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# SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Carol Liu, Chair  
2015 - 2016 Regular

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**Bill No:** SB 527  
**Author:** Liu  
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**Urgency:** No  
**Consultant:** Lenin Del Castillo  
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**Fiscal:** Yes

**Subject:** Education finance: Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Fund Grant Program

## SUMMARY

This bill establishes various requirements for the grant program authorized by the Safe Neighborhoods and School Act (approved by voters as Proposition 47 in November 2014) for truancy and dropout prevention. This program is to be administered by the California Department of Education (CDE).

## BACKGROUND

The Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act was approved by voters as Proposition 47 in November 2014 and makes significant changes to the state's criminal justice system. It reduces the penalties for certain non-violent, non-serious drug and property crimes, and requires that the resulting state savings be spent on 1) mental health and substance use services; 2) truancy and dropout prevention; and 3) victim services. Further, Proposition 47 requires that 25 percent of the Safe Neighborhoods School Fund be allocated to the CDE to administer a grant program to reduce truancy, high school dropout, and student victimization rates.

## ANALYSIS

This bill:

1. Adds various legislative findings and declarations, including:
  - A. The Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Fund has been established by Proposition 47, approved by the voters at the November 4, 2014, statewide general election. The funds transferred to the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Fund are to be used exclusively for the purposes of the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act.
  - B. Twenty-five percent of the funds are disbursed to the CDE to administer a grand program to public agencies aimed at improving outcomes for public school pupils in kindergarten and grades 1 to 12, inclusive, by reducing truancy and supporting pupils who are at risk of dropping out of school or are victims of crime.
  - C. Studies estimate that between 3.3 million and 10 million children in the United States witness violence in their own homes each year.

- D. Children who have experienced early, chronic trauma, such as family or community violence, can develop emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and relationship difficulties that can adversely affect their ability to learn and function well in school.
  - E. Exposure to trauma is associated with a higher risk for dropping out of school, and in turn, dropping out of school increases the risk of being imprisoned.
2. Establishes in statute the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Fund Grant Program under the administration of the California Department of Education (CDE) and the Safe Neighborhoods and School Fund (SNSF), pursuant to the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Act, approved as Proposition 47 by voters on November 4, 2014.
3. Requires the CDE to comply with the following requirements in order to improve outcomes for public school pupils by reducing truancy and supporting pupils who are at risk of dropping out of school or are victims of crime:
- A. All local educational agencies (LEAs) in the state shall be eligible to apply and specifies that an LEA is a school district, county office of education, or charter school.
  - B. The program shall reward LEAs that have developed a comprehensive plan and implementation strategy utilizing research based approaches to increase attendance rates, reduce chronic absenteeism, remedy school push-out and dropout rates, and reduce school removals of all types and referrals to law enforcement agencies. Requires the plan to create a strong and supportive school culture that identifies and addresses the needs of pupils, as specified, and coordinate pupil support programs with community-based providers or public agencies, or both, at school sites and across the LEA.
  - C. An LEA receiving a grant shall show at a minimum that it has designed, and is committed to implementing, all of the following:
    - (1) A three-year plan, developed through its local control and accountability plan or otherwise, to accomplish all of the following:
      - (a) Significantly reduce class and school removals, absences, violent incidents on campus, and referrals to law enforcement agencies.
      - (b) Implement one or more research-based, whole school approaches, as specified, to reengage and reconnect pupils who have been pushed out.
      - (c) Identify and address disparities in areas, as specified, and with respect to subgroups addressed by the Local Control

Funding Formula, including English learners, foster youth, low-income pupils, pupils with disabilities, and ethnic subgroups.

- (2) A robust data system to collect and disaggregate data, as specified, and that includes a survey that measures the pupils' sense of safety and pupil connectedness to monitor progress in these areas.
  - (3) A system for sharing this de-identified data on the aggregate level and progress with respect to meeting the grant goals with the school community on at least an annual basis and engaging and partnering with all key stakeholders, as specified.
  - (4) An evaluation system that involves key stakeholders, as specified, to assess effectiveness related to addressing the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of pupils and developing strong, supportive, and positive school climates.
4. Requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to issue a request for proposal no later than October to all local educational agencies (LEAs) in the state for each fiscal year that there are funds available from the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools Fund. Provides that LEAs serving high percentages of unduplicated pupils with high needs, as specified, shall be prioritized to receive these funds. Requires that grants be awarded no later than April 15 of each fiscal year.
5. Requires that the funds provided to LEAs be utilized only to further implementation of the three-year plan and the other minimum commitments, as specified, through each of the following:
  - A. Professional development, training, and coaching for teachers, school administrators, pupils, parents, counselors, administrative staff, and members of school district governing boards.
  - B. Investments in social services, health, mental health, restorative justice, and youth development staff, agencies, and providers.
  - C. Entering into agreements with institutions and community-based nonprofit organizations that have a track record of improving pupil outcomes and providing cultural competency and anti-bias training, supporting parent leadership and engagement, and providing nonpunitive pupil and family support programs.
6. Prohibits the funds from being used for either of the following purposes:
  - A. To supplant existing funding to meet the requirements of the school climate, engagement, or other state priority areas in the local control and accountability plans.
  - B. For law enforcement agencies or entities, public or private.

