

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Darshana R. Patel, Chair
SB 1188 (Archuleta) – As Amended April 9, 2026

[Note: This bill is double referred to the Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee and will be heard by that Committee as it relates to issues under its jurisdiction.]

SENATE VOTE: 33-0

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

SUMMARY: Requires a local educational agency (LEA) offering a Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) program to permit membership in the JROTC program for homeschool pupils. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires an LEA offering a JROTC program within any of its schools to, consistent with federal law, permit membership in the JROTC program for a homeschooled pupil who resides within the attendance area of the LEA and meets all applicable eligibility requirements for participation in the JROTC program other than enrollment in the school offering the JROTC program.
- 2) Defines "homeschooled pupil" to have the same meaning as the term "homeschooled student" used in Section 2031(f)(1) of Title 10 of the United States Code.
- 3) Requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to make information about existing JROTC programs, including eligibility and application requirements for pupils, available on its website and distribute implementation guidance to LEAs on an annual basis.
- 4) Authorizes the governing board or body of an LEA, rather than just a school district, maintaining a secondary school to establish its schoolsites courses in military science and tactics. complying with the laws of the United States made and provided with reference to JROTC units in educational institutions.
- 5) Defines "LEA" to mean a school district, charter school, or county office of education (COE).

EXISTING LAW:

Federal law:

- 1) Requires the Secretary of each military department to establish and maintain a JROTC, organized into units, at public and private secondary educational institutions, including Job Corps centers. (10 U.S. Code §2031)
- 2) States it is the purpose of the JROTC to instill in students in United States secondary educational institutions the values of citizenship, service to the United States (including an

introduction to service opportunities in military, national, and public service), and personal responsibility and a sense of accomplishment. (10 U.S. Code §2031)

- 3) Requires each public secondary educational institution that maintains a JROTC unit to permit membership in the unit to homeschooled students residing in the area served by the institution who are qualified for membership in the unit (but for lack of enrollment in the institution). (10 U.S. Code §2031(f)(1))
- 4) Provides federal support for JRTOC programs, including assignment or certification of instructions, provision of curriculum materials and equipment, and partial reimbursement of instruction salaries, with remaining costs typically borne by the LEA. (various sections of federal code and regulation)

State law:

- 5) Authorizes the governing board of any school district maintaining a secondary school to establish in the school courses in military science and tactics complying with the laws of the United States made and provided with reference to Reserve Officers Training Corps units in educational institutions. (Education Code (EC) 51750)
- 6) Prohibits any student from being required to enroll in any course in military science and tactics, as specified. (EC 51750)
- 7) Prohibits a public or private elementary or secondary school, childcare center, day nursery, nursery school, family daycare home, or development center to admit a student to that institution unless they have been fully immunized against specified diseases. (Health and Safety Code (HSC) 120335)
- 8) Requires the governing board of each school district or institution to require documentary proof of each entrant's immunization status. Requires the governing board to prohibit from further attendance any student who failed to obtain the required immunization within legally specific time limits, unless the student is legally exempted. (HSC 120375)
- 9) Exempts a student who is in a home-based private school or a student who is enrolled in an independent study program, as specified, and does not receive classroom-based instruction, from immunization requirements. (HSC 120335)

FISCAL EFFECT:

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- The bill's requirements could result in one-time General Fund costs in the tens of thousands to low hundreds of thousands of dollars. Specifically, the CDE would be responsible for making information about JROTC programs on its website, including eligibility and application requirements, and distributing implementation guidance to LEAs on an annual basis. Presumably, the CDE would also need to identify which students qualify as "homeschooled" for purposes of participating in the program.
- The bill's proposal allowing homeschooled students to participate in JROTC programs is not expected to result in an expansion in students eligible to participate since the

provision merely codifies an existing federal requirement. Additionally, the number of JROTC units is typically subject to the availability of federal funds.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. 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.”

Key provisions of the bill. This bill would require a school district, COE, or charter school offering a JROTC program to permit membership in the JROTC unit for homeschool pupils, in alignment with federal law. Further, the bill requires the CDE to make information about existing JROTC programs, including eligibility and application requirements for pupils, available on its website and distribute implementation guidance to LEAs on an annual basis. The bill also expands the existing authorization for school districts to offer JROTC to also include an authorization for COEs and charter schools to offer the program.

Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC). The JROTC is a voluntary high school program of instruction administered by the Department of Defense (DOD) through the military departments. A key purpose of JROTC, as stated in federal law, is “to instill in students in United States secondary educational institutions the values of citizenship, service to the United States (including an introduction to service opportunities in military, national, and public service), and personal responsibility and a sense of accomplishment.” JROTC was established as an Army program by the National Defense Act of 1916 and in 1964 expanded to the Navy and Air Force. Congress authorized Coast Guard JROTC units at two schools: the Maritime and Science Technology Academy in Miami, Florida, in 1989, and Camden County High School, Camden, North Carolina, in 2005. In federal fiscal year 2021, there were about 3,500 JROTC units operating in every state and in DOD schools overseas. ***The Committee may wish to consider*** that federal law already authorizes the participation of homeschooled students in public school JROTC programs.

