

Date of Hearing: April 7, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS, AND TOURISM

Christopher M. Ward, Chair

AB 1626 (Gabriel) – As Amended March 16, 2026

**SUBJECT:** Interscholastic athletics: youth sports: coaches: behavioral and mental health training.

**SUMMARY:** AB 1626 requires coaches for interscholastic athletic programs at California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) member high schools to complete initial training, and subsequent training every 2 years, that covers specified mental health-related topics.

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Adds a component on behavioral and mental health and trauma-informed care to the list of components to be emphasized by the 1998 California High School Coaching Education and Training Program.
- 2) Requires all persons who serve as coaches in interscholastic athletic programs at high schools, including private high schools, that are members of the CIF, as a condition of employment or volunteer service commencing with the 2027-28 school year, to complete initial training, and subsequent training every two years, that covers at least all of the following topics:
  - a) Trauma-informed care and recognizing signs and symptoms of common behavioral and mental health conditions in adolescents, including, but not limited to, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance use disorder, and suicidal ideation.
  - b) Awareness of behavioral and mental health challenges specific to pupil athletes, including, but not limited to, performance anxiety, injury-related behavioral and mental health impacts, and the pressures of competition and recruitment.
  - c) Strategies for creating a positive team culture that promotes behavioral and mental well-being, reduces stigma around behavioral and mental health, and encourages help-seeking behavior among pupil athletes.
  - d) Appropriate communication techniques for approaching and supporting pupil athletes who may be experiencing behavioral and mental health difficulties.
  - e) Procedures for referring pupil athletes to appropriate mental health resources, including school counselors, psychologists, and community behavioral and mental health services.
  - f) Understanding of the coach's role and limitations in supporting pupil behavioral and mental health, including, but not limited to, ethical boundaries and the importance of professional behavioral and mental health care.
- 3) Requires the California Department of Education (CDE), on or before September 1, 2027, to develop a model youth athletics behavioral and mental health training for persons who serve

as coaches in youth sports organizations, both for recreational leagues and competitive or club leagues. This training will cover, but not be limited to, all of the following:

- a) Strategies for creating a positive team culture that promotes healthy behavior and mental well-being.
  - b) Protective factors that promote youth resilience, well-being, and positive mental health.
  - c) Awareness of behavioral and mental health challenges specific to youth athletes.
  - d) Recognition of signs and symptoms of common behavioral and mental health conditions in youth and adolescents.
  - e) Appropriate communication techniques for approaching and supporting youth athletes who may be experiencing behavioral and mental health difficulties.
  - f) Appropriate referral pathways, including how to connect youth and families to school-based behavioral health services, community-based organizations, crisis support, and emergency resources when necessary.
  - g) Understanding of the coach's role and limitations in supporting youth athletes' behavioral and mental health, including ethical boundaries and the importance of professional behavioral and mental health care.
- 4) Requires CDE to post this training on their website, and to work with local partners to disseminate the training to appropriate youth athletic leagues, youth coaching entities, and relevant statewide organizations and associations.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the 1998 California High School Coaching Education and Training Program, administered by school districts, updated and rehearsed annually, and emphasizing the following components (Education Code (EDC) 35179.1):
- a) Development of coaching philosophies consistent with school, school district, and governing board of a school district's goals.
  - b) Sport psychology: emphasizing communication, reinforcement of the efforts of pupils, effective delivery of coaching regarding technique and motivation of the pupil athlete.
  - c) Sport pedagogy: how pupil athletes learn, and how to teach sport skills.
  - d) Sport physiology: principles of training, fitness for sport, development of a training program, nutrition for athletes, and the harmful effects associated with the use of steroids and performance-enhancing dietary supplements by adolescents.
  - e) Sport management: team management, risk management, and working within the context of an entire school program.

