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# SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

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<b>Bill No:</b>	AB 1851	<b>Hearing Date:</b>	July 1, 2026
<b>Author:</b>	Gipson		
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<b>Urgency:</b>	No	<b>Fiscal:</b>	Yes
<b>Consultant:</b>	Therresa Austin		

**Subject:** Pupil health: social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health supports.

## SUMMARY

This bill requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to select one or more lead local educational agencies (LEAs) to provide support for the implementation of integrated social-emotional learning (SEL), behavioral health, and restorative practices for pupils in kindergarten and grades 1 to 12, inclusive.

## BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Appropriates \$50 million in 2021-22 to the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) to award grants to LEAs to fund schoolwide and districtwide implementation of services or practices aligned to the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework developed under the "Scale Up MTSS Statewide" (SUMS) project. Requires the grants awarded to LEAs to support the implementation of high-quality integrated academic, behavioral, and SEL practices in an integrated MTSS at the schoolwide level. (Education Code (EC) § 41490)
- 2) Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to establish a process, in consultation with and subject to the approval of the executive director of the State Board of Education (SBE), to select an LEA or another entity, as specified, to partner with the OCDE and the Butte County Office of Education (COE) to expand the state's capacity to support LEA's implementation of SEL, trauma screening, trauma-informed practices, and culturally relevant, affirming, and sustaining practices. Requires the entity chosen to have demonstrated expertise in developing and delivering high quality professional learning to educators in SEL, trauma-informed practices, and culturally relevant, affirming, and sustaining practices in a manner that aligns with local MTSS. (EC § 41490)
- 3) Requires the CDE, by June 1, 2024, to develop evidence-based best practices for restorative justice practice implementation on a school campus and make these available on the department website for use by LEAs to implement restorative justice practices as part of efforts to improve campus culture and climate. Requires the CDE to consult with school-based restorative justice practitioners, public school educators, students, community partners, and nonprofit and public entities in developing the best practices, and to the extent

feasible, take into account other programs and resources, including, but not limited to, the SUMS Initiative, the California Community Schools Partnership Program, and resources developed by the department in support of SEL. (EC § 49055)

- 4) Expresses the intent of the Legislature to support LEAs in conducting evidence-based activities to address chronic absenteeism and loss of attendance due to emergency events, including but not limited to:
  - a) Establishing a community school model;
  - b) Implementing activities or programs to improve attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism, including, but not limited to, early warning systems or early intervention programs;
  - c) Implementing restorative practices, restorative justice models, or other programs to improve retention rates, reduce suspensions and other school removals, and reduce the referral of pupils to law enforcement agencies;
  - d) Implementing activities that advance SEL, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), culturally responsive practices, and trauma-informed strategies;
  - e) Establishing partnerships with community-based organizations or other relevant entities to support the implementation of evidence-based, nonpunitive approaches to further the goals of the program; and
  - f) Adding or increasing staff within an LEA whose primary purpose is to address ongoing chronic attendance problems, including, but not necessarily limited to, conducting outreach to families and children currently, or at risk of becoming, chronically truant. (EC § 46210)
  
- 5) Appropriates \$1.5 billion for the Educator Effectiveness Block Grant to be distributed by the SPI to school districts, COEs, charter schools, and state special schools in the 2020-21 fiscal year for expenditure through the 2025-26 fiscal year. Authorizes these funds to be used to provide professional learning to school staff who work with students in any of the following areas, among others:
  - a) Strategies to implement SEL, trauma-informed practices, suicide prevention, access to mental health services, and other approaches that improve pupil well-being; and
  - b) Practices to create a positive school climate, including, but not limited to, restorative justice, training around implicit bias, providing positive behavioral supports, MTSS, transforming a schoolsite's culture to one that values diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and preventing discrimination, harassment, bullying, and intimidation based on actual or perceived characteristics. (EC § 41480)