JROTC courses are taught over a three- or four-year period with academic coursework on topics such as leadership and ethics, civics, history, and health and wellness. Instruction in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields was added in federal fiscal year 2020. Units also offer extracurricular activities such as color guard/drill team, marksmanship, and field trips to military installations.

According to a 2022 Congressional Research Service Primer, *Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps*, participation in JROTC does not incur any military obligation, and military recruitment is

not a stated objective in statute or policy. Nevertheless, the military services intend to provide favorable exposure to military careers, and the program has the potential to increase the propensity for military service. Some researchers have found a positive correlation between JROTC and enlistment, while others have found that the impact of JROTC participation on military enlistment is negligible when accounting for self-selection into JROTC. JROTC participants who pursue enlistment or appointment as an officer may receive some benefits at the time of entry into service.

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 as a program intended to develop informed and responsible citizens and to foster favorable attitudes toward public and military service.

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.

JORTC structure requirements and funding opportunities create program limitations. Unlike traditional academic courses, JROTC programs operate within fixed structures tied to federal requirements, staffing models, and funding levels. Each JROTC unit typically requires a minimum of two instructors, often retired military personnel certified by the applicable service, and must maintain minimum student participation levels to remain viable. At the national level, the number of JROTC units is constrained by federal appropriations, and military services generally operate at or near capacity, maintaining waiting lists of schools seeking to establish new units. As a result, program expansion is limited, and participation within existing units is bounded by available instructor staffing, facilities, and program design. These structures suggest that JROTC units are akin to capacity-limited instructional programs or specialized pathways, rather than open-enrollment offerings.

Federal law establishes a narrow access requirement limited to homeschooled students.

Federal law requires that public secondary schools operating JROTC units permit participation by homeschooled students residing in the area served by the school, provided those students meet all other eligibility requirements, but for lack of enrollment at the school. This requirement is narrowly framed and reflects a specific policy choice to ensure access for students who are not enrolled in the host school due to the nature of their educational setting. According to data from the Household Pulse Survey, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, active-duty military families homeschool their children at double the rate (12%) of non-military families (nearly 6%). Federal law does not extend this requirement to students enrolled in private schools, charter schools, or other public schools.

Homeschool students participating in JROTC courses are required to be vaccinated. Current state law requires children to be vaccinated against 10 diseases before attending school and childcare settings. Evidence of immunization is collected for all children when they first enter a school or childcare setting, and additionally when they enter transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, and seventh grade. A child participating only in home-based private school or

independent study and does not receive classroom-based education may remain unvaccinated. Homeschool students participating in JROTC courses are participating in a classroom-based education setting and, therefore, are required to be vaccinated in alignment with current state law. *The Committee may wish to consider* that certain vaccines are required for all service members, while others may only be required for those deploying to particular locations, as established by the DOD Immunization Program (DOD Instruction 6205.02).

Fewer youth joining the U.S. Armed Forces. Annual recruitment targets are not being met for most branches of the armed forces. In 2002, the Army fell about 25%, or 15,000 soldiers short of its annual recruitment goal of 60,000. A Joint Advertising Market Research & Studies (JAMRS) conducted by the DOD states that youth perception of the military is declining due to a shrinking military footprint, years of prolonged overseas conflict, globalization, dwindling family ties, lack of knowledge, and a perception that service members are not “people like them.” According to the U.S. Army Recruiting Command, in 2019, over 50% of youth admitted to knowing little to nothing about the military.

Arguments in support. The U.S. DOD writes, “Under existing federal law (10 U.S.C. §2031), schools hosting JROTC programs are already required to permit eligible students receiving home instruction to participate. However, a significant awareness and implementation gap at the local level prevents many students from accessing this right. This is particularly challenging for military families, who homeschool at nearly twice the national rate to provide educational stability amidst frequent relocations. These families often arrive in a new district unaware of their eligibility and face inconsistent or non-existent local policies for enrollment.

SB 1188 rectifies this issue by codifying federal requirements into state law and critically, establishing clear mechanisms for implementation. By requiring the California Department of Education to develop and distribute guidance annually and post this information on its website, SB 1188 ensures that school districts and families are aware of their rights and obligations.”

Related legislation. AB 1605 (Gallagher), Chapter 142, Statutes of 2023, defines, further, “Uniformed Services” and “military services” to include “Space Force” and prohibits a school district, COE, and charter school offering instruction in any of grades 9 to 12 that provides on-campus access to employers from excluding access to the military services.

AB 343 (Saldaña), Chapter 237, Statutes of 2009, enacts the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, which addresses issues experienced by children of military families who transfer schools.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Family Council
Military Services in California
U.S. Department of Defense

Opposition

None on file

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