

Date of Hearing: March 18, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Darshana Patel, Chair
AB 1653 (Lackey) – As Introduced January 28, 2026

SUBJECT: Pupil instruction: health framework: heat illness

SUMMARY: Requires the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC), the next time the health curriculum framework is revised, to consider including specified content related to recognizing and responding to the signs and symptoms of heat illness. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the IQC, during the next revision of the publication health framework, to consider including, and recommending for adoption by the State Board of Education (SBE), specific content related to recognizing and responding to the signs and symptoms of heat illness.
- 2) States that the signs and symptoms of heat illness include, but are not necessarily limited to:
 - a) A red or flushed face;
 - b) Nausea;
 - c) Muscle cramps;
 - d) Headache;
 - e) Dizziness;
 - f) Fatigue or weakness;
 - g) Confusion; and
 - h) Heavy sweating or the lack of sweating.
- 3) States that “responding to signs and symptoms of heat illness” includes, but is not necessarily limited to:
 - a) Stopping physical activity;
 - b) Seeking shade or a cool area;
 - c) Drinking water or otherwise hydrating;
 - d) Cooling the body; and
 - e) Notifying a teacher, staff member, or other responsible adult.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) States that if a school district or charter school elects to offer any interscholastic athletic program, the governing board of the school district or the governing body of the charter school must ensure that there is a written emergency action plan in place that describes the location and procedures to be followed in the event of medical emergencies, including heat illness, related to the athletic program's activities or events. The written emergency action plan shall be posted in compliance with the most recent pertinent guidelines of the National Federation of State High School Associations. (Education Code 35179.4)
- 2) Establishes the High School Coaching Education Training Program (HSCTP), which is administered by school districts and includes training, which includes a basic understanding of the signs and symptoms of concussions and heat illness and the appropriate response to concussions and heat illness. Concussion or heat illness training may be fulfilled through entities offering free, online, or other types of training courses. (EC 35179.1)
- 3) Requires school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools to develop, adopt, and implement standardized guidelines specifying temperature thresholds or index ratings that trigger modifications to pupil physical activities during extreme weather conditions. (EC 33355)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. The author states, "As temperatures continue to rise across our state and nation, protecting the health and safety of our students must remain a top priority. Extreme heat is no longer a rare occurrence, it is a growing public health concern. Our children are especially vulnerable. Student athletes practicing outdoors, children waiting at bus stops, and students in classrooms without adequate cooling systems are all at risk. Yet heat illness is preventable when individuals understand the warning signs and know how to respond.

Education saves lives. By incorporating age-appropriate heat safety lessons into health education curriculum, we empower students with practical knowledge they can use immediately at school, at home, and in their communities. This bill is not about adding burden, it is about prevention. A few minutes of education can prevent emergency room visits, long-term health complications, and even fatalities. Heat illness is predictable. It is preventable. And with this legislation, it is teachable."

Heat illness in the health content standards and curriculum framework. The current health education standards, adopted by the SBE in 2008, for grades 6-8, include a standard on identifying ways to reduce exposure to the sun, and the current health curriculum framework, adopted by the SBE in 2019, includes minimal content related to heat illness. In the grades 7-8 section the framework mentions sun safety as a health-management strategy.

Heat illness on the rise among children. A recent study published in American Pediatrics (Merritt, 2025) of heat-related illness trends found that as extreme summer temperatures become more frequent due to a changing climate, there is an increased risk of heat-related morbidity and mortality, particularly in vulnerable populations such as children.

The authors conducted a retrospective study at a pediatric health care system in Utah with two large children's hospitals to identify emergency department (ED) encounters with a heat-related ED diagnosis from May to September from 2012 to 2023. Aggregate heat-related illness encounters, as a proportion of total ED encounters, increased 170% between 2012 and 2023.

More students will be subject to extreme heat. According to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), climate change is leading to higher temperatures, more often and of longer duration. In California, between 2010–2020, there was an average of more than 5,000 emergency department visits and 60 deaths per year due to heat-related illness. Among teenage athletes, heat-related illness is a leading cause of death. All youth and student athletes are susceptible to the risks of exercising in a hot environment, particularly those participating in high-exertion sports.