- 6) Establishes the California Community Schools Partnership Act, to provide integrated pupil supports, community partnerships, and expanded learning opportunities, which will help address the trauma and loss of learning that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Statewide investment in community schools, supported by local networks designed to coordinate services and resources, are critical to realize whole-child education. (EC § 8900 et seq.)
- 7) Requires the CDE to develop model referral protocols for addressing student mental health concerns, in consultation with specified agencies and stakeholders, and authorizes these protocols to be used on a voluntary basis by schools. (EC § 49428.1)
- 8) Requires the governing boards or bodies of LEAs, by January 31, 2026, to adopt at a regularly scheduled meeting, a policy on referral protocols for addressing student behavioral health concerns of students in grades 7 to 12. (EC § 49428.2)
- 9) Requires the CDE, by January 1, 2023, to recommend best practices and identify evidence-based and evidence-informed training programs for schools to address youth behavioral health, including staff and student training, contingent upon an appropriation for this purpose. (EC § 49428.15)
- 10) Requires LEAs to certify to the CDE by July 1, 2029, that 100% of certificated employees and 40% of classified employees who have direct contact with students in grades 7 to 12 have received youth behavioral health training at least once, as specified. (EC § 49428.2)
- 11) Establishes the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI) and requires the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) to develop and maintain a school-linked statewide fee schedule for outpatient mental health or substance use disorder treatment provided to a student 25 years or younger at a school site, beginning January 1, 2024. (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) § 5961.4)
- 12) Requires the DHCS to award competitive grants for school-linked behavioral health partnership grants to eligible entities, including counties, city mental health, tribal entities, LEAs, higher education institutions, publicly funded early childhood education providers, health care service plans, community-based organizations, and behavioral health providers. (WIC § 5961.2)

## ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Requires the CDE, on or before July 1, 2027, to enter into a contract with one or more LEAs to serve as lead entities in providing support for the implementation of integrated, universal SEL, behavioral health, and restorative practices for pupils in kindergarten and grades 1 to 12, inclusive. Requires that the lead entities have capacity and established expertise in providing resources, technical assistance, and training to LEAs.

- 2) Requires the LEAs selected by the CDE through a competitive process, as specified, to provide 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 guidance, resources, and technical assistance provided are equity focused and include trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices as part of a comprehensive MTSS.
- 4) Defines “local educational agency” to mean a school district, COE, or charter school.
- 5) States that the implementation of this bill shall be contingent upon an appropriation for its purpose in the annual Budget Act or another statute.
- 6) Makes a series of legislative findings and declarations related to the state’s ongoing efforts to support SEL and the uniquely position nature of school in providing early supports for children and youth.

## STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, “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.”
- 2) ***Social-emotional learning.*** According to the CDE, SEL reflects the critical role of positive relationships and emotional connections in the learning process and helps students develop a range of skills they need for school and life. SEL skills include the ability to:
  - a) set and achieve positive goals
  - b) feel and show empathy for others
  - c) establish and maintain positive relationships
  - d) make responsible decisions
  - e) understand and manage emotions

There is a growing body of research proving that SEL is fundamental to academic success and must be woven into the work of every teacher in every classroom and every after school and summer learning program in order to prepare all students for college and careers.

To better connect educators with SEL, the CDE has joined the Collaborating States Initiative hosted by the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a group of states that share information, best practices, and promising tools and ideas in the interest of building strong SEL in schools across their states.

The integration of SEL to promote equity and address the needs of the whole child, and educators, is supported by many of California's current policies, standards, funding, and decision-making mechanisms, including Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP).

The CDE maintains several resource pages related to SEL, including the SEL Guiding Principles and the Transformative Social Emotional Learning (T-SEL) Conditions and Competencies for Thriving.

- 3) ***California's SEL Guiding Principles.*** In 2017, the CDE convened representatives from more than 20 California education organizations and systems to affirm SEL as an essential part of a well-rounded, quality education in all youth-serving settings and develop the California SEL Guiding Principles (Principles). The Principles are intended to serve as a resource to help LEAs develop LCAP goals; support the local rollout of the MTSS; set school or district leadership team priorities; inform the design of professional learning, instructional approaches, and curricula adoption; help determine assessment methodologies and tools; and build coalitions of families and community stakeholders.

The following Principles are designed to build on the implicit and explicit SEL practices already happening in many schools and to promote the intentional use of evidence and research-based practices to guide decision-making:

- a) Adopt Whole Child Development as the Goal of Education: Take a systems approach to promoting student academic, SEL, physical well-being, and college, career, and civic life readiness. Name SEL as not a "nice to have," but a "must have" to ensure student success in school, work, and community.
- b) Commit to Equity: All students must have opportunities to build SEL skills and receive an assets-based educational experience that is personalized, culturally relevant, and responsive, and intentionally addresses racism and implicit bias. Use practices that build on the existing strengths of students, educators, families, and communities.
- c) Build Capacity: Build the capacity of both students and adults through an intentional focus on relationship-centered learning environments and by

offering research-based learning experiences that cultivate core social and emotional competencies.

- d) Partner with Families and Community: Maximize the resources of the entire school community, including expanded learning opportunities, early learning and care programs, and family and community partnerships, to advance SEL and student well-being.
- e) Learn and Improve: Adopt continuous improvement practices and use evidence to guide decision-making while aiming to enhance the quality of student SEL opportunities. Use data to inform improvement of instructional and school practices, not for accountability purposes.

