
THIRD READING

Bill No: SB 1128
Author: Stern (D)
Amended: 4/14/26
Vote: 21

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 7-0, 4/22/26

AYES: Pérez, Ochoa Bogh, Cabaldon, Choi, Cortese, Gonzalez, Reyes

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 5/14/26

AYES: Cervantes, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

SUBJECT: Pupils: technology-based materials: school-issued electronic devices

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill (1) prohibits local educational agencies (LEA) from requiring a pupil in kindergarten to take home a school issued electronic device; (2) requires the Department of Education (CDE) to develop and post on its internet website, model policies for the age-appropriate use of school-issued electronic devices in schools, as specified.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Authorizes the governing board of a school district, a county board of education, or the governing body of a charter school to adopt a policy to limit or prohibit pupil use of social media while pupils are at a school site or while the pupils are under the supervision and control of an employee or employees of that school district, county office of education (COE), or charter school. Specifies that the above authorization does not authorize the monitoring, collection, or otherwise accessing of information related to a pupil's online activities. (Education Code (EC) § 48901.8)

- 2) Requires the governing body of a school district, COE, or charter school to develop and adopt a policy by July 1, 2026, to limit or prohibit the use of smartphones by students while they are at school or under the supervision of a school employee, and to update the policy every five years. (EC § 48901.7(a))
- 3) Prohibits an LEA's adopted smartphone use policy from restricting a student's use of a smartphone under any of the following circumstances:
 - a) In the case of an emergency, or in response to a perceived threat of danger, unless explicitly addressed in a comprehensive school safety plan;
 - b) When a teacher or administrator grants permission to a student to possess or use a smartphone, subject to any reasonable limitation imposed by that teacher or administrator;
 - c) When a licensed physician and surgeon determines that the possession or use of a smartphone is necessary for the health or well-being of the student; or
 - d) When the possession or use of a smartphone is required in a student's individualized education program (IEP). (EC § 48901.7(b))
- 4) Defines "distance learning" to mean instruction in which the pupil and instructor are in different locations and interact through the use of computer and communications technology. States that distance learning may include video or audio instruction in which the primary mode of communication between pupil and instructor is instructional television, video, telecourses, or any other instruction that relies on computer or communications technology. (EC § 51865)
- 5) States the following state education goals for which distance learning should be utilized:
 - a) Equity in education, which requires that every pupil in California's public schools, and every adult in the state, have equal access to educational opportunities, regardless of where he or she lives or how small a school the pupil attends.
 - b) Quality in education, which would be enhanced through the creative application of telecommunications, as pupils are given the opportunity to interact with pupils from other cultures and geographical locations, and with outstanding educators from other educational institutions.

- c) Diversity among educational institutions, which has been recognized in California through the support of various types of public educational institutions as well as of independent and private colleges and universities.
- d) Efficiency and accountability, which receive increasing emphasis as state budget resources become increasingly restricted. (EC § 51865)

This bill:

- 1) Prohibits an LEA from requiring a pupil in kindergarten to take home a school-issued electronic device.
- 2) Requires the CDE, on or before July 1, 2027, to develop and post on its internet website, model policies for the age-appropriate use of school issued electronic devices in schools.
- 3) Requires the CDE, in the development of the model policies, to consider all of the following:
 - a) Developmentally appropriate screen exposure time.
 - b) Balancing pupils' use of school-issued electronic devices with direct teacher interaction.
 - c) The impact of school-issued electronic devices on early literacy, arithmetic, and fine motor skill development.
- 4) Defines the following terms:
 - a) "Electronic device" means a desktop or laptop computer, handheld device, tablet, smartpone, or other electronic product or device that has a platform on which to download, install, or run any software program, code, script, or other content.
 - b) "Kindergarten" includes transitional kindergarten (TK), defined as the first year of a two-year kindergarten program that uses a modified kindergarten curriculum that is age and developmentally appropriate.
 - c) "Local educational agency" means a school district, COE, or charter school.

Comments

- 1) *Need for this bill.* According to the author, "Innovation is our state's greatest strength, but it should never come at the cost of our children's fundamental

development. Today, we see five-year-olds coming home with school-issued laptops before they have even mastered the grip of a pencil. Senate Bill 1128 is a common-sense step to bring balance back to our homes and classrooms.

