
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	AB 1626	Hearing Date:	June 10, 2026
Author:	Gabriel, et al.		
Version:	April 8, 2026		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Michelle Nguyen		

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

SUMMARY

This bill establishes training content areas, related to behavioral and mental health challenges specific to pupil athletes, to be used for trainings for coaches of interscholastic athletic programs, non-interscholastic athletic programs, and youth sports organizations. This bill requires the California Department of Education (CDE), by September 1, 2027, to identify an existing training or develop a model youth athletics behavioral and mental health training, as specified, for coaches in youth sports organizations.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Defines “interscholastic athletics” is defined as those policies, programs, and activities that are formulated or executed in conjunction with, or in contemplation of, athletic contests between two or more schools, either public or private. (Education Code (EC) § 35179)
- 2) Defines “athletic activity”, for purposes of the Eric Paredes Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act, as all of the following: a) interscholastic athletics, b) an athletic contest or competition, other than interscholastic athletics, that is sponsored by a school, including club-sponsored sports activities, c) noncompetitive cheerleading that is sponsored by a school, d) practices, interscholastic practices, and scrimmages for all of the aforementioned activities listed in this definition. (EC § 33479.1)
- 3) Establishes the California High School Coaching Education and Training Program and states it is the intent of the Legislature that the program be administered by school districts, be updated and rehearsed annually, and emphasize the following components:
 - a) Development of coaching philosophies consistent with school, school district, and governing board of a school district 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 cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), use of an automated external defibrillator (AED), and first aid that includes, but is not limited to, training in recognizing the signs and symptoms of, and responding to, concussions, heat illness, and cardiac arrest. Training on concussion, heat illness, and cardiac arrest may be provided by entities offering free, online, or other types of training courses.
 - 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. (EC § 35179.1)
- 4) Requires each high school coach to have completed a coaching education program developed by their school district or the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) that meets the guidelines established by the California High School Coaching Education and Training Program. Requires that the coaching education program count toward the continuing education required for the renewal of the teaching credential of a coach who is also a certificated employee. (EC § 49032)
- 5) Establishes the Eric Paredes Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention Act, which requires a coach of an athletic activity to complete a specified sudden cardiac arrest training course every two years. (EC §§ 33479 and 33479.6)
- 6) Requires the 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, and shall include, but not be limited to, the goals and objectives of the CIF with regard to, and the status of, all of the following:
- a) The governing structure of the 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 the 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 the CIF in order to ensure compliance with Title IX of the federal Education Amendments of 1972. (20 United States Code § 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. (EC § 33353)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Requires that trainings for a coach of an interscholastic athletic program and a coach of an athletic program other than an interscholastic athletic program, as specified in AB 1665 (Pacheco, 2026), cover, but are not limited to, all of the following topics:
 - a) Substantive awareness of behavioral and mental health challenges specific to pupil athletes.
 - b) Trauma-informed care and recognizing signs and symptoms of common behavioral and mental health conditions in adolescents.
 - c) Strategies for creating a positive team culture that promotes behavior 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.

- f) Understanding of the coach's role and limitations in supporting pupil behavioral and mental health.
- 2) Prohibits coaches from providing mental health counseling or therapy or to substitute for the services of licensed behavioral and mental health professionals.
- 3) Provides that the training required by this bill may be provided by entities offering free, online, or other types of training courses.
- 4) Requires CDE, by September 1, 2027, to identify existing training or 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, and requires the training to cover, but not be limited to, all of the following topics:
 - a) Strategies for creating a positive team culture that promotes healthy behavioral 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.
 - g) Understanding of the coach's role and limitations in supporting youth athletes' behavioral and mental health.
- 5) Allows the training content developed by CDE be aligned with statewide youth mental health and school wellness initiatives.
- 6) Requires CDE to post the training it identifies or develops on its website and to work with local partners to disseminate the training to approach youth athletic leagues, youth coaching entities, and relevant statewide organizations and associations.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, "Unfortunately, studies show that only 1 in 5 coaches report being highly confident in their ability to support youth with mental health and substance use challenges. Without guidance, coaches may miss opportunities for early intervention, positive reinforcement or, at worst, even

contribute to harm. The unaddressed mental health stigma in sports further complicates the potential support system a coach can offer. Student-athletes may fear being perceived as weak or losing playing time, and coaches worry about team performance, recruitment, or unintentionally making a situation worse. Existing law does not have a requirement for California's youth coaches to take training on supporting the mental health needs of their young athletes.

Assembly Bill (AB) 1626 would enshrine a critical mental health and substance use disorder training for school coaches and create model training for youth sports coaches. Through this training, coaches will learn practical and potentially lifesaving tools to support California's young athletes."

- 2) ***This bill is a response to Governor Newsom's recent executive order to address rising suicide rates in young men and boys.*** In July 2025, Governor Newsom issued an executive order urging action to address rising suicide rates and growing disconnection in young men and boys within the state. The order specifically states that "lack of mental health support and gender stereotypes have perpetuated a culture where men and boys feel unable to ask for assistance or support." The order directs a coordinated statewide response to improve mental health outcomes, reduce stigma, and expand access to meaningful education, work, and mentorship opportunities.

