

AB 10

Return Students to In-Person Learning

Assemblymember
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19TH DISTRICT



SUMMARY

Teachers and local school officials have worked tirelessly to support students during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those struggling with distance learning – including accompanying social-emotional challenges and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Recognizing the burdens of distance learning on both children and parents, many private schools and some public schools prioritized returning to in-person instruction, at least on a part-time basis. AB 10 would ensure that public schools safely provide in-person instruction for students to the greatest extent allowable under public health guidelines during the pandemic.

BACKGROUND

In March 2020, nearly all public schools in California closed their campuses in response to the budding COVID-19 pandemic.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has issued guidance for when schools can reopen, based on a four-tiered color-coded system that tracks counties by the number and percentage of COVID-19 cases recorded each day. No public or private schools in the Purple tier (indicating that cases and risk is “widespread”) may reopen for in-person instruction, unless it is a K-6 school that received a waiver or is providing instruction to a small “cohort” group of children. Schools in the Red tier may reopen for in-person once the county has remained in this tier for 14 days. Schools in the Orange and Yellow tiers may open immediately, although individual counties may also have stricter rules that prevent reopening.

The Budget Act of 2020 included Distance Learning standards, but also legislative intent that public education was to be conducted “in-person to the greatest extent possible.” However, the final decision about when and how to conduct in person instruction is up to local school boards, under guidance of their county public health officer.

While many private schools have reopened under current CDPH guidelines, many public schools have not. This disparity has disproportionately affected our most vulnerable low-income students and worsened existing achievement gaps. A recent study published

by the Journal of the American Medical Association found that learning loss experienced by children in 2020 could result in 5.53 million cumulative fewer years of life for elementary school students. In-person instruction not only allows for more robust experiential learning, but also provides critical social-emotional support for students and families.

Across the country, including in the nation’s largest school system (New York City), districts have utilized hybrid instruction models with strict testing protocols to safely bring children and teachers back into the classroom. California must do the same to ensure no student falls further behind.

THIS BILL

AB 10 seeks to return students to classroom-based learning, but is part of a larger legislative working group effort to ensure quality education for all students and ongoing support for teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beginning March 1, 2021, this urgency bill would require schools in the Red, Orange, or Yellow tiers to reopen and implement a plan to do so within two weeks, in accordance with public health parameters, setting a clear threshold when in-person instruction must resume. Local districts would continue to determine what in-person model best fits their student and workforce needs.

Current law that allows Distance Learning for individual students due to COVID-19 vulnerability or self-quarantine would continue, and this bill would expand such individual allowances to eligible certificated employees as well.

Current law requires local districts to adopt a Tiered Reengagement Plan for students chronically absent from distance learning, intended to return the student to in-person learning and identify additional support. This bill would also require a Tiered Reengagement Plan for students deemed to be performing below grade level and specify that these already-mandated plans must be implemented within 30 days.

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