“When we mandate that TK and kindergarten students must take a device home, we risk replacing direct teacher interaction with a digital interface. We are seeing a real threat to the development of early literacy, arithmetic, and those essential fine motor skills that every child needs to succeed. Senate Bill 1128 provides a common-sense solution. Commencing with the 2027–28 school year, local educational agencies shall not require these young pupils to take home electronic devices. This returns the power to parents, ensuring that a child’s first “homework” isn’t navigating a screen.

“Furthermore, this bill ensures our schools lead with facts. By July 1, 2027, the Department of Education will develop model policies focused on developmentally appropriate screen exposure. These guidelines will focus on direct teacher interaction and the impact of screens on early literacy, arithmetic, and fine motor skills. We are grounding our educational technology in facts, not just trends.

“We are not anti-technology; we are pro-childhood. SB 1128 helps to ensure that parents are in the drivers seat when it comes to their kids technology use, helping to ensure that the Golden State remains a place where our children’s futures are defined by their potential, not their screen time.”

- 2) *Distance learning and one-to-one computing programs.* Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, several schools began adopting and implementing “one-to-one” computing programs, providing each student with one laptop, tablet, or mobile device, with variations across school districts and grade levels as to whether the student was able to bring the device home. When the pandemic necessitated transitions to distance learning, the prevalence of one-to-one computing programs rose significantly with the goal of ensuring that students were able to continue learning through virtual classrooms.

To this effect, in 2020 and 2021, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and the CDE issued several press releases announcing partnerships with companies like ASUS, CDW, Dell, HP, Lenovo, Samsung, Staples, Office Depot, Apple, and T-Mobile to help schools provide discounted devices to their students, as well as initiatives aimed at closing the digital device.

In addition to these efforts, LEAs received \$5.3 billion in one-time Learning Loss Mitigation Funding (LLMF) in the 2020-2021 State Budget to support pupil academic achievement and mitigate learning loss related to COVID-19 school closures. Among the approved uses for this funding was the purchase of devices or connectivity tools for the provision of in-classroom and distance learning.

While not universal, these efforts proved effective. According to data reported by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), in Spring 2020, as COVID-19 related distance learning shift began, 67.5% of California households with students reported reliable device access. This percentage rose significantly to 81.6% and 81.8% in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, respectively, as LEAs used available funds and partnerships to invest in student technology.

It does not appear that CDE collects uniform metrics on how many schools currently employ a school-issued device program, or on how device issuance varies across grade levels.

- 3) *Recent efforts to reduce classroom screen time.* LEAs have the authority to determine whether and how to utilize technology, such as laptops, tablets, and computers, as instructional tools. Further, teachers retain the discretion to design their instruction and curriculum in ways that utilize technology to support student learning. As students advance through grade levels, the use of technology in and outside of the classroom may increase as school issued devices are used to complete assessments and homework assignments.

In response to parent concerns about the increasing ubiquity of school device use and the impacts of prolonged screen time on students, some California school districts have introduced and adopted resolutions aimed at creating stronger guidance on technology use in classrooms.

In March, the Beverly Hills Unified School District (BHUSD) passed a resolution titled, “Using Technology with Intention: Establishing Guidelines for Student Screen Time,” stating BHUSD’s intention to adopt a Screen Time Policy that, among other things, would:

- Provide expected and maximum daily and weekly screen time limits for students delineated by grade level;

- Reduce the use of digital devices—including one-to-one tablets—for early education through second grade, except for district-mandated formative assessments;
- Operationalize how parents and guardians can annually consent/opt-in for each Google application on a to-be-created Consent to Use Digital Tools form rather than submit a blanket opt-in for all applications listed, particularly for students in grades TK-8;
- Provide recommendations and strategies to safely prepare students to utilize and/or create digital tools; and
- Develop and share schoolwide guidance outlining best practices for reducing and monitoring student screen time—including systematic coordination among teachers—to prevent excessive cumulative screentime.

The resolution also requires BHUSD to conduct a review of all its current systems and processes, both internal and external, to determine how to regularly track and report students' time spent on devices districtwide, disaggregated by grade level, and specific online applications.

A substantively similar resolution was recently passed by the Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles—the governing board of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- This bill could result in one-time Proposition 98 General Fund costs potentially in the hundreds of thousands of dollars for LEAs to review and revise their policies on the use of school-issued electronic devices. This estimate assumes that each LEA would require several hours of personnel time to develop the policies.
- The CDE may incur one-time General Fund costs in the low to mid hundreds of thousands of dollars to develop model policies on the age-appropriate use of electronic devices in schools.

SUPPORT: (Verified 5/14/26)

TechNet

OPPOSITION: (Verified 5/14/26)

None received

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5/16/26 10:33:46

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