- f) Training: certification in CPR, use of an automated external defibrillator (AED), and first aid, including, but not limited to, training in recognizing the signs and symptoms of, and responding to, concussions, heat illness, and, by July 1, 2024, cardiac arrest. Certification in CPR and use of an AED shall be consistent with national evidence-based emergency cardiovascular care guidelines. Concussion, heat illness, and cardiac arrest training may be provided by entities offering free, online, or other types of training courses. For purposes of this section, “heat illness” includes heat cramps, heat syncope, heat exhaustion, and exertional heat stroke.
  - g) Knowledge of, and adherence to, statewide rules and regulations, as well as school regulations, including, but not necessarily limited to, eligibility, gender equity, and discrimination.
  - h) Sound planning and goal setting.
- 2) Requires CIF to report to the appropriate policy committees of the Legislature and the Governor on its evaluation and accountability activities on or before January 1, 2023, and on or before January 1 every seven years thereafter. The report is required to include, but not be limited to, the goals and objectives of CIF with regard to, and the status of, all of the following (Education Code (EDC) 33353):
- a) The governing structure of CIF, and the effectiveness of that governance structure in providing leadership for interscholastic athletics in secondary schools.
  - b) Methods to facilitate communication with agencies, organizations, and public entities whose functions and interests interface with CIF.
  - c) The quality of coaching and officiating, including, but not limited to, professional development for coaches and athletic administrators, and parent education programs.
  - d) Gender equity in interscholastic athletics, including, but not limited to, the number of male and female pupils participating in interscholastic athletics in secondary schools, and action taken by CIF in order to ensure compliance with Title IX of the federal Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1681 et seq.).
  - e) Health and safety of pupils, coaches, officials, and spectators.
  - f) The economic viability of interscholastic athletics in secondary schools, including, but not limited to, the promotion and marketing of interscholastic athletics.
  - g) New and continuing programs available to pupil athletes.
  - h) Awareness and understanding of emerging issues related to interscholastic athletics in secondary schools.
- 3) States the intent of the Legislature that CIF accomplish all of the following (EDC 33353):

- a) During years in which CIF is not required to report to the Legislature and the Governor pursuant to paragraph (1), it shall hold a public comment period relating to that report at three regularly scheduled federation council meetings per year.
- b) Annually allow public comment on the policies and practices of CIF at a regularly scheduled federation council meeting.
- c) Require sections of CIF to allow public comment on the policies and practices of the CIF and its sections, and the report required pursuant to paragraph (1), at each regularly scheduled section meeting.
- d) Engage in a comprehensive outreach effort to promote the public hearings described in subparagraphs (a) and (c).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown. This bill was keyed fiscal by Legislative Counsel.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) Author's statement. According to the author, "Coaches are uniquely positioned to make a real difference in the lives of young people. They see our kids every day - under pressure, in moments of failure, and in moments of triumph. AB 1626 gives coaches the practical tools they need to recognize when a young athlete is struggling and to connect them with the help they deserve. This bill is about creating safer, more supportive environments for every student or child who steps onto a field or a court."
- 2) Background. California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) was organized at a high school athletic convention on March 28, 1914, as a voluntary association of schools. Since 1914, the California Department of Education (CDE) has allowed the CIF to regulate interscholastic athletics, and the CIF has been the rule-making body for all of California's K-12 athletics programs since 1917. In 1981, that rule-making authority was expanded to include control over all interscholastic athletics, replacing the CDE in that role.

The Federation consists of ten regional sections, each of which is divided into several "leagues," for purposes of scheduling athletic contests, assigning referees, etc. Similar organizations exist in other states. Almost all public, private, and parochial schools in California are CIF members.

The primary responsibilities of CIF are to administer high school athletic programs and to promulgate and enforce rules relating to a student's involvement in athletics - age, semesters in school, scholarship, residence, transfer status, and amateur standing. Such regulations, which are generated by the 1,628 member base of secondary schools, prevent undesirable exploitation of high school students, provide for the welfare of participants, and ensure that interscholastic athletics offer major benefits to students in a safe, rewarding environment.

- 2) 1998 California High School Coaching Education and Training Program. Currently, CIF offers training programs to high school coaches who receive a certificate upon course completion. The completed certificate is transferable between school districts. CIF's mandated coaches training program, under the High School Coaching Education and Training Program (HSCTP), currently includes instruction on CPR, first aid, concussions and

heat illness. CIF offers a free online concussion and heat illness training course for coaches where they receive an immediate printed certification upon completion. There is also a free online course for sudden cardiac arrest.

Currently, coaches must complete a CPR/First Aid/Concussion/Heat Illness course and renew that training every two years. Because this bill includes training on cardiac arrest as part of the mandatory training requirement, coaches will be required to receive updated cardiac arrest training every two years as well.

CIF Bylaw 22.B. (9) states: “Definition of a coach, paid or unpaid: Any individual that the school/district is required to approve under Title V, California Code of Regulations, Section 5593 and 5594 and/or under California Education Code 33190-33192, 45125.01 and 45125.1.” Simply stated, the law applies to anyone who is required to be fingerprinted and/or is approved by their local school board/directors to have contact with students. This applies to all CIF member schools, public and private.

