
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 382 (Berman) - Pedestrian safety: school zones: speed limits

Version: June 26, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 18, 2025

Policy Vote: TRANS. 15 - 0

Mandate: Yes

Consultant: Mark McKenzie

Bill Summary: AB 382 would reduce the prima facie speed limit in a school zone to 20 miles per hour (mph), subject to specified conditions, beginning on January 1, 2029, and revise the definitions of a “school zone,” when “children are present,” and “speed trap” for purposes of the applicability of school zone speed limits, as specified.

Fiscal Impact:

- Unknown significant state-mandated local costs, likely in the millions of dollars in the aggregate, for local jurisdictions to change out signage at each school site by January 1, 2029 to reflect a 20 mph prima facie speed limit in school zones. These costs are likely to be reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates. (General Fund)
- The Department of Transportation (Caltrans) would incur minor costs to update the California Manual on Uniform Traffic Devices for speed limit policies related to school zones. In addition, Caltrans would incur one-time costs, likely in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars, to replace speed limit signs in the state highway rights-of-way for the 585 school sites that are located along the state highway system. These costs could be higher if support posts require replacement and if flashing beacons are installed. (State Highway Account)
- The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) would incur costs to update automated knowledge exams and eLearning modules to account for changes to speed limits in school zones, and for IT improvements to its driver's license systems to account for the separate Vehicle Code violation for the new 20 mph prima facie speed limit beginning in 2029. DMV indicates that costs to update driver's license systems are unknown at this time because the department's Enterprise Modernization Project efforts are currently underway. Staff notes that the Motor Vehicle Account has a structural imbalance, and without corrective action, the fund will be insolvent in the next budget year. (Motor Vehicle Account)

Background: Existing law establishes a prima facie speed limit of 25 mph when approaching or passing a school building or school grounds. This speed limit applies where the highway is posted with a standard “SCHOOL” sign and under the following circumstances: while children are entering or exiting during school hours or the noon recess period, or while the school grounds are in use by children and the grounds are not separated from the highway by a fence, gate, or other physical barrier. This sign may be posted at any distance up to 500 feet away from school grounds. If a local authority conducts a traffic survey and determines that the 25 mph speed limit in a particular school zone is too high to be reasonably safe, the prima facie speed limit may

be reduced to either 20 or 15 mph, as deemed appropriate by the survey. Existing law also allows a local authority to establish a prima facie speed limit of 15 mph within 500 feet of a school zone, and 25 mph between 500 and 100 feet of a school zone in a residence district on a highway with a maximum of two traffic lanes and a speed limit of 30 mph or slower, as specified.

Proposed Law: AB 382 would lower the prima facie speed limit in school zones to 20 mph beginning on January 1, 2029, and revise the signage requirements to designate a school zone. Specifically, this bill would do the following as of January 1, 2029:

- Delete current requirements to specify where a school zone speed limit applies when approaching or passing a school building or grounds, including where a highway is posted with a standard “SCHOOL” sign up to 500 feet from school grounds, and circumstances in which children are present, as specified.
- Define “school zone” to mean an area of a highway within 500 feet of school grounds in any direction marked with appropriate signs giving notice of the area.
- Define “children are present” to mean whenever children are going to or leaving school, or when school grounds are in use by children and the highway is posted with a standard “SCHOOL” warning sign. The definition does not include children separated from the highway by a fence, gate, or other physical barrier.
- Allow a local authority to establish a prima facie speed limit of 20 mph in a school zone by ordinance or resolution until January 1, 2029.
- Reduce the prima facie speed limit from 25 mph to 20 mph in a school zone when any of the following apply:
 - A school speed limit sign with attached beacons states “speed limit 20 when flashing” and the beacons are flashing.
 - A school speed limit sign states “when children are present” and children are present.
 - A school speed limit sign with specific hours, which shall be determined by the local jurisdiction.
- Makes the following revisions to a local agency’s authority to declare a lower prima facie speed limit in a school zone, by ordinance or resolution, as follows:
 - Delete specified conditions on declaring a prima facie speed limit of 15 mph in a school zone located in a residence district, on a highway with a maximum of two lanes of traffic and a posted speed limit of 30 mph or slower.
 - Delete specified conditions on declaring a prima facie speed limit of 25 mph on a highway when approaching a school zone from a distance of 500 to 1,000 feet.
- Make conforming changes to the statutory definition of a “speed trap” to account for the revised definition of a school zone.

Related Legislation: AB 2583 (Berman), which was held on this Committee’s Suspense File last year, was substantially similar to this bill.

SB 632 (Cannella), which failed passage in the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee in 2015, would have established a 15 mph speed limit in school zones.

AB 321 (Nava), Chap. 384/2008, authorized a city or county to establish a 15 mph prima facie speed limit in a school zone, as specified, and to expand the enforcement area in a 25 mph school zone from within 500 feet of school grounds to within 1000 feet.

Staff Comments: This bill makes several significant changes regarding the speed limits near school sites. Specifically, the bill clarifies the limits of a “school zone” to be any area of a highway within 500 feet in any direction from school grounds, revises the applicability of the meaning of when “children are present,” and lowers the prima facie speed limit from 25 mph to 20 mph, beginning in 2029. The bill provides discretion to local authorities to determine when a school zone speed limit can be enforced by authorizing signage indicating that the speed limit applies when specified beacons are flashing, when “children are present,” or within specific hours indicated on the sign.

Current law authorizes local agencies to establish a lower speed limit in school zones based on an engineering and traffic study in certain circumstances. Staff notes that there are approximately 8,500 to 9,000 school sites in the state. To the extent a local agency has not authorized a speed limit lower than the current 25 mph prima facie limit in a school zone, this bill would require local agencies to replace existing 25 mph speed limit signs by January 1, 2029 to reflect the lower prima facie speed limit. Total local agency costs are unknown, but likely in the high millions of dollars in the aggregate. These costs are likely to be reimbursable from the state General Fund, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates, to the extent a local agency files a reimbursement claim. In addition, Caltrans indicates that there are 585 school sites that are located along the state highway system, and one-time costs to replace signs within the state highway rights-of-way would be at least in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars, and potentially more if supporting sign posts require replacement or if flashing beacons are also installed.

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