
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Benjamin Allen, Chair

2017 - 2018 Regular

Bill No:	SB 596	Hearing Date:	September 15, 2017
Author:	Stern		
Version:	September 8, 2017		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Lynn Lorber		

Subject: Civics education: Student Empowerment Commission

NOTE: This bill was amended in the Assembly to replace its contents and this is the first time the bill is being heard by this Committee in its current form.

SUMMARY

This bill establishes the Student Empowerment Commission to be administered by the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), the Secretary of State and one or more non-profit organizations, for the purpose of organizing and conducting annual regional conferences and a statewide conference of students.

BACKGROUND

The California Association of Student Councils (CASC) was formed in 1946 by the California Department of Education and the Association of California School Administrators. CASC is a student-run organization focusing on youth leadership. CASC serves student councils and their advisors. Through peer-to-peer leadership training and conferences, CASC provides students and advisors the opportunity to develop leadership skills, network with other students and advisors, and become empowered. The Student Advisory Board on Legislation in Education (SABLE), a component of CASC, was established to propose legislation to the Senate and Assembly Education Committees. SABLE provides an annual presentation to these committees.

ANALYSIS

This bill establishes the Student Empowerment Commission to be administered by the SPI, the Secretary of State and one or more non-profit organizations, for the purpose of organizing and conducting annual regional conferences and a statewide conference of students. Specifically, this bill:

Administration

- 1) Requires the SPI, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to solicit proposals and select one or more non-profit organizations to assist in administering the program. This bill requires preference to be given to non-profit organizations

working collaboratively and in partnership with other non-profit organizations that present multi-organizational proposals.

- 2) Requires a non-profit organization to satisfy both of the following criteria to be eligible for selection:
 - a) Be registered as a non-profit public benefit corporation (501(c)(3)).
 - b) Present documentation of sufficient private resources to fund the costs required to administer the program.
- 3) Requires the duties of the administrators to include but not be limited to organizing and conducting annual regional conferences and a statewide conference.

Participation and selection of delegates

- 4) Authorizes a public or private school, including a charter school, in order to participate in the program, to conduct an election of the student governing body to determine whether the school will participate in the program. This bill requires, if a majority of the student governing body votes to participate, an election of the student body to be held each school year to nominate one regional delegate.
- 5) Provides that participation in the program by a school is subject to approval by the school administration.
- 6) Requires a student to meet both of the following requirements to qualify as a candidate for regional delegate:
 - a) Be enrolled in the school in grades 9, 10, or 11.
 - b) Agree to faithfully and diligently represent all students at the school.
- 7) Provides that the term of a regional delegate is to begin upon nomination and terminate two years later or upon the student's graduation, whichever occurs first.

Election of delegates

- 8) Requires the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), to annually recommend the date or dates on which elections to opt into the program and to nominate regional delegates are to be held. This bill requires the Secretary of State to take into consideration the dates of regularly scheduled student body elections as well as programs to encourage student civic engagement, including but not limited to high school voter education weeks.

Regional conferences

- 9) Requires the Secretary of State to divide the state's counties, or segments thereof, into 12 geographic regions, designed to be relatively equal in population.
- 10) Requires the administrators, in consultation with the SPI, to organize and conduct a conference in each of the 12 regions each year, to be attended by

each student nominated by their school in the region in which the school is located.

- 11) Requires regional delegates attending the regional conference to prepare proposals addressing legislative solutions to public policy issue identified by regional delegates at their own schools. This bill encourages regional delegates to present their proposals to local governmental agencies and to take action to implement their proposals in their communities.
- 12) Requires each regional conference to be attended by students from each participating school in the region that elected a student as a regional delegate.
- 13) Requires regional conferences to be conducted in the spring and be scheduled to give participating schools and regional delegates sufficient notice of important dates and responsibilities. This bill requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), in consultation with the Secretary of State, to annually determine the date of the regional conferences.

Student Empowerment Commission

- 14) This bill requires the regional delegates to do both of the following at the conclusion of each regional conference:
 - a) Adopt by a majority vote of the regional delegates attending the regional conference an official proposal or proposals for the region to be identified as the official proposal or proposals of the region.
 - b) Select from among the regional delegates attending the regional conference a Student Empowerment Commission, consisting of five student commissioners from each of the 12 regions, who are to represent the regions at the statewide conference.

Statewide conference

- 15) Requires the administrators, in consultation with the SPI, to organize and conduct a statewide conference in Sacramento each year, to be attended by the Student Empowerment Commission.
- 16) Requires the statewide conference to be conducted in the fall and be scheduled on a date determined by the SPI in consultation with the administrators.
- 17) Requires, at the conclusion of the statewide conference, recommendations and proposals developed and adopted by the Student Empowerment Commission (in accordance with rules promulgated by the Commission) to be presented to the appropriate committees of the Legislature before the deadline for bills to be introduced in the Legislature. This bill encourages the Legislature to provide the Commission with opportunities to formally present their recommendations and proposals to the appropriate legislative committees.

