
SENATE COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

Senator Bob Archuleta, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	SB 1188	Hearing Date:	4/20/26
Author:	Archuleta		
Version:	4/9/26 Amended		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Diego Nelson		

Subject: Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps: home instruction, independent study, and private schools

DESCRIPTION

Summary:

This bill updates California's Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) law by expanding it beyond school districts to also cover county offices of education and charter schools, requires a local educational agency (LEA) that offers a JROTC program to allow participation by eligible homeschooled pupils who reside within the agency's attendance area, and directs the California Department of Education (CDE) to post information on existing JROTC programs and related eligibility requirements online and provide annual implementation guidance.

Existing law:

- 1) Authorizes the governing board of a school district maintaining a secondary school to establish courses in military science and tactics that comply with federal law governing Reserve Officers' Training Corps units in educational institutions (Ed. Code § 51750).
- 2) Prohibits a student from being required to enroll in military science and tactics courses (Ed. Code § 51750).
- 3) Federal law requires a public secondary school maintaining a JROTC unit to permit participation by homeschooled students residing in the area served by the school if those students meet all eligibility requirements other than enrollment at the host school (10 U.S.C. § 2031(f)(1)).

This bill:

- 1) Revises state law to authorize a local educational agency, defined to include a school district, county office of education, or charter school, to establish JROTC courses at its school sites in compliance with federal law.
- 2) Prohibits a pupil enrolled in a school that offers JROTC courses from being required to enroll in military science and tactics.
- 3) Requires a local educational agency that offers a JROTC program to permit participation by homeschooled pupils who reside within the agency's attendance area and meets all otherwise applicable eligibility requirements.
- 4) Requires the California Department of Education to post information on existing JROTC programs, including eligibility and application requirements for homeschooled pupils, on

its internet website and to distribute annual implementation guidance to local educational agencies.

BACKGROUND

JROTC is a federally authorized program offered at participating secondary schools to promote citizenship, leadership, service, personal responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment among students. The broader ROTC framework dates back to the National Defense Act of 1916, and the modern JROTC program was significantly expanded by the ROTC Vitalization Act of 1964. Federal law now directs the Secretary of Defense to establish and support JROTC units nationwide at eligible secondary educational institutions. Although JROTC is affiliated with the armed forces and is often taught by retired service members, it is structured as an educational program rather than a military enlistment requirement. Federal regulations have long described JROTC and the related National Defense Cadet Corps as programs intended to develop informed and responsible citizens and to foster favorable attitudes toward public and military service.

Current federal law requires each public secondary educational institution that maintains a JROTC unit to permit membership for homeschooled students who reside in the area served by the institution and who would otherwise qualify for the program but for not being enrolled in that school. This ensures that homeschooled students are not excluded solely because they are educated outside the host institution. However, federal law addresses homeschooled students only in relation to the institution operating the JROTC unit and does not create a broader framework addressing how access should work across the full range of public education entities.

Under current California law, enacted in 1976, the governing board of a school district maintaining a secondary school may establish courses in military science and tactics that comply with federal law, and no student enrolled in such a school may be required to take those courses. That California statute predates several later developments in both federal law and the structure of California's K-12 system, including the growth of charter schools, independent study, and other instructional settings that fall outside the traditional school-district model.

COMMENT

According to the author: "Many military families opt to homeschool their children; nearly twice the rate of civilian families. They face unique challenges associated with military life which create instability and at times effect families' abilities to adapt to new surroundings and routines. State policies that streamline access to educational resources such as extracurricular activities and sports better support students and their families. Prioritizing clarifying participation requirements for Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps, JROTC, can contribute to greater stability for military families, which supports retention efforts. Allowing homeschooled students to participate in JROTC programs maintains military cultural connections and leadership development opportunities. California can facilitate access by clarifying in state policy that pursuant to federal law, homeschool children are required access to JROTC programs. SB 1188 ensures local education agencies provide clear and accessible guidance to schools and information for parents. This bill supports military family values while providing structured programs that complement homeschool education."

This bill makes several changes to California's existing law governing access to JROTC programs. Under current law, the statute is framed primarily around school districts. This measure broadens that framework, so it applies more generally to local educational agencies,

which the bill defines to include school districts, charter schools, and county offices of education. In doing so, the bill makes clear that any of these entities may establish and operate JROTC courses at their school sites.

SB 1188 addresses student participation by expanding access for homeschooled pupils. Specifically, if a local educational agency offers a JROTC program, it would be required to allow homeschooled students to participate, if they reside within the agency's attendance area and meets all other applicable eligibility requirements. This change would clarify that homeschooled students are not excluded simply because they are not enrolled in a traditional public-school setting.

The bill also assigns new responsibilities to the CDE to support implementation and improve public awareness of available programs. The department would be required to maintain current information on its website about JROTC programs operating throughout the state, including eligibility standards and application procedures. The bill would also require the department to provide annual guidance to local educational agencies on implementation, which could help promote more consistent administration of the law.

POSITIONS

Sponsor: Department of Defense – Military State Policy Source

Support: California Family Council

Oppose: None

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