
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 560
Author: Addis (D), et al.
Amended: 8/29/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 7-0, 7/9/25
AYES: Pérez, Ochoa Bogh, Cabaldon, Choi, Cortese, Gonzalez, Laird

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 6-1, 8/29/25
AYES: Caballero, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab
NOES: Dahle

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Special education: resource specialists: special classes

SOURCE: California Teachers Association
CFT - A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals

DIGEST: This bill requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), on or before July 1, 2027, to recommend a maximum adult-to-pupil staffing ratio for special classes serving students with disabilities ages 3 to 22, and requires local educational agencies (LEAs) to take all reasonable steps to equitably distribute the workload associated with initial special education assessments among all resource specialists, unless otherwise collectively bargained.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which ensures that students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment. (20 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 1400 et seq.)

- 2) Authorizes school districts to place students in special classes only when the nature or severity of the student's disability precludes satisfactory education in a regular class with supplementary aids and services. (Education Code (EC) § 56364.2)
- 3) Requires caseloads for Resource Support Program (RSP) teachers to be limited to 28 students, and prohibits RSP teachers from enrolling a student for a majority of the school day without individualized education program (IEP) team approval. (EC § 56362)

This bill:

- 1) Requires LEAs to take all reasonable steps to distribute the workload associated with initial special education assessments equally among all resource specialists employed by the LEA, unless otherwise collectively bargained.
- 2) Requires the SPI, on or before July 1, 2027, to recommend and post on the California Department of Education (CDE) website a maximum adult-to-pupil staffing ratio for special classes (special day classes) serving students with disabilities ages 3 to 22.
- 3) Requires the SPI, in establishing the recommended ratio, to:
 - a) Consult with a wide range of stakeholders, including education specialists, administrators, paraprofessionals, and parents—with a majority of consultees being current special class teachers—and ensure representation from geographically and demographically diverse communities.
 - b) Consult with researchers and disability rights advocates with expertise in inclusive practices.
 - c) Consider factors such as student support needs (mild to moderate vs. extensive), age ranges, educational settings (preschool, elementary, secondary, nonpublic schools), LEA practices, national models, workforce and facility constraints, conditions in small and rural LEAs, and the impact of staffing on inclusive education under the federal IDEA.
- 4) Requires the SPI to submit a report with their recommendations to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature and the State Board of Education by April 1, 2027.

Comments

- 1) *Need for this bill.* According to the author, “Assembly Bill 560, the Supporting California’s Special Educators Act, ensures that students with diverse learning needs receive the individualized attention they deserve, as well as fostering an environment that supports our educators. Smaller class sizes will help enhance the quality of education for students, improve educational outcomes, and reduce the strain on our educational workforce. AB 560 will have a profoundly positive impact on both special educators and the students they serve.”
- 2) *Assessment workload is not accounted for in caseload limits.* Resource specialists play a critical role in determining whether a student qualifies for special education services through initial assessments. These evaluations can be time-intensive and high-stakes, yet current law only limits instructional caseloads and does not address this additional workload. In practice, some districts offer supplemental compensation or rely on informal distribution practices, but implementation varies widely. By requiring LEAs to take reasonable steps to equitably distribute assessment duties, this bill seeks to create a more manageable and consistent workload across specialists, reducing burnout and ensuring timely assessments for students.
- 3) *Special class staffing varies widely, with no statewide guidance.* Unlike general education classrooms, which have statutory caps or recommended ratios in the early grades, there is no statewide class size or adult-to-student ratio guidance for special day classes serving students with disabilities. Staffing ratios in these settings are typically determined locally and vary significantly by district, disability type, and setting. Some Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA) set internal targets, but these may not reflect research-based recommendations or be responsive to broader inclusion goals. The absence of state guidance can result in overcrowded classes, inconsistent supports, and a misalignment between program design and student needs.
- 4) *A data-informed recommendation, not a mandate.* Rather than establishing mandatory caps, this bill directs the SPI to develop a recommended staffing ratio for special classes, informed by consultation with educators, administrators, parents, and researchers. The required considerations—including the needs of students with varying disabilities, different age groups, and diverse instructional settings—reflect an understanding that “one size fits all” guidance may not be appropriate in special education. A recommendation, rather than a mandate, provides a research-informed benchmark for local decision-making without limiting LEA flexibility.

- 5) *Supporting inclusion through appropriate staffing.* The bill appropriately links special class staffing ratios to federal requirements for education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Research shows that successful inclusion depends not only on placing students with disabilities in general education classrooms, but on equipping educators with adequate adult support. Understaffed special classes can lead to inappropriate placements, as LEAs may lack the resources to support students in inclusive settings. By considering inclusive practices and educator support as part of the ratio-setting process, this bill underscores the interdependence of staffing adequacy and meaningful access to the general curriculum.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: Yes

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- The California Department of Education (CDE) estimates General Fund costs of \$546,000 for 3.0 positions to investigate the anticipated increase in complaints to the department, and additional one-time General Fund costs of \$350,000 to convene the workgroup to make recommendations. The estimate for the workgroup is based on previous efforts undertaken by CDE, including the workgroup established by the 2020 Budget Act to examine and propose alternate pathways to a high school diploma and the IEP Workgroup, also established by the 2020 Budget Act, which was tasked with designing a statewide IEP template.
- To the extent that the workgroup recommends staffing ratios for special classes that result in smaller class sizes for LEAs, this bill could result in additional, unknown Proposition 98 General Fund costs pressures for those LEAs to implement smaller class sizes. The associated costs would vary by LEA as they would depend on several factors, such as their existing staffing levels and availability of classrooms and infrastructure needs. It is unclear if these activities would constitute a reimbursable mandate.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/29/25)

California Teachers Association (Co-Source)

CFT - A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals (Co-Source)

California School Employees Association

California State Council of Service Employees International Union

California State PTA

Easterseals Northern California

Pangea's Civic Youth Activists
San Francisco Unified School District

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/29/25)

Small School Districts Association

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

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