregate, a unified, comprehensive, and equitable learning supports system should create supportive and respectful learning conditions and environments at each school for students, teachers, student and learning supports professionals, family members, and other school and community stakeholders.

SEC. 2. Chapter is added to Part __ of the Education Code, to read:

CHAPTER __. A COMPONENT DEDICATED TO ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO LEARNING AND TEACHING

_____. (a) There is hereby established a component for addressing barriers to learning and teaching at the State Department of Education and all school districts to ensure the development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports at every school. This component *shall be established with existing personnel and program resources, without the need for additional or new appropriations.*

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature in establishing a component for developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports to provide all students with a supportive, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment that ensures students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and beyond as productive and responsible learners and citizens.

(c) These goals shall be accomplished by involving students, teachers, student and learning support professionals, administrators, family members, and other school and community stakeholders in the development, daily implementation, monitoring, and maintenance of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports at every school and by braiding together the human and financial resources of relevant public and private entities.

_____. The State Department of Education shall facilitate the establishment of a component for addressing barriers to learning and teaching at the Department and all school districts by doing all of the following:

(a) Developing standards and strategic procedures to guide the establishment of the component at each school.

(b) Providing ongoing technical assistance, leadership training, and other capacity building supports.

(c) Ensuring there is an administrative lead for the component to address barriers to learning and teaching.

(d) Rethinking the functions of personnel who provide student and learning supports to establish their role in developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports at every school and increase their in-classroom collaboration with teachers.

(e) Detailing procedures for establishing operational infrastructure mechanisms for cooperation among clusters of schools (e.g., feeder schools) and between schools and their district administrators.

(f) Enhancing collaboration with state agencies and other relevant resources to facilitate local collaboration and braiding of resources.

(h) Including an assessment of each school's efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching in all future school reviews and accountability reports.

_____. (a) Each elementary, middle, and high school shall establish a component for addressing barriers to learning and teaching to ensure the development of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports based on the guidelines developed by the Department of Education pursuant to Section _____. The guidelines will require each school plan for addressing barriers to learning and teaching to include (1) multi-tiered continuum of integrated intervention subsystems that interweave school-community-home resources to promote healthy development, prevent problems, respond quickly when problems arise, and play an appropriate role in helping students with severe and chronic problems and (2) a circumscribed set of specific arenas for supportive interventions that enhances the capacity of each school to provide in-classroom supports to enable learning, provide supports for transition concerns confronting pupils and their families, enhance home involvement, respond to and prevent crises, outreach to increase community engagement, and provide special assistance to pupils and families.

(b) Each school shall develop an action plan focused on doing all of the following:

(1) Enhancing the capacity of the school to address problems, engage and re-engage students in classroom learning, and foster social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral development. The facet of the school action plan required by this paragraph shall emphasize ensuring that the continuing education of teachers and student and learning support personnel includes strategies for preventing problems, responding quickly when problems arise, and playing an appropriate role in helping students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems within the context of the classroom. Interventions may include, but not be limited to, all of the following:

(A) Addressing a greater range of pupil problems within the classroom through an increased emphasis on strategies for positive social and emotional development, problem prevention, and accommodation of differences in the motivation and capabilities of pupils.

(B) Classroom management that emphasizes re-engagement of pupils in classroom learning and minimizes over-reliance on social control strategies.

(C) Collaboration of teacher and student and learning support staff and the home in providing additional assistance to foster enhanced responsibility, problem solving, resilience, and effective engagement in classroom learning.

(2) Enhancing the capacity of schools to handle transition concerns confronting pupils and their families. The facet of the school action plan required by this paragraph shall emphasize ensuring that a set of systematic strategies is established to provide supports for the many transitions pupils, their families, and school staff encounter. Interventions may include, but are not limited to, all of the following:

(A) Welcoming and social support programs for newcomers.

(B) Before, during, and afterschool programs to enrich learning and provide safe recreation.

(C) Articulation programs to support grade transitions.

(D) Addressing transition concerns related to vulnerable populations, including, but not limited to, those in homeless education, migrant education, and special education programs.

(E) Vocational and college counseling and school-to-career programs.

(F) Support in moving to postschool living and work.

(G) Outreach programs to re-engage truants and dropouts in learning.