7. Requires an LEA that has received funding to submit annual outcomes-based data for evaluation, as specified, to show progress in reducing the rate of class and school removals, referrals to law enforcement agencies, and dropout and truancy rates of targeted pupils. Requires the CDE to consider the data submitted when making determinations for eligibility for future funding.
8. Requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to consult with a stakeholder group, as specified, in making determinations regarding the awarding of grants, in assessing whether grant recipients are meeting the minimum requirements, as specified, and starting in year two of the grant cycle, in assisting with developing or amending the requests for proposals.

## STAFF COMMENTS

1. ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author's office, "positive school climate is directly related to academic achievement. New Local Control Funding Formula state priorities include a focus on improving school climate measure in part by suspension and expulsion rates. Studies have shown that one suspension greatly increases the likelihood that a student will drop out and become involved in the juvenile justice system. Removing students from school through the disciplinary exclusion also increase the risk that they will become victims of violent crime. Exposure to trauma is associated with a higher risk for school dropout and in turn, dropping out of school increases the risk of being imprisoned. Students of color, foster youth, and students with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by school removals. In addition, behavioral problems among school-age youth are associated with high rates of depression, experiencing a traumatic or violent event, and other significant home-life stress. 65 percent of students with an "emotional disturbance" drop out of school. This dropout rate is the highest of all other disability categories.

School-age youth who are depressed, have experienced a traumatic or violent event, and other significant home-life stresses are more likely to be suspended or expelled. The American Academy of Pediatrics has found that suspension can increase stress and may predispose students to antisocial behavior and even suicidal ideation. Psychologists have similarly found that disciplinary exclusion policies can increase "student share, alienation, rejection, and breaking of healthy adult bonds," thereby exacerbating negative outcomes for young people."

This bill is intended to provide specificity in statute regarding the awarding of the Safe Neighborhoods and Schools grant funds. Specifically, it would target the funding of grants towards local educational agencies (LEAs) who have developed three plans in their local control accountability plans (LCAPs) to develop research-based, school wide approaches to addressing social, emotional, and behavioral issues.

2. ***Report on Proposition 47.*** The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) released a report on the Implementation of Proposition 47 in February 2015. In the report, the LAO indicates that while the state savings that will result from Proposition 47 is subject to significant uncertainty, annual savings will likely range from \$100 million to \$200 million beginning in 2016-17. The LAO also notes that although

Proposition 47 states that these savings shall be deposited into a new state fund, the new Safe Neighborhood and Schools Fund (SNSF), and be allocated for grant programs administered by specific departments, the Legislature has the opportunity to provide direction on how the funds are spent. Specifically, the Legislature could weigh in on 1) how the individual departments should distribute the funds and 2) how much state oversight to provide to ensure that the funds are being spent effectively.

Proposition 47 requires that 25 percent of the SNSF be allocated to the California Department of Education (CDE) to administer a grant program to reduce truancy, high school dropout, and student victimization rates. The Legislative Analyst Office LAO estimates that the amount available for this grant program will likely total between \$25 million and \$50 million annually beginning in 2016-17. The LAO recommended in its report that the Legislature allocate the grants for truancy, high school dropout prevention, and student victimization rates to school districts that have notably high concentrations of English learners, low-income, or foster youth, as these students are at higher risk for these concerning outcomes.

3. ***Truancy in schools.*** California's compulsory education law requires all students between the ages of six and 18 to attend school full-time. Parents and legal guardians are responsible for ensuring that children attend school. A student who is absent from school without a valid excuse for more than 30 minutes on three days in a school year is considered a truant. The law requires that parents or legal guardians are notified when their children has been classified as a truant and reminded of their obligation to compel the attendance of pupils at school. Upon a pupil's third truancy in a school year and following a district's effort to hold a conference with the parent or legal guardian and the pupil, a pupil is classified as a habitual truant and may be referred to a school attendance review board (SARB) or to the local probation officer. Upon a fourth truancy, students and/or their parents or legal guardians may be fined. In 2012-13, the California Department of Education (CDE) reported a truancy rate of 29.28% with 1.9 million students considered truants.

According to the CDE, students who are chronically absent in lower grades are much less likely to be proficient readers and have higher levels of suspensions. Chronic absence in the sixth grade is the most predictive indicator that a student will not graduate from high school.

In 2013, the Attorney General's (AG's) office released a report, "In School and On Track" on the truancy of elementary school kids. The AG argues that truancy at the elementary level has negative impacts on the students, who are more likely to drop out of high school, public safety when students become more likely to become involved with gangs, substance abuse, and incarceration. There are also negative impacts on school districts who attendance funding and on the economy, due to lost economic productivity and revenues.

## **SUPPORT**

Advancement Project  
Alliance for Boys and Men of Color

American Civil Liberties Union of California  
Black Parallel School Board  
Brotherhood Crusade  
California Alliance of African American Educators  
California Federation of Teachers  
Californians for Justice  
Californians United for a Responsible Budget  
Centro CHA, Inc.  
Children Now  
Children's Defense Fund  
Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth  
Community Asset Development Redefining Education  
Dizzy Feet Foundation  
Dolores Huerta Foundation  
Equal Justice Society  
GSA Network of California  
Labor/Community Strategy Center  
Legal Services for Children  
Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy  
Los Angeles Community Action Network  
Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust  
National Center for Youth Law  
Our Family Coalition  
PICO California  
Public Counsel  
Social Justice Learning Institute  
T.R.U.S.T. South LA  
Violence Prevention Coalition of Greater Los Angeles  
Visual and Performing Arts Education  
Youth Justice Coalition  
Youth Leadership Institute

**OPPOSITION**

None received.

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