- 3) Arguments in support. According to a coalition of youth-centered, education, and behavioral health advocates, including Mental Health America of California, Equality California, and Disability Rights California, in support, “Coaches spend significant time with student athletes and are often present during moments of stress, failure, and vulnerability. This proximity places them in a unique position to notice early warning signs of mental health distress. Yet studies show that only one in five coaches feel highly confident in their ability to support youth facing mental health challenges, and California law currently does not require mental health training for youth sports coaches.

“By requiring mental health-informed training for coaches, AB 1626 would equip them to recognize signs of distress, engage in supportive communication, and connect students to appropriate school and community resources. This training would help reduce stigma, encourage early intervention, and foster safer, more supportive athletic environments for all student athletes.”

- 4) Double-referral. Should the bill pass from this committee, it will be re-referred to the Assembly Committee on Education.
- 5) Amendments and policy considerations. The proposed committee amendments align the mental health training provisions of this bill with the changes to the California High School Coaching and Education Training Program from AB 1665 (Pacheco) that was previously passed by this committee. The amendments also point out that there are entities offering free online training that would satisfy the training requirements in the bill.
- 6) Prior and related legislation:
  - a) AB 1572 (Alanis), of 2026, would require the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) to annually verify the eligibility of its officials to officiate CIF contests by requiring those officials to annually register through a platform. The bill is currently on Assembly Third Reading (Consent).
  - b) AB 1665 (Pacheco), of 2026, would enact legislation relating to mental health training for youth sports coaches. This bill is in the Assembly Committee on Education.

- c) AB 1985 (Irwin), of 2026, would be known as Sarah Shulze’s Law, and would require the Surgeon General to identify and compile a list of age-appropriate mental health training programs that local educational agencies and post-secondary educational institutions can use to train athletic coaches that meet minimum standards. This bill is currently in the Assembly Committee on Health.
- d) AB 245 (McKinnor), Chapter 422, Statutes of 2023, requires coaches to complete training in CPR, recognizing the signs and symptoms of sudden cardiac arrest, and how to use an automated external defibrillator (AED). It also requires emergency action plans and rehearsal of procedures to be followed in the event of a medical emergency related to athletic program activities.
- e) AB 1327 (Weber), Chapter 172, Statutes of 2023, requires CDE to develop a standardized incident form to track racial discrimination, harassment, or hazing that occurs at high school sporting games or sporting events.

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

A World Fit for Kids  
 Affirmative Athletics  
 Aids Healthcare Foundation / Impulse Group  
 Association of California School Administrators  
 Cal Voices  
 California Afterschool Network  
 California Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs INC.  
 California Alliance of Child and Family Services  
 California Association of Alcohol and Drug Program Executives, INC.  
 California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists  
 California Association of Mental Health Peer Run Organizations  
 California Association of Student Councils  
 California Behavioral Health Planning Council  
 California School Employees Association  
 California School-based Health Alliance  
 California Youth Empowerment Network  
 California Youth Football Alliance  
 CALPRIDE  
 Center for Healing and Justice Through Sport  
 Children Now  
 County Behavioral Health Directors Association, (CBHDA)  
 Disability Rights California  
 Equality California  
 Forty Niners Football Company LLC, a Delaware Limited Liability Company  
 Game Plan Life Foundation  
 Gente Organizada  
 Helpline Youth Counseling, INC.  
 Hillsides  
 Home Field Advantage

Human Response Network  
LA Waves  
Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA  
LGBTQ Connection  
LGBTQ+ Inclusivity, Visibility, and Empowerment (LIVE)  
Mental Health America of California  
MoPride Center  
Movember Foundation  
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI-CA)  
National Center for Youth Law  
National Health Law Program  
North County LGBTQ Resource Center  
On the Margins, INC  
Pacific Clinics  
Peer Voices United-sacramento  
Positive Images  
Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition  
Rainbow Families Action Bay Area  
Reach LA  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond  
Stonewall Alliance of Chico  
The Children's Partnership  
Vietnamese American Arts & Letters Association  
YMCA of Greater San Francisco  
YMCA of Metropolitan Los Angeles  
YMCA of San Diego County  
YMCA of Silicon Valley  
Youth Leadership Institute  
1 Individual

**Opposition**

None on file.

**Analysis Prepared by:** Brian V. Anderson, Jr. / A.,E.,S., & T. / (916) 319-3450