
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anthony Portantino, Chair
2021 - 2022 Regular Session

SB 955 (Leyva) - Pupil attendance: excused absences: civic or political events

Version: February 9, 2022

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: May 2, 2022

Policy Vote: ED. 4 - 2

Mandate: Yes

Consultant: Lenin Del Castillo

Bill Summary: This bill would allow students in grades 6 through 12 to have one excused absence per year to participate in a civic or political event.

Fiscal Impact: To the extent that students who would have otherwise attended school do not attend as a result of this measure, this bill could result in unknown Proposition 98 General Fund savings to the state. However, each time a student is absent, that absence negatively impacts that local educational agency's average daily attendance (ADA), ultimately reducing its overall funding. While each individual absence may be insignificant, in the aggregate, absences have an impact on overall funding provided to local school districts. Under current law, all absences, whether excused or unexcused, result in a reduction of overall ADA.

Background: Existing law provides that excused absences are deemed to be absences in computing ADA and shall not generate state apportionment payments. The law specifies a list of reasons that constitute an excused absence, which include:

1. Due to the pupil's illness, including an absence for the benefit of the pupil's mental or behavioral health; quarantine under the direction of a county or city health officer; have a medical, dental, optometric, or chiropractic services during school hours.
2. For the purpose of attending the funeral services of a member of the pupil's immediate family or spending time with a member of the pupil's immediate family who is an active duty member of the uniformed services.
3. Jury duty or justifiable personal reasons, including, but not limited to, an appearance in court, attendance at a funeral service, observance of a holiday or ceremony of the pupil's religion, attendance at a religious retreat, attendance at an employment conference, or attendance at an educational conference on the legislative or judicial process offered by a nonprofit organization.
4. Attending a naturalization ceremony to become a United States citizen; participating in a cultural ceremony or event.

Existing law provides that a valid excuse may include other reasons that are within the discretion of school administrators and based on the facts of the pupil's circumstances.

Proposed Law: This bill adds civic and political events to list of excused absences for middle or high school students. It clarifies that an excused absence to attend a civic or

political event counts as one schoolday and is available once every school year to middle or high school students.

This bill also adds that a middle or high school student who is absent to attend a civic or political event may be granted additional absences to attend a civic or political event at the discretion of the school administration. It specifies that a “civic or political event” includes, but is not limited to, voting, poll working, permitted protesting, strikes, public commenting, candidate speeches, political or civic forums, and town halls.

Related Legislation: AB 516 (Dahle, Chapter 281, Statutes of 2021) adds “for the purpose of participating in a cultural ceremony or event” to the list of categories of excused absences for purposes of school attendance.

SB 14 (Portantino, Chapter 672, Statutes of 2021) adds “for the benefit of the behavioral health of the pupil” to the list of categories of excused absences for purposes of school attendance, and requires CDE to identify an evidence-based and evidence-informed training program for LEAs to address youth behavioral health, including staff and pupil training.

Staff Comments: In California, school funding is primarily calculated using ADA. Each time a student is absent, that absence negatively impacts that school district’s ADA, thereby reducing its’ overall funding. While each individual absence may be insignificant, in the aggregate, absences do have impact on overall funding. Under current law, all absences, whether excused or unexcused, result in a reduction of overall ADA.

This bill could also result in Proposition 98 GF savings to the extent students who would have otherwise attended school do not attend school as a result of this measure. The savings at the state level would result from a redirection of funds from school districts that would no longer generate state funding for these students. School districts receive base LCFF grants of between \$8,935 and \$10,057 per student each year depending on the grade level.

-- END --