

Date of Hearing: June 29, 2022

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
Chris Holden, Chair
SB 955 (Leyva) – As Amended June 20, 2022

Policy Committee: Education Vote: 4 - 2

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: Yes Reimbursable: Yes

SUMMARY:

This bill adds student participation in a civic or political event to the list of reasons a pupil must be excused from school.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Adds engagement in a civic or political event by a middle or high school pupil to the list of excused absences.
- 2) Limits the excused absences for these purposes to one schoolday-long absence per school year.
- 3) Authorizes a school administrator to permit additional excused absences for these purposes at their discretion.
- 4) Defines a “civic or political event” to include, but not be limited to, voting, poll working, permitted protesting, strikes, public commenting, candidate speeches, political or civic forums, and town halls.

FISCAL EFFECT:

Potential Proposition 98 General Fund savings to the extent students who otherwise would have attended school do not attend school as a result of this measure. Savings at the state level would result from a redirection of funds from local educational agencies (LEAs) that would no longer generate state funding for students not attending school as a result of this measure.

LEAs receive between on average \$11,000 annually per middle school or high school student. If 1% of the state’s approximately 2.9 million students enrolled in seventh through twelfth grades absent for one day they otherwise would not have been, Proposition 98 General Fund costs savings to the state would be about \$1.8 million while LEAs serving those students would lose, on aggregate, about \$1.8 million.

If the Commission on State Mandates determines the bill’s requirements to be a reimbursable state mandate, the state would need to reimburse these costs either directly to LEAs or through the K-12 Mandates Block Grant.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Background.** When a student is absent from school or tardy by 30 minutes or more without a valid excuse, the absence is known as an “unexcused absence.” When a student has three unexcused absences in a school year, the student is considered truant. Laws governing truancy, including interventions and fines to parents, apply to these students.

When a student is absent from school with a valid excuse, the absence is known as an “excused absence.” Current law defines various reasons a student may be excused from school, including illness, funerals of immediate family and medical appointments. It also lists “justifiable personal reasons” including, but not limited to, appearance in court, observance of a holiday or ceremony of the student’s religion and attendance at religious retreats.

This bill adds a civic or political event to the list of reasons a student may be excused from school.

Schools are funded based on attendance. An unexcused absence and an excused absence both result in a loss of funding to a school equivalent to the amount of time a student is absent.

- 2) **Prior Legislation.** AB 516 (Dahle), Chapter 281, Statutes of 2021, adds participation in a cultural ceremony or event to the list of reasons that a pupil must be excused from school.

SB 14 (Portantino), Chapter 672, Statutes of 2021, adds “for the benefit of the behavioral health of the pupil” to the list of reasons that a pupil must be excused from school.

AB 1593 (Oberholte), Chapter 92, Statutes of 2016, adds a pupil’s attendance at his or her naturalization ceremony to become a United States citizen to the list of reasons that a pupil must be excused from school.

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