The Principles are intended to be refined to meet the unique needs of each community and can be used to measure progress toward shared SEL goals.

- 4) ***Multi-Tiered Systems of Support***. MTSS is a comprehensive framework that aligns academic, behavioral, SEL and mental health supports in a fully integrated system of support for the benefit of all students. CA MTSS offers the potential to create needed systematic change through intentional design and redesign of services and supports to identify and match all students' needs quickly. The MTSS framework provides opportunities for LEAs to strengthen school, family, and community partnerships while developing the whole child in the most inclusive, equitable learning environment, thus closing the equity gaps for all students.

In 2015, Assembly Bill 104 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 13, Statutes of 2015) appropriated \$10 million for developing, aligning, and improving academic and behavioral support systems. The CDE conducted a competitive grant process and awarded the funds to the OCDE for their SUMS proposal, which included the Butte COE as a rural partner. The focus of the SUMS Initiative is to develop resources for MTSS within an LEA that align the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports in an LEA in order to serve the whole child. It involves family and community engagement, administrative leadership, integrated education frameworks, and inclusive policy and practices.

In 2016, an additional \$20 million, appropriated by SB 828 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 29, Statutes 2016), augmented the original grant award.

The Budget Act of 2018 authorized an additional \$15 million, appropriated by AB 1808 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 32, Statutes of 2018) and SB 840 (Mitchell, Chapter 29, Statutes of 2018), to focus on improving the school climate statewide.

Finally, the Budget Act of 2021 appropriated an additional \$50 million to the SUMS Initiative. The legislation required the OCDE to award \$30 million of these funds as subgrants to LEAs. The legislation also required the CDE to conduct a process to select a partner entity to work with the OCDE and the Butte COE to support high quality professional learning for educators.

The purpose of the full \$95 million awarded to date is 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 SUMS Initiative has allowed the OCDE and its partners to develop and disseminate statewide resources and technical assistance for this purpose.

*This bill requires the CDE to select one or more lead LEAs to provide support for the implementation of integrated SEL, behavioral health, and restorative practices for pupils in kindergarten and grades 1 to 12, inclusive. The Committee may wish to consider how this bill interacts with current investments made by the Legislature to address the social-emotional health of students.*

- 5) **Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative.** Launched in July 2021, CYBHI is a multiyear, multi-billion-dollar effort focused on improving the behavioral health and well-being of children, youth, and families. The CYBHI is the core of the Master Plan for Kids' Mental Health, the state's \$4.7 billion investment to overhaul its mental health system and enhance the pathways connecting families with the needed services. According to the CYBHI's 2024 annual report, CYBHI investments have taken form in the following work streams in educational settings:
- a) *Safe Spaces Trauma Informed Training* – A free, online training designed to help individuals working with children and youth recognize and respond to signs of trauma and stress.
  - b) *CalHOPE Mindfulness, Resilience, and Well-being Supports* – Providing no-cost mental health and wellness resources to schools across the state. The website contains resources that focus on creating trusted spaces, building resilience, and recognizing the signs of mental stress and duress in colleagues, students, and family members.
  - c) *Student Behavioral Health Incentive Program* – Addressing behavioral health access barriers for Medi-Cal students through targeted interventions that increase access to preventive, early intervention, or other behavioral health services provided by school-affiliated behavioral health providers for TK-12 children in public schools.
  - d) *School-Linked Partnership and Capacity Grants* - Providing COEs and LEAs, as well as institutions of higher education (IHEs), with critical resources to build infrastructure and partnerships and achieve a long-term and sustainable funding model for student behavioral health services. These one-time grants aim to increase operational readiness to engage in the CYBHI Fee Schedule program through supporting Medi-Cal enrollment, building service delivery and billing infrastructure, establishing data collection and documentation processes, and supporting collective impact efforts.
  - e) *CYBHI Fee Schedule Program* - Increases access to school-linked behavioral health services. The program establishes a sustainable

reimbursement source from Managed Care Plans, commercial health insurance, and disability insurers. Covered services include outpatient mental health or substance use disorder services for students under 26 years of age. The Fee Schedule creates a more approachable billing model for LEAs and public IHEs, easing burdens related to contracting, rate negotiation, and navigation across delivery systems, and reducing uncertainty around students' health insurance coverage.

- f) *Transforming Together* - Supported by the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools, Transforming Together (T2) brings together a cross-sector Collaborative Leadership Working Group to align and integrate systems efforts for a re-imagined, youth-centered behavioral health ecosystem. Work is conducted in close partnership with CDE's California Community Schools Partnership Program and piloted in four demonstration counties.