(3) Responding to, minimizing the impact of, and preventing crisis. The facet of the school action plan required by this paragraph shall emphasize ensuring that a set of systematic strategies is established for emergency, crisis, and follow-up responses and for

preventing crises at a school and throughout a complex of schools. Interventions may include, but are not limited to, all of the following:

- (A) Establishment of a crisis team to ensure immediate response when emergencies arise, and to provide aftermath assistance as necessary and appropriate so that pupils are not unduly delayed in re-engaging in learning.
- (B) School-wide and school-linked prevention programs to enhance safety at school and to reduce violence, bullying, harassment, abuse, and other threats to safety in order to ensure a supportive and productive learning environment.
- (C) Classroom curriculum approaches focused on preventing crisis events, including, but not limited to, violence, suicide, and physical or sexual abuse.

(4) Enhancing home involvement. The facet of the school action plan required by this paragraph shall emphasize ensuring there a set of systematic strategies and contexts are established that lead to greater involvement to support the progress of students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Interventions may include, but are not limited to, all of the following:

- (A) Interventions that address specific needs of the caretakers of a pupil, including, but not limited to, providing ways for them to enhance literacy and job skills and meet their basic obligations to the children in their care.
- (B) Interventions for outreaching and re-engaging homes that have disengaged from school involvement.
- (C) Improved systems for communication and connection between home and school.
- (D) Improved systems for home involvement in decisions and problemsolving affecting students.
- (E) Enhanced strategies for engaging the home in supporting the basic learning and development of their children to prevent or at least minimize learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

(5) Outreaching to increase community engagement. The facet of the school action plan required by this paragraph shall emphasize ensuring that there is a systematic set of strategies established to provide outreach to and engage strategically with public and private community resources to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. Interventions may include, but are not limited to, all of the following:

- (A) Training, screening, and maintaining volunteers and mentors to assist school staff in enhancing pupil motivation and capability for school learning.
- (B) Job shadowing and service learning programs to enhance the expectations of students for postgraduation opportunities.
- (C) Enhancing limited school resources through linkages with community resources, including, but not limited to, health and social service agencies, libraries, recreational facilities, and postsecondary education institutions.
- (D) Enhancing community and school connections to heighten a sense of community.

(6) Providing special assistance for students and families as necessary. The facet of the school action plan required by this paragraph shall ensure that there is a systematic set of strategies established to provide or connect with direct services when necessary to address barriers to learning at school. Interventions may include, but are not limited to, all of the following:

- (A) Special assistance for teachers in addressing the problems of specific individuals.
- (B) Processing requests and referrals for special assistance, including, but not limited to, counseling or special education.

- (C) Ensuring effective school mechanisms are in place to assist individuals and families with decision-making and timely, coordinated, and monitored referrals to school and community services when indicated.
- (D) Ensuring effective case and resource management when students are receiving direct services.
- (E) Connecting with community service providers to fill gaps in school services and enhance access for referrals.

(c) The development, implementation, monitoring, and maintenance of the school action plan shall address, but not be limited to, all of the following:

- (1) Operational mechanisms for
 - (A) Stakeholders to plan and work collaboratively.
 - (B) Facilitating necessary system changes and institutionalization of the component to address barriers to learning and teaching.
 - (C) Facilitating development, capacity building, and sustainability of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports at every school.
 - (D) Ensuring compliance with the guidelines developed by the Department of Education and accountability for outcomes that are the direct objectives of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching.
- (2) How each school shall maximize its use of available resources in the development, capacity building, and sustainability of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports.
- (3) How the school action plan for addressing barriers to learning and teaching shall be integrated into existing school improvement plans, policies, goals, guidelines, priorities, activities, procedures, and resource allocations.

_____. (a) For the purposes of this section, "complex of schools" means a group of elementary, middle, or high schools associated with each other due to the natural progression of attendance linking the schools or geographic proximity.

(b) To ensure that efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching are developed cohesively, efficiently use community resources, and capitalize on economies of scale, infrastructure mechanisms shall be established to connect a complex of schools with each other and with the district level component.

_____. The success of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching shall be assessed according to student outcomes that are the direct objectives of such efforts, including, but not limited to:

- (1) Increased student attendance.
- (2) Reduced tardies.
- (3) Reduced misbehavior
- (4) Less bullying and sexual harassment.
- (5) Increased family involvement with child and schooling.
- (6) Fewer referrals for specialized assistance.
- (7) Fewer inappropriate referrals for special education.
- (8) Fewer suspensions and dropouts.