

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2117 (Alvarez) – As Amended April 28, 2026

Policy Committee: Education

Vote: 9 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill establishes the position Education Commissioner, appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate after January 1, 2027, to administer the California Department of Education (CDE), effective July 1, 2027, and removes or changes various duties of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI).

Specifically, the bill replaces four of the existing 10 State Board of Education (SBE) non-student governor appointments with legislative appointees, requires legislative confirmation of the Education Commissioner, and requires a transition plan for the transfer of CDE governance from the SPI to the Education Commissioner. The bill also establishes the Office of the SPI and prescribes various roles and responsibilities and provides for adequate staffing. Lastly, the bill establishes several new requirements on the CDE to facilitate legislative oversight and responsiveness to findings of noncompliance.

FISCAL EFFECT:

Ongoing General Fund costs of an unknown amount, but likely in the hundreds of thousands to low millions of dollars, to establish the position of Education Commissioner and for the CDE to create a transition plan. The bill authorizes the Governor to appoint a total of 16 deputies to the Education Commissioner but prohibits these positions from resulting in a net increase in the expenditures of the department.

To the extent the CDE transition plan recommends additional staffing for the office of the SPI the bill could create additional General Fund cost pressures, likely in the hundreds of thousands to low millions of dollars, for the Legislature to provide additional funding for this purpose.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

COMMENTS:

1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

AB 2117 restructures our state's education governance to improve coordination and accountability, but a shift of this scale demands careful, deliberate implementation to ensure nothing falls through the cracks. By taking the time to thoughtfully align every aspect of this transition, we can safeguard student learning, protect classroom

stability, and build a system that truly delivers on the promise of a quality education for every child.

- 2) **Background.** In the 2026-27 state budget proposed by the Governor, the Department of Finance introduced a K-12 Education budget trailer bill proposal to “amend the Education Code to move oversight authority of the management of the CDE and support of local educational agencies under the SBE.” Department of Finance and the Governor’s Office claim the change is intended to improve coherence, efficiency, and accountability within California’s education governance system and better address the needs of public schools and their communities.

In late 2025, Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) published a report on education governance in California, which, among other things, recommended redefining the SPI’s responsibilities under current law and provide the Governor, by way of the SBE, with more clear responsibility over K-12 education governance and policymaking. PACE conducted several interviews with California education governance experts and stated the following in their report:

Overall, the findings point to a governance system hampered by misaligned incentives, uneven capacity, and unpredictable funding. Strengthening coherence requires clarifying roles, aligning authority with responsibility, and building sustainable capacity and fiscal infrastructure across all levels of the system.

In response to the Governor’s Budget proposal, the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) examined the proposal and recommended the Legislature adopt it, with some changes. Among other concerns, the LAO notes that most research on this topic historically highlights the blurred responsibilities among the education policymaking entities of the Governor, the Legislature, and SBE. This may be because the SPI is elected by the public based upon a platform of policy priorities but is tasked with implementing and administering programs and policies they had no formal role in designing. All the studies published on this subject have recommended reducing or eliminating the SPI’s independent authority and increasing the Governor’s official policymaking role in some way. In the conclusion of its report, the LAO states “adopting the new governance structure would allow for voters to hold the Governor accountable for change, reduce confusion about who is in charge, and improve oversight of existing programs.”

This bill codifies the Governor’s education governance proposal but makes several changes related to legislative oversight of CDE, representation on the SBE, and the timing of the governance transition.

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