According to the California Data Initiative, led by the organization Ten Strands, by 2025, at least 16 counties will have over 120 days of high heat, leaving at least 1.6 million students extremely vulnerable to heat related illnesses for a significant portion of the school year.

- Counties with the most projected heat days in all decades above 87 degrees, and above the high heat threshold: Inyo, Imperial, Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino.
- Counties with a significant increase in high heat days above current: Alameda, Contra Costa, Merced, Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, San Joaquin, Sonoma, and Ventura.
- Other Counties who will have both a high number of heat days and will see a significant increase in days include: Colusa, Fresno, Kern, Kings, Merced, Mono, Sacramento, San Diego, Sutter, Tulare, Ventura, and Yolo.

The CDPH notes that schools need to have natural and built cooling infrastructure in place to keep kids safe both indoors and outdoors for instruction, eating, and play. They note that schools cannot afford to cancel school due to high heat disaster days, and students cannot afford the potential amount of learning loss they will incur if schools continue to remain unprepared to mitigate high heat temperatures indoors and outdoors.

CDPH guidance and California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) policy for school athletics during extreme heat. In 2023, the CDPH issued guidance for schools on sports and strenuous activities during extreme heat, which covers risks, prevention, and signs and symptoms of heat illness.

Additionally, AB 1653 (Sanchez), Chapter 589, Statutes of 2023, required the California Interscholastic Federation, in consultation with the CDE, to develop guidelines, procedures, and safety standards for the prevention and management of exertional heat illness. The CIF maintains the Extreme Heat and Air Quality Policy, to which all CIF member schools must adhere.

Emergency action plans include heat illness. Existing law requires, if a school district or charter school elects to offer any interscholastic athletic program, the governing board of the school district or the governing body of the charter school to ensure that there is a written emergency

action plan in place that describes the location and procedures to be followed in the event of medical emergencies, or heat illness.

California's Extreme Heat Action Plan. Existing law requires the Natural Resources Agency to update the state's climate adaptation strategy every three years. In updating the strategy, the need for an interagency approach to extreme heat was identified, and therefore the state updated its extreme heat guidance and recommendations to create California's Extreme Heat Action Plan. California's Extreme Heat Action Plan was released by the Natural Resources Agency in April, 2022. The plan provides a strategic and comprehensive set of state actions to adapt and build resilience to extreme heat, including supporting climate-smart planning in heat-vulnerable schools, promoting climate-appropriate shade tree cover and schools, and promoting increased use of green barriers between agricultural fields and schools.

Content Standards, Frameworks, and Model Curricula. The Legislature has vested the IQC and the SBE with the authority to develop and adopt state curriculum and instructional materials. The IQC develops curriculum frameworks in each subject by convening expert panels, developing drafts, and holding public hearings to solicit input. Changes are frequently made in response to public comment. The SBE then adopts the frameworks in a public meeting. The SBE also adopts, in a public process, instructional materials aligned to those frameworks for grades K-8. School district governing boards and charter schools then adopt instructional materials aligned to these standards and frameworks. This process has traditionally occurred on a regular schedule, giving schools a predictable timetable to plan and budget for changes to the curriculum. Local adoption of new curricula involves significant local costs, including resources for professional development.

These existing processes involve practitioners and experts who have an in-depth understanding of curriculum and instruction, including the full scope and sequence of the curriculum in each subject and at each grade level, constraints on instructional time and resources, and the relationship of curriculum to state assessments and other measures of student progress.

Curriculum development and adoption process under review. The 2025-26 budget, through AB 121 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 8, Statutes of 2025, included \$1 million for a study on the processes by which other states develop curriculum guidance, and to make recommendations about how to improve and streamline California's processes. This report is to be completed by January 1, 2027.

The report is required to include, among other topics:

- The roles and responsibilities of the CDE, the IQC, the SBE, the Legislature, LEAs, educators, parents and guardians, and the public; and
- The processes and cycles for developing, revising, and adopting content standards, curriculum frameworks, and other instructional guidance, and how available instructional time in elementary and secondary schools is considered.

