

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 1128
Author: Stern (D), et al.
Amended: 8/13/26
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

SENATE FLOOR: 33-0, 5/22/26

AYES: Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

NO VOTE RECORDED: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Becker, Hurtado, Niello, Padilla, Stern

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: Passed, 8/27/26

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

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill prohibits local educational agencies (LEAs) from requiring a pupil in kindergarten to take home a school issued electronic device. Requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to curate and maintain on its website resources and guidance for the age-appropriate use of school-issued electronic devices in schools.

Assembly Amendments 1) add specified exemptions to the prohibition on requiring TK and kindergarten students to take home electronic devices; 2) encourage LEAs to review and update their policies related to school issued devices and students

completing homework on electronic devices, as specified; and 3) recasts the requirement for CDE to develop and post model policies for age-appropriate use of school issued electronic devices to instead require the CDE to curate and maintain on its website guidance on age-appropriate screen time and electronic device use 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 schoolsite 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. 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, including transitional kindergarten (TK), to take home a school-issued electronic device, except under the following conditions:
 - a) If required by a pupil's IEP;
 - b) In the case of a local or state emergency that interferes with the ability of a pupil to attend class in-person, as determined by the LEA;
 - c) If required as part of an independent study program, pursuant to Article 5.5 of Chapter 5 of Part 28.
- 2) Encourages LEAs to review and update their policies related to pupils' screentime, including in the classroom and when completing homework, as well as providing pupils with school-issued devices. Encourages LEAs to solicit input from specified stakeholders, and consider the following:
 - a) Appropriate policies for each grade span;

- b) The one-time and ongoing financial cost of providing pupils with take-home devices;
 - c) The ability of the LEA to provide ongoing technological support of school-issued devices;
 - d) The ability of the LEA to monitor and control pupil activity on school-issued devices when they are used at home;
 - e) The educational benefits and risks of students completing at-home work on electronic devices rather than other methods;
 - f) The equity implications of providing or not providing all students with personal take-home devices; and
 - g) The safety risks to pupils completing homework on digital devices, school-issued or otherwise, including data privacy concerns, exposure to harmful content, and developmental impacts.
- 3) Requires the CDE to maintain on its website guidance on age-appropriate screen time and electronic device use in schools, how to transition take-home school-issued devices into dedicated classroom-based devices, and how to participate in e-waste recycling or buy-back programs. Requires the guidance to consider the following:
- a) Developmentally appropriate screen exposure time at each grade level;
 - b) Balancing pupils' use of electronic devices with direct teacher interaction; and
 - c) The impact of electronic devices and screen time on early literacy, arithmetic, and fine motor skill development.

Comments

Need for the 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.”

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 gap.

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, 67.5% of California households with students reported reliable device access. By Spring

2021, this percentage had risen to 81.8%, 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.

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. Notable examples include Beverly Hills Unified School District and Los Angeles Unified School District.

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

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- Potential one-time Proposition 98 General Fund costs possibly in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars, for LEAs, cumulatively statewide, to update policies to prohibit required issuance of an electronic device to kindergarten pupils except under specified circumstances.
- Ongoing annual costs to the CDE in the tens of thousands of dollars to support the development and publication of the required model policies on the age-appropriate use of school-issued electronic devices.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/27/26)

Distraction-Free Schools California
Healthier-Tech
Los Angeles County Office of Education
Los Angeles Unified School District
Mothers Against Media Addiction
Mothers Against Media Addiction - West LA
TechNet

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/27/26)

None received

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