- 6) ***Arguments in support.*** In a letter of support submitted to this Committee, this bill's sponsors, Initiate Justice, note the following:

"Importantly, this bill is grounded in the lived experience and policy insight of incarcerated students at Pleasant Valley State Prison who participated in Initiate Justice's Inside Policy Clinic. Through that process, participants identified the absence of early emotional and behavioral support as a key factor contributing to cycles of harm and system involvement. AB 1851 reflects a rare and critical inside-out approach to policymaking by centering the voices of those most directly impacted to inform upstream, preventative solutions.

"Too often, policy responses to violence—particularly gun and gang violence—are reactive, relying on increased punishment after harm has already occurred. However, decades of research and lived experience have shown that this approach is both costly and ineffective in producing safer communities. What we need are upstream solutions that build the skills young people need to navigate conflict, regulate emotions, and develop healthy relationships. Social-emotional learning does exactly that.

"By equipping students with tools such as emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and responsible decision-making, SEL strengthens school climate, reduces behavioral incidents, and supports long-term positive outcomes. Importantly, it provides a proactive framework for violence prevention that aligns with what we know actually improves safety: early intervention, skill-building, and supportive learning environments."

- 7) ***Prior and related legislation.***

AB 1479 (Garcia, 2023) would have established the Pupil Social-Emotional, Behavioral, and Mental Health Program, to be administered by the CDE, to make available grants to LEAs to provide Tier 1 mental health supports to pupils and families, subject to an appropriation for this purpose. AB 1479 was vetoed with the following message:

*Unfortunately, this specific proposal creates additional significant ongoing Proposition 98 General Fund cost pressures up to tens of millions of dollars that are not accounted for in the state budget plan and may be duplicative of other investments made in prior budgets. The 2021 Budget Act provided \$50 million to support the Scale Up Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Statewide Initiative, which provides grants to support schools in implementing services or practices aligned to the MTSS framework. Additionally, the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative is a \$4.7 billion investment towards ensuring that every Californian aged 0-25 has increased access to behavioral health supports.*

AB 2598 (Akilah Weber, Chapter 914, Statutes of 2022) requires the CDE to develop and post on its website, by June 1, 2024, evidence-based best practices for restorative justice practices for LEAs to implement to improve campus culture and climate.

AB 2124 (Cristina Garcia, 2022) would have required the SPI to develop, administer, and award the Pupil Peer Support Training Program grant competitively for LEAs serving pupils in grades 9 to 12 to establish a peer support training program. *AB 2124 was vetoed with the following message:*

*Peer support programs are valuable, which is why the 2022 Budget Act funded a similar program. AB 178 allocated \$10 million for the School-Based Peer Mental Health Demonstration Project. This grant program will provide competitive grants to high schools to develop peer-to-peer support programs. With our state facing lower-than-expected revenues over the first few months of this fiscal year, it is important to remain disciplined when it comes to spending, particularly spending that is ongoing. We must prioritize existing obligations and priorities, including education, health care, public safety and safety-net programs.*

AB 552 (Quirk-Silva, 2022) would have authorized a county behavioral health agency and the governing board or governing body of a LEA to enter into an Integrated School-Based Behavioral Health Partnership Program (Partnership Program), as established by this bill, to provide prevention and early intervention, and access to behavioral health and substance use disorder services for pupils at schoolsites. *AB 552 was vetoed with the following message:*

*While I share the author's goal of addressing the mental health needs of children and youth, the partnership programs proposed under this bill would duplicate requirements for school-based behavioral health services being developed pursuant to the Children and Youth's Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI), which take effect in 2024. Implementation of the CYBHI's statewide all-payer fee schedule will provide a solution to the issue that this bill attempts to address. Additionally, I am concerned that this bill could create significant one-time and ongoing costs in the millions of dollars for the departments that would play a role in implementing these programs.*

AB 2221 (Cristina Garcia, 2020) would have required school districts to establish a peer support training program at each high school. *AB 2221 was held in the Assembly Education Committee.*

AB 2639 (Berman, Chapter 437, Statutes of 2018) requires the CDE to identify and make available an online training program in suicide prevention that an LEA can use to train school staff and pupils, consistent with the LEA's policy on suicide prevention.

**SUPPORT**

Initiate Justice (sponsor)  
Alameda County Office of Education  
Back to the Start  
California Association for Bilingual Education  
California Association of School Counselors  
California Primary Care Association Advocates  
Drug Policy Alliance  
GLIDE  
Los Angeles County Office of Education

**OPPOSITION**

None received

**-- END --**