Governor's veto message states that changes to curriculum should wait until curriculum study is complete and recommendations adopted. In 2025, the Governor vetoed AB 86 (Boerner), which would have

required the SBE to adopt instructional materials for health education for kindergarten through 8th grade, on or before July 1, 2028, with the following message:

The Budget Act of 2025 authorized a Curriculum Guidance Study to evaluate and improve the current state-level curriculum guidance adoption process to improve efficiency and consistency across all content areas. Proposals like AB 86 should only be considered after this study is complete and changes to the process are adopted. In the meantime, local governing boards continue to have the authority to evaluate and select a range of materials that align with the state standards and the associated curriculum framework.

Two-house curriculum bill policies. For several Sessions, the Assembly and Senate Education Committees have adopted identical policies on curriculum measures. These policies state, in part:

- The Committee strongly discourages the introduction of measures which require, or require consideration of, modifications to state curriculum through changes to the curriculum framework, or the course of study, which require that specific curriculum be taught, or which require the development of new model curricula or any other state-adopted curriculum.
- The Committee encourages Members to engage in the existing administrative processes for modifying state curricula. Members may wish, for example, to provide written comments or public testimony to the Instructional Quality Commission, the State Board of Education, or the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Committee staff can share a model letter to the Instructional Quality Commission. Members may also wish to engage with the Legislative Members who are appointed to serve on the Instructional Quality Commission, or to engage in the Legislature’s oversight or appointment processes for this purpose.

The policies also state that bills proposing changes to the curriculum frameworks, instructional materials, or the course of study shall either request or require that the IQC consider including content not already included in the existing or draft curriculum frameworks, instructional materials, the course of study, model curricula or any other state-adopted curriculum, to be added in the next regularly scheduled revision of a framework. ***The Committee may wish to consider*** that this bill conforms to this provision.

Recommended Committee amendments. ***Staff recommends that the bill be amended*** to add 1) prevention of heat illness, and 2) the CDPH guidance and the CIF heat policy, to the content the IQC would be required to consider adding to the Framework.

Arguments in support. The California School Nurses Organization writes, “Children are particularly vulnerable to heat-related illnesses due to their developing bodies, higher metabolic rates, and reliance on adults to monitor and regulate their activities. Conditions such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke can escalate quickly, often beginning with subtle symptoms such as dizziness, excessive sweating, or fatigue, and progressing to confusion, nausea, or loss of consciousness. Prompt recognition and intervention are essential to preventing serious medical emergencies. CSNO believes all students should have the tools and education necessary to recognize the signs and symptoms of heat illness.

At CSNO, we recognize that awareness is the best form of defense when it comes to protecting both students and staff from the dangers of heat-related illness. AB 1653 strikes the appropriate balance of drawing attention to an important issue without putting undue burden on our schools.”

Related legislation. AB 1653 (Sanchez), Chapter 589, Statutes of 2023, requires the California Interscholastic Foundation (CIF), in consultation with the California Department of Education (CDE), to develop guidelines, procedures and safety standards for monitoring the safety of practice and play when wet bulb globe thermometer (WBGT) readings reach specified levels, no later than July 1, 2024; and requires the governing board of the school district or the governing body of the charter school to ensure that there is a written emergency action plan in place that describes the location and procedures to be followed in the event of heat illness related to the athletic program's activities or events.

SB 499 (Menjivar) of the 2023-24 Session would have required every school in the state, contingent on appropriation, to develop and implement an extreme heat action plan. The bill would also have required every school to replace outdoor surfaces with more heat resistant materials the next time the school replaces an outdoor surface. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

SB 394 (Gonzalez) of the 2023-24 Session would require, upon an appropriation by the Legislature for this purpose, the California Energy Commission (CEC), in consultation with the CDE, Division of the State Architect (DSA), OPSC, and NRA, to facilitate an interagency process and stakeholder engagement to develop a Master Plan for Healthy, Sustainable, and Climate-Resilient Schools.

AB 2800 (Chu), Chapter 21, Statutes of 2021, adds basic understanding of the signs and symptoms of, and appropriate responses to, heat illness, to the training component of the 1998 HSCTP.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Alameda County Office of Education
California School Nurses Organization
1 individual

Opposition

None on file

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