

Newsom signs K-12, broadband bills

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Governor Gavin Newsom recently signed a suite of bills to increase K-12 student supports, expand broadband access to help bridge the digital divide and expand educational opportunities for students to help boost academic achievement and attainment – critical parts of the state’s historic \$123.9 billion K-12 school education package.

“What we’re doing here in California is unprecedented in nature and scale, but it all comes back to providing California’s students with the best opportunities to learn, achieve and succeed,” said Newsom. “We’re implementing the historic, transformative measures needed to help support our students’ health and wellbeing, bridge the digital divide with improved access to broadband, and expand educational opportunities for future generations.”

“I am thankful and thrilled that there are bills, and now law, that will drive more resources and supports to student mental health and help close the digital divide, both of which are major priorities of mine,” said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond.

“Helping our students rebound from the emotional toll of COVID-19 and develop the social-emotional learning needed to thrive and grow will take a concerted focus on mental health supports at our schools. I thank both Governor Newsom and the Legislature for their work to bring these much needed resources to our campuses,” said State Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond. “I also want to applaud the attention given to connectivity – key to a 21st century education. My hope is that future improvements to broadband will push our educational system to further integrate technology into everyday student learning.”

Newsom signed legislation to significantly improve mental and behavioral health supports in schools, both as students return to in-person instruction after the pandemic and for the long-term benefits for future generations:

AB 309 by Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel (D-Encino) - Requires the California Department of Education (CDE), in consultation with the State Department of Health Care Services, to develop mental health model referral protocols addressing the appropriate and timely referral by school staff of students with mental health concerns, for voluntary use by schools, contingent upon an appropriation for this purpose.

SB 14 by Senator Anthony Portantino (D-La Cañada Flintridge) - Includes “for the benefit of the behavioral health of the pupil” within the “illness” category for excused absences for purposes of school attendance; and requires the CDE to identify an evidence-based and evidence-informed training program for local educational agencies to address youth behavioral health, including staff and pupil training.

SB 224 by Senator Anthony Portantino (D-La Cañada Flintridge) - Requires schools offering one or more courses in health education to pupils in middle school or high school to include mental health instruction in those courses, as specified.

The governor also signed legislation to improve access to broadband across the state, particularly for those in underserved communities, in order to help bridge the digital divide:

AB 14 by Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry (D-Winters) - Extends the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) program to encourage deployment of broadband service to unserved Californians, and revising the surcharge collection methodology for interconnected Voice over Internet Protocol service and the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program

SB 4 by Senator Lena Gonzalez (D-Long Beach) - Extends the operation of the CASF through 2032, increases the annual funding cap for the CASF, and expands projects eligible for CASF grants to include fund broadband deployment at unserved locations used for emergency response.

SB 28 by Senator Anna Caballero (D-Salinas) - Expands the authority of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to collect data to enforce requirements for cable franchises, and authorizes the CPUC to set customer service requirements for cable providers. A signing message can be found [here](#).

Additionally, Newsom signed ethnic studies legislation that will help expand educational opportunities in schools, teach students about the diverse communities that comprise California, and boost academic

engagement and attainment for students as shown by a Stanford University study. The bill also provides a number of safeguards to ensure that courses will be free from bias or bigotry and appropriate for all students.

AB 101 by Assemblymember Jose Medina (D-Riverside) - Requires that local educational agencies and charter schools serving students in grades 9-12 offer at least a one semester course in ethnic studies, commencing with the 2025-26 school year. Also requires students, beginning with the graduating class of 2029-30, to complete a one semester course in ethnic studies that meets specified requirements in order to receive a high school diploma. A signing message can be found [here](#).

”Thank you to Governor Newsom for signing AB 101. The inclusion of ethnic studies in the high school curriculum is long overdue. Students cannot have a full understanding of the history of our state and nation without the inclusion of the contributions and struggles of Native Americans, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans,” said Assemblymember Jose Medina. “I want to acknowledge the countless young people, high school and college students, teachers and professors, who have organized, demonstrated, boycotted classes, and gone on hunger strikes to demand a more equitable and inclusive educational system. The signing of AB 101 today is one step in the long struggle for equal education for all students.”

“At a time when some states are retreating from an accurate discussion of our history, I am proud that California continues to lead in its teaching of ethnic studies,” said Secretary of State Shirley Weber. “This subject not only has academic benefits, but also has the capacity to build character as students learn how people from their own or different backgrounds face challenges, overcome them and make contributes to American society. I want to thank Assemblymember Medina for his persistence in moving this this bill forward and Governor Newsom for his support and for making ethic studies a reality in our schools. This is a great day for California.”