This bill, along with AB 1665 (Pacheco, 2026) and AB 1985 (Irwin, 2026), recognizes the unique role that athletic coaches have in young athletes' lives and aims to equip coaches with the tools and the understanding so that they can appropriately respond and provide support to young men and women during an age when this support is critical. This bill and AB 1665 (Pacheco, 2026) address providing mental health training for athletic coaches in K-12 schools and youth organizations, while AB 1985 (Irwin, 2026) aims to provide mental health training for athletic coaches at the collegiate level.

- 3) ***CIF's structure and role in interscholastic athletics.*** The CIF, founded in 1914, is a voluntary organization consisting of over 1,600 public, public charter, and private high schools and over 750,000 student-athletes, for the purpose of governing education-based athletics in grades 9 through 12. Almost all public and private high schools in California are CIF members. The CIF is organized under CDE, and CDE has allowed the CIF to regulate interscholastic athletics and be the rulemaking body for these programs.

The CIF consists of ten regional sections, each of which is divided into several local leagues, for purposes of developing sports, scheduling athletic contests, and assigning referees. Each league elects a representative to their respective CIF section's governing body, which is called a Board of Managers or Council. Each CIF section's governing body elects officers, establishes section policies, develops section playoff sports and schedules, and CIF members adhere to these rules and regulations adopted by their section.

Currently, CIF offers training programs to high school coaches who earn a certificate upon course completion that is transferable between school districts. These training programs are part of the California High School Coaching Education

and Training Program and currently include instruction on CPR and first aid, concussions, sudden cardiac arrest, and heat illness. According to CIF's website, coaches who are part of CIF member schools must complete these training courses every two years.

- 4) ***Bill targets interscholastic athletic programs, non-interscholastic athletic programs, and youth sports organizations, and is closely related to AB 1665 (Pacheco, 2026).*** This bill and AB 1665 are closely interlinked, and both require training for athletic program coaches to promote awareness of, and strategies to address, behavioral and mental health challenges for pupil athletes. This bill specifically puts forward training topics in this area, including awareness of performance anxiety and injury-related behavioral and mental health impacts; strategies for creating a positive team culture; and appropriate communication techniques for approaching and supporting pupil athletes.

This bill requires CDE to identify an existing training or develop a model youth athletics behavioral and mental health training for coaches in youth sports organizations on these training topics. In addition, AB 1665 requires that the training topics specified in AB 1626 be used for trainings for coaches for interscholastic athletic programs and non-interscholastic athletic programs offered by a school district, county office of education, or charter school.

This bill doesn't define athletics programs that aren't interscholastic programs, nor does it define youth sports organizations. However, non-interscholastic athletic programs could include athletic programs operated by local educational agencies (LEAs) that are not CIF members, or athletic programs for K-8 pupils operated by LEAs. Youth sports organizations could include for-profit or non-profit entities organizing youth sports leagues or club sports, separate from those operated by LEAs.

- 5) ***Committee amendment.*** To address a drafting error, committee staff recommends, and the author agrees, to make an amendment to remove a duplicative reference to a training topic related to the awareness of behavioral and mental health challenges specific to pupil athletes.
- 6) ***Related and Prior Legislation.***

AB 1665 (Pacheco, 2026) would require, commencing July 1, 2027: (1) a coach for an interscholastic athletic program at a high school that is a member of the CIF to complete an initial training, and subsequent training every two years, on a coaching education and training program on mental health, and (2) that a LEA ensure a coach of a non-interscholastic athletic program complete an initial training, and subsequent training every two years, covering sudden cardiac arrest and youth athletics behavioral and mental health, if the LEA chooses to offer a non-interscholastic athletic program.

AB 1985 (Irwin, 2026) would require, by July 1, 2028, the California State University, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, and each private postsecondary educational institution and independent institution of higher education that receives state financial assistance, and requests of the University of

California, to identify and compile a list of mental health programs that can be used to train athletic coaches.

AB 245 (McKinnor, Chapter 422, Statutes of 2023) requires the High School Coaching Education and Training Program to include training in recognizing the signs and symptoms of concussions, heat illness, and cardiac arrest.

SUPPORT

California Alliance of Child and Family Services (co-sponsor)
California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (co-sponsor)
Mental Health America of California (co-sponsor)
AIDS Healthcare Foundation / Impulse Group
All for Kids
Association of California School Administrators
Cal Voices
California Association of Mental Health Peer Run Organizations
California Association of Student Councils
California Behavioral Health Planning Council
California Department of Education
California Hospital Association
California Medical Association
California School Employees Association
California Youth Empowerment Network
CalPride
County Behavioral Health Directors Association
Disability Rights California
Equality California
Gente Organizada
Human Response Network
LA Waves
LGBTQ Connection
LGBTQ+ Inclusivity, Visibility, and Empowerment
Los Angeles Unified School District
MoPride
National Center for Youth Law
North County LGBTQ Resource Center
On the Margins, Inc.
Peer Voices United-Sacramento
Positive Images
Reach LA
Stonewall Alliance of Chico
Vietnamese American Arts & Letters Association
Youth Leadership Institute

OPPOSITION

None received