Miscellaneous

- 18) Requires the administrators to establish procedures for the preparation, discussion, and vetting of issues at the regional and statewide conferences that include peer-to-peer facilitation and consensus-based decision making.
- 19) Provides the following definitions:
 - a) “Program” means the Student Empowerment Commission.
 - b) “Administrators” means one or more non-profit organizations selected by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.
- 20) States the intent of the Legislature to empower and engage students statewide in the democratic process and to provide student insight and feedback on public policy issues to state and local government.
- 21) States findings and declarations related to increasing youth and millennial voter turnout.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, “Civic engagement and voter turnout by individuals between the ages of 18-34 continues to be unacceptably low in California. It is imperative that we develop new programs and policies to civically empower the next generation of citizens so they feel engaged and invested in our democratic process – both locally and statewide. Traditional approaches to address this problem are worthy but not enough. SB 596 will create a mechanism through which California high school students have a direct voice on public policy issues – opportunities to cast meaningful votes before they are eligible to participate in regular elections – with the hope to build a habit of civic engagement.”
- 2) ***Different from Association of Student Councils.*** The California Association of Student Councils (CASC) provides leadership development for students and their advisors through peer training. CASC programs foster self-esteem and civic engagement, and provide an avenue for the expression of student views and empowers young people. The CASC structure includes twelve regions, a state council, an executive director, and a board of directors. This bill establishes a program that differs from CASC as follows:
 - a) Students who participate in CASC are not elected by their peers.
 - b) This bill enables *all* students to have a voice (vote to participate in program and vote for regional representation).
 - c) The Student Advisory Board on Legislation in Education (a component of CASC) is related only to education, not other policy areas.

- d) This program established by this bill closely links the work of the regional conferences with state level policy proposals and establishes a defined process to present the proposals to the Legislature.
 - e) This program established by this bill engages the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and the Secretary of State.
- 3) **California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning.** California Supreme Court Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye and SPI Tom Torlakson formed the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning in 2013 to chart the course for civic learning in California. The Task Force made several recommendations in their August 2014 report, such as to include civic learning in state assessment and accountability systems for students, schools and districts, and improve professional learning experiences for teachers and administrators, and provide access to existing professional learning experiences in civics to help them implement civic learning in schools.

The Power of Democracy Steering Committee, which was formed to guide and support the work of the Task Force and other civic learning initiatives, is under the leadership of the Chief Justice and include the SPI's principal advisor, representatives from all three levels of the California courts, state and local education organizations, and the State Bar and local bar associations. The Power of Democracy Steering Committee will work to see that recommendations of the Task Force are implemented.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/documents/cltffinalreport.pdf>

- 4) **The Six Proven Practices in Civic Learning.** According to the Education Commission of the States and the National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement, considerable research found that six core activities, known as the Six Proven Practices in Civic Learning, directly improve the quality and effectiveness of civic learning in schools. The Six Proven Practices are:
- a) Classroom instruction in government, history, geography, law, democracy and economics, striking a balance between teaching important facts and documents, such as the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and demonstrating their relevance to today's society.
 - b) Discussion of current events and controversial issues, including their relevance to young people's lives.
 - c) Service learning experiences that are directly linked to curriculum and instruction and that give students a chance to apply what they are learning through informed civic action.
 - d) Extracurricular activities that give students opportunities to get involved in their schools, communities and local government and to work together toward common goals.

- 5) **Other civic engagement and education efforts.** California's new History–Social Science Framework, adopted by the State Board of Education in July, 2016, addresses civic engagement throughout the document. The Civic Learning Award for public schools, co-sponsored by the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and California's Chief Justice, is designed to celebrate successful efforts to engage students in civic learning and to identify successful models that can be replicated in other schools. In February 2013, the SPI, Chief Justice, and a committee of civic leaders organized the Civic Learning California Summit: Making Democracy Work to examine successes and barriers to increasing civic literacy in California.
- 6) **Fiscal impact.** According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, this bill would impose the following costs:
- a) To fully implement this bill, the non-profit selected as an administrator will require at least \$2 million in private funds. The California Association of Student Councils (CASC), which was similar to this Commission and was funded by private dollars, also received Proposition 98 dollars between 2008-09 and 2012-13. This bill requires the Commission to be funded entirely by private funds.
 - b) Approximately \$118,000 one-time and \$113,000 ongoing to the Secretary of State to support the duties and operations relating to Commission membership and their operations.
 - c) Approximately \$7,000 on-going to the California Department of Education to consult with the non-profit administrator.
 - d) Unknown costs to public and private schools to participate in the program. While the bill intends for the administrator of the program to absorb some of the costs, the cost-sharing is not specified.
- 7) **Related legislation.** AB 24 (Eggman) establishes a State Seal of Civic Engagement, to be affixed to the diploma of qualifying high school graduates, based on a demonstration of excellence in civics education and participation. AB 24 passed the Legislature and is awaiting action by the Governor.

AB 261 (Thurmond) deletes the authority for a school district governing board to include a student as a non-voting member of the district governing board, and instead provides that a student member of the governing board is to have preferential voting rights. AB 261 passed the Legislature and is awaiting action by the Governor.

SB 468 (Leyva) modifies the existing requirement that school district governing boards provide the student board member with materials presented to the board members to specify that the student members are to receive all open meeting materials at the same time the materials are presented to the board members, and requires governing boards to invite the student member to staff briefings provided to board members or provide a separate briefing within the same timeframe as the briefing of board members. SB 468 passed the Legislature and

is awaiting action by the Governor.

SUPPORT

California Association of Student Councils
California Center for Civic Participation
California Latino Leadership Institute
Generation Citizen
National Youth Rights Association
Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

OPPOSITION

None received

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