

Date of Hearing:

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, SPORTS, AND TOURISM  
Christopher M. Ward, Chair  
AB 1706 (Sanchez) – As Amended March 3, 2026

**SUBJECT:** California Interscholastic Federation: flag football pilot program

**SUMMARY:** Requires the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) to establish a five-year pilot program for boys flag football in Orange and Riverside Counties.

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires CIF to establish a five-year pilot program that sanctions flag football as an interscholastic sport.
  - a) Requires the pilot program to operate from the 2027–28 academic year through the 2031–32 academic year.
  - b) Requires the pilot program to be available to high school boys who are enrolled in CIF member schools in the Counties of Orange and Riverside.
- 2) Repeals the provisions of this bill on January 1, 2033.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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:** None. This measure is keyed nonfiscal by the Legislative Counsel.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) Author's statement. According to the author, "Sports are one of the most valuable opportunities our schools can offer young people. Athletics teach lifelong lessons of discipline, teamwork, leadership, and perseverance.

"In 2023, California introduced girls' high school flag football, and the response has been incredible. Participation has surged across our schools and in youth leagues throughout the state, showing just how much demand there is for accessible, competitive football programs. This bill establishes a pilot program for boys' high school flag football in Orange and Riverside Counties from 2027 to 2032. By starting with a regional pilot, we can evaluate the program's success, ensure schools have the right resources in place, and create a model that could ultimately expand statewide.

"Our goal is simple: to give more students the opportunity to compete, stay active, and build the character that comes from being part of a team. AB 1706 helps open the door for the next generation of student-athletes."

- 2) Background. 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.

- 3) The growing popularity of flag football. California schools unanimously approved adding girls flag football in February 2023. 10,832 girls participated in the sport when it was offered in the fall of 2023. According to a CIF's participation survey the fall of 2024 saw an 84% increase and the number of schools offering the sport just from 433 to 697. With 19,921 participants, girls flag football became 8th on the list of most-played girls sports.

According to a 2025 article in SF Gate, participation in girls flag football was growing faster than almost any other sport in the country. In an annual participation survey by the National Federation of High Schools, from 2023-24 to 2024-25 girls flag football saw an increase of more than 25,000 participants. The number of schools offering the sport also nearly doubled, going from 1,777 to 2,736.<sup>1</sup>

California has been a driving force for that growth, where 19,921 girls participated in the sport in 2024. California made up 29% of all girls flag football players at the high school level nationwide.

At the youth sports level, 2.4 million youth played flag football nationally in 2025, up 71% from 2023. Many parents view flag football as a safer and more affordable alternative than full contact football, due to there being less contact and requiring less equipment.<sup>2</sup>

The National Football League (NFL) has their own program, NFL Flag, that included more than 2,000 leagues across all 50 states, with more than 830,000 youth participants. The sport will also be included for the first time in the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

- 4) Double-referral. Should the bill pass from this committee, it will be re-referred to the Assembly Committee on Education.
- 5) Policy considerations. CIF has established a member-driven process for sanctioning new sports. This process added beach volleyball in February 2021, and girls flag football in February 2023. Through this process, a member school would present a proposal to the league they are associated with, which in turn, with approval from the league, would approach the Section with the proposal. After approval of the proposal, at the Section level,

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Simon, "The 84% Calif. high school sports jump that has everyone scrambling," SF Gate, September 2, 2025, <https://www.sfgate.com/sports/article/california-epicenter-america-girls-flag-football-21017936.php>

<sup>2</sup> David Mills, "Flag football leagues are expanding to Richmond as sport's popularity soars," Richmondside, November 18, 2025, <https://richmondside.org/2025/11/18/flag-football-exploding-popularity-nationally-richmond-ca/>

the proposal would then be presented to the CIF Federated Council for vetting, first readings, and a final vote. The Federated Council considers policies and rules that govern athletics statewide.

CIF's process for adding new sports is separate and apart from the legislative process. The legislature has not previously mandated the sanctioning of a specific sport, but through ACR 211 by Assemblymember Kalra in 2024, CIF was encouraged to officially recognize the sport should it be elevated through the established process. Similar to flag football, cricket will also be included in the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

For girls flag football, the sport picked up momentum and eventually was sanctioned by CIF through a program sponsored by the Los Angeles Rams and Chargers in partnership with the NFL and Nike. Schools are able to create clubs for various sports without having them go through CIF's governance process.

According to the CIF, the Los Angeles City Section discussed a proposal to add flag football in early 2026, however the item was tabled without coming to an agreement on when the season would start, as well as whether or not to make the program only available to schools without an existing tackle football program.

6) Prior and related legislation:

- a) ACR 211 (Kalra), Chapter 181, Statutes of 2024, in recognition that the sport of cricket will be included in the 2028 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles, encouraged CIF to take steps towards officially recognizing the game in the state, should the game of cricket be brought forward from a CIF member school and ultimately elevated to, and approved by, the CIF Federated Council.
- b) AB 734 (McCarty) of 2023 would have prohibit a youth sports organization that conducts a tackle football program, or a youth tackle football league, from allowing a person younger than six years old to participate. The prohibition from participating in youth tackle football would have changed to apply to kids under 12 years of age as of 2029. The bill died on Assembly Third Reading.
- c) AB 2373 (Garcia) of 2022 would have established the Adaptive Sports Hubs Pilot Program in the Counties of Imperial and Riverside. The pilot program would have created adaptive sports hubs at centralized public schools for pupils in kindergarten and grades 1 to 8. Died in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

None on file.

**Opposition**

None on file.

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