

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 1851 (Gipson)

As Amended April 27, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires the California Department of Education (CDE), by July 1, 2027, to enter into a contract with one or more local educational agencies (LEAs) with the capacity and established expertise in providing resources, technical assistance, and training to LEAs, to serve as lead entities in providing support for the implementation of integrated, universal social-emotional learning (SEL), behavioral health, and restorative practices for pupils in kindergarten and grades 1 to 12.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires the CDE, by July 1, 2027, to enter into a contract with one or more LEAs with the capacity and established expertise in providing resources, technical assistance, and training to LEAs, to serve as lead entities in providing support for the implementation of integrated, universal social-emotional learning, behavioral health, and restorative practices for pupils in kindergarten and grades 1 to 12.
- 2) Requires the LEAs selected by the CDE to be lead entities to make available guidance, resources, and technical assistance to LEAs to expand the statewide implementation of integrated, universal SEL, behavioral health, and restorative practices to meet the needs of pupils in their school communities.
- 3) Requires the lead entities to ensure that the guidance, resources, and technical assistance provided are equity focused and include trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices as part of a comprehensive multitiered system of supports (MTSS).
- 4) Requires the implementation of these provisions to be subject to an appropriation for this purpose.

COMMENTS

CDE's California SEL Guiding Principles. According to the CDE, SEL has become an increasingly important part of education in California. Coordinated efforts to promote and infuse high-quality, equity-focused SEL across the California education system bring us closer to the CDE vision of advancing a "whole child" approach to education, as originally articulated in the 2013 shift to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).

Specifically, SEL is aligned with the state education priorities described in the LCFF, particularly priorities (4) Student Achievement, (5) Student Engagement, and (6) School Climate. As a result, many districts have articulated SEL goals and strategies within their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs).

The CDE's California SEL Guiding Principles, published in 2017, are intended to inform and support strong SEL practice across the state. They are grounded in five core principles: adopt whole child development; commit to equity; build capacity; partner with families/community; and learn and improve.

The CDE notes that these principles can be a resource in a variety of ways: in the development of LCAP goals; for the roll out of the MTSS; to set school or district leadership team priorities; to inform the design of professional learning, instructional approaches, and curricula adoption; in determining assessment methodologies and tools; and in building coalitions of families and community stakeholders. The principles should be refined to meet the unique needs of each community and can be used to measure progress toward shared SEL goals.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). California's MTSS focuses on aligning initiatives and resources within an educational organization to address the needs of all students. It is an integrated, comprehensive framework for LEAs that aligns academic, behavioral, and SEL in a fully integrated system of support for the benefit of all students. MTSS offers the potential to create systematic change through intentional integration of services and supports to quickly identify and meet the needs of all students.

Over \$95 million has been appropriated to date to the Scaling Up MTSS Statewide (SUMS) Initiative, managed by the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) and the Butte County Office of Education (COE), to encourage LEAs to establish and align schoolwide, data-driven systems of academic and behavioral supports to more effectively meet the needs of California's diverse learners in the most inclusive environment.

The OCDE and Butte COE partnered with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Center for the Transformation of Schools to expand the state's MTSS framework. They developed evidence-based tools and training for educators and school systems. Their work expands restorative justice, bullying prevention and positive behavior interventions and minimizes the use of emergency interventions. Their joint effort also established a pilot program to help LEAs to promote positive school climates by improving student-teacher relationships, increasing student engagement, and promoting alternative discipline practices.

CalHOPE Student Support. CalHOPE, led by the Sacramento COE, is a unique cross-sector partnership between healthcare and education, which aims to enhance statewide leaders' capacity to support the implementation of equity-centered SEL in schools. Led by the Sacramento County Office of Education, CalHOPE leverages partnerships and leaders from 58 COEs to develop sustainable and supportive SEL delivery systems for California's educators and students. CalHOPE operationalizes and expands previous priorities like the California SEL Guiding Principles and Transformative SEL Competencies and Conditions Indicators.

According to the Author

The author states, "AB 1851 helps ensure that California's commitment to young people translates into real opportunities, stronger systems, and better outcomes for our students. We have made historic commitments to children's behavioral health, but too often our systems operate in silos, leaving schools without clear guidance or alignment. At a time when chronic absenteeism remains high and students are facing unprecedented behavioral health challenges; we cannot afford fragmentation."

"This bill strengthens coordination and accountability around existing Social Emotional Learning and school-based behavioral health efforts so that prevention happens early, consistently, and equitably. Our students deserve systems that work together, not in isolation."

Arguments in Support

The Ella Baker Center for Human Rights writes, "Across California, educators, community organizations, and policymakers are increasingly recognizing that students' social, emotional, and behavioral well-being are foundational to academic success and long-term life outcomes. Schools are seeing rising levels of student anxiety, chronic absenteeism, and behavioral health needs. At the same time, the state has made historic investments in youth behavioral health infrastructure through the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI) and related programs. AB 1851 helps ensure these investments are implemented effectively by improving coordination and clarity around existing SEL efforts across California's education and behavioral health systems."

"AB 1851 is rooted in the understanding that prevention must begin early and that students thrive when schools are equipped with the tools and coordination necessary to support their social and emotional development. By strengthening coordination between existing state initiatives and educational systems, this bill helps ensure that California's investments in youth well-being are implemented in a effective manner. We believe AB 1851 represents a thoughtful step toward strengthening the systems that support California's students and educators."

Arguments in Opposition

Moms for Liberty Placer County writes, "Our organization supports parents, transparency, and the fundamental principle that schools exist to educate, not to replace the role of families in shaping a child's emotional, behavioral, or moral development. AB-1851 crosses that line. By embedding mental-health and behavioral-health instruction into the school day, AB-1851 effectively shifts authority away from parents and places it in the hands of the state. Families seeking real mental-health support for their children will now face fewer resources because those funds are being diverted into curriculum development and classroom instruction. Moms for Liberty supports strong academics, safe schools, and parental authority. AB-1851 undermines all three. It expands the role of government into children's emotional development, reduces local control, and diverts mental health funding away from students who truly need clinical support."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, "One-time Proposition 98 General Fund cost pressures of an unknown amount but likely in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Legislature to appropriate funds for CDE to enter into a contract with one or more LEAs selected as lead entities to produce and proliferate guidance, resources, and technical assistance as required by this bill."

VOTES

ASM EDUCATION: 8-0-1

YES: Patel, Hoover, Alvarez, Bonta, Garcia, Lowenthal, Pellerin, Zbur

ABS, ABST OR NV: Castillo

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 13-0-2

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

ABS, ABST OR NV: Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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