
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1851 (Gipson) - Pupil health: social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health supports

Version: April 27, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

Policy Vote: ED. 7 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Lenin Del Castillo

Bill 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.

Fiscal Impact: While the bill's provisions would be contingent upon an appropriation, it could result in one-time Proposition 98 General Fund cost pressures, likely in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, for the state provide funding for CDE to enter into a contract with one or more LEAs to implement integrated SEL, behavioral health, and restorative practices students.

The CDE estimates General Fund costs of \$327,000 each year and 2.0 positions for administrative workload related to contract development, oversight, coordination, collaboration, partnership, monitoring, and technical assistance.

Background: Existing law 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.

Existing law 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.

Existing law requires the CDE 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.

Existing law 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)

Existing law 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.

Proposed Law: This bill 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. The bill requires that the lead entities have capacity and established expertise in providing resources, technical assistance, and training to LEAs.

This bill requires the LEAs selected by the CDE through a competitive process 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.

This bill 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.

This bill provides that its implementation shall be contingent upon an appropriation for its purpose in the annual Budget Act or another statute.

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.

Staff Comments: 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. The state has made multiple significant investments in recent years to promote SEL in schools, including the California Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI) and community schools. 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.”

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