
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	AB 1985	Hearing Date:	June 17, 2026
Author:	Irwin and Pacheco		
Version:	April 23, 2026		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Michelle Nguyen		

Subject: Student health: athletic coaches: mental health training.

SUMMARY

This bill requires, by July 1, 2028, and every two years thereafter, the campuses of the California State University (CSU), the California Community Colleges (CCCs), and each private postsecondary educational institution and independent institution of higher education that receives state financial assistance, and requests of the campuses of the University of California (UC), a coach of an athletic program to complete a training on student mental health, as specified, as a condition of the coach's employment or volunteer service.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the UC as a public trust to be administered by the Regents of the UC; and grants the Regents full powers of organization and government, subject only to such legislative control as may be necessary to insure security of its funds, compliance with the terms of its endowments, statutory requirements around competitive bidding and contracts, sales of property and the purchase of materials, goods and services. (Article IX § 9 of the California Constitution)
- 2) Establishes UC, CSU, and the CCCs as the three segments of public higher education and defines "independent institutions of higher education" as nonpublic higher education institutions that grant undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, or both, and that are formed as nonprofit corporations in California and are accredited by an agency recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE). For purposes of any code or statute, a national or regional accrediting agency recognized by the USDE as of January 1, 2025, shall retain that recognition until July 1, 2029, provided that the accrediting agency continues to operate in substantially the same manner as it did on January 1, 2025. (Education Code (EC) § 66010, et seq.)
- 3) Requires the governing board of each community college district (CCD), the Trustees of the CSU, the Board of Directors of the College of Law, San Francisco, and the Regents of the UC to, within existing resources, adopt and implement a rape and sexual assault education program for, and ensure maximum feasible participation of, students and student services professional staff members or

student affairs professional staff members at each of their respective campuses or other facilities. (EC § 67391)

- 4) Finds and declares that colleges should provide special sexual assault seminars for all athletic coaches and administrators and members of athletic teams, and states that these seminars should take place during a student athlete orientation program or prior to the first team meeting. (EC § 67390)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Requires, by July 1, 2028, the CSU, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), and each private postsecondary educational institution and independent institution of higher education that receives state financial assistance, and requests of the UC, to identify and compile a list of mental health programs that can be used to train athletic coaches.
- 2) Requires the specified trainings to cover suicide prevention education, and allows the specified trainings to cover mental health first aid education if suicide prevention education is included.
- 3) Requires, by July 1, 2028, and every two years thereafter, each campus of the CSU, each CCC, and each private postsecondary educational institution and independent institution of higher education that receives state financial assistance, and requests of the UC, a coach in an athletic program to complete a training on student mental health, as specified, as a condition of the person's employment or volunteer service.
- 4) Requires that this legislation be known, and may be cited, as Sarah Shulze's Law.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, "There is currently no standard in state law that requires athletic coaches at college and universities to be trained on mental health awareness and best practices for their student-athletes. Without a state standard, individual institutions and campuses are left to create their own standards if they voluntarily train coaches on mental health. This leaves room for potentially no standard at all, inconsistent implementation if there is a policy, and generally a lack of oversight from the state to ensure coaches are receiving training on the most up-to-date and evidence-based best practices."
- 2) ***Slate of bills from 2025-26 Regular Session promoting wellness and improved mental health for pupil athletes.*** This bill, along with AB 1626 (Gabriel, 2026) and AB 1665 (Pacheco, 2026), recognizes the unique role that athletic coaches have in young athletes' lives and aims to equip coaches with the tools and the understanding so that they can appropriately respond and provide support to young men and women during an age when this support is critical. This bill aims to provide mental health training for athletic coaches at the collegiate level, and AB 1626 (Gabriel, 2026) and AB 1665 (Pacheco, 2026) address

providing mental health training for athletic coaches in K-12 schools and youth organizations.

3) ***Mental health challenges on college campuses and for college athletes.***

Historical data suggests the prevalence of mental health issues among college students nationally has increased over the long term. More recent data suggests the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this trend. Since the onset of the pandemic, several studies have found further increases in a variety of student mental health issues. For example, a 2024-25 study from the Healthy Minds Network, which is a research organization focused on the mental health of young adults, reports that college students continue to report poor mental health, with more than one in three students saying they experience moderate anxiety or depression. Data from the most recent survey found that only 36% of college students are thriving, reporting high levels of success in relationships, self-esteem, purpose and optimism, down slightly from 38% the previous year.

For college athletes in particular, the pressures of balancing their academics and the time spent traveling, practicing, and competing in competitions are draining and leave many student athletes overwhelmed. Moreover, with more colleges moving into conferences that are not geographically close to the campuses, college athletes are traveling farther than ever as part of their regular season. This bill requires training on student mental health for athletic coaches, with the intent for coaches to be equipped to recognize signs of mental illness and behavioral distress in students participating in athletic programs. The UC has indicated that they already mandate their athletic coaches to take the trainings required by this bill.

4) ***Author's amendments to be taken as committee amendments.*** To simplify the bill and clarify the coaches who are required to take the specified trainings on student mental health, *the author suggests amending the bill, and committee staff concurs, with the following:*

- *Remove the requirement for institutions to compile a list of trainings.*
- *Explicitly requires that assistant coaches and athletic trainers complete trainings on student mental health.*
- *Adds that the training required by this bill may be provided by entities offering free, online, or other types of training courses.*

5) ***Related and Prior Legislation.***

AB 1626 (Gabriel, 2026) would establish training content areas, related to behavioral and mental health challenges specific to pupil athletes, to be used for trainings for coaches of interscholastic athletic programs, non-interscholastic athletic programs, and youth sports organizations. This bill requires the CDE, by September 1, 2027, to identify an existing training or develop a model youth athletics behavioral and mental health training, as specified, for coaches in youth sports organizations.

AB 1665 (Pacheco, 2026) would require, commencing July 1, 2027: (1) a coach for an interscholastic athletic program at a high school that is a member of the California Interscholastic Federation to complete an initial training, and subsequent training every two years, on a coaching education and training program on mental health, and (2) that a local educational agency (LEA) ensure a coach of a non-interscholastic athletic program complete an initial training, and subsequent training every two years, covering sudden cardiac arrest and youth athletics behavioral and mental health, if the LEA chooses to offer a non-interscholastic athletic program.

SUPPORT

California Alliance of Caregivers
California Behavioral Health Association
National Alliance on Mental Illness
University of California

OPPOSITION

None received

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