

AMENDED IN SENATE MARCH 28, 2016

SENATE BILL

No. 1457

Introduced by Senator Morrell

(Principal coauthor: Assembly Member Brown)

~~(Coauthor: Senator Beall)~~

~~(Coauthors: Senators Beall, Fuller, Huff, Mendoza, and Vidak)~~

~~(Coauthor: Assembly Member Dahle)~~

~~(Coauthors: Assembly Members Dahle, Jones, and Waldron)~~

February 19, 2016

An act to add Chapter 20 (commencing with Section 53330) to Part 28 of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Education Code, relating to pupil instruction.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 1457, as amended, Morrell. Pupil instruction: high school graduation requirements: credit for released time instruction.

Existing law allows pupils, with the written consent of their parents or guardians, to be excused from school in order to participate in religious exercises or to receive moral and religious instruction, as specified. Under existing law, these absences will not be deemed absences in computing average daily attendance if (1) the governing board of a school district, in its discretion, first adopts a resolution permitting pupils to be absent from school for the exercises or instruction, (2) the governing board adopts regulations governing the attendance of pupils at the exercises or instruction and the reporting thereof, (3) the pupil attends at least the minimum schoolday, and (4) no pupil is excused for more than 4 days per school month.

This bill would authorize the governing board of a school district to adopt a policy to allow a pupil in high school to earn up to 2 elective

credits toward that pupil's high school graduation requirements for the completion of released time instruction, as defined. The bill would require the policy to state that a pupil may receive elective credit for the completion of released time instruction only if specified conditions are met. The bill would require the policy to include secular criteria for determining whether to authorize a pupil to earn credit that are substantially the same criteria used to evaluate a similar nonpublic high school course for the purpose of determining whether to award credit for that course to a pupil transferring from a nonpublic high school to a public high school. The bill would require a decision to award credit for released time instruction to be neutral to, and not involve any test for, religious content or denominational affiliation, and would prohibit school district staff and faculty from encouraging or discouraging participation by pupils in released time instruction. The bill would require that an absence for released time instruction not be deemed an absence in computing average daily attendance.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: no.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 20 (commencing with Section 53330)
2 is added to Part 28 of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Education Code,
3 to read:

4
5 CHAPTER 20. THE PARENTAL CHOICE FOR RELEASED TIME
6 CREDIT ACT

7
8 53330. *The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:*

9 (a) *Private religious education is a legitimate and*
10 *complementary part of the American school system.*

11 (b) *Parents have a recognized constitutional right to provide*
12 *their children with a private religious education.*

13 (c) *The United States Constitution and state law allow local*
14 *school districts to offer religious released time instruction for the*
15 *benefit of public school pupils.*

16 (d) *School districts have local autonomy and are governed by*
17 *locally elected school boards.*

18 (e) *In order to accommodate the independent choices of parents*
19 *and pupils to pursue religious instruction, school districts should*

1 *be unrestricted in their ability to award credit for that instruction*
2 *under conditions that preserve the neutrality and impartiality of*
3 *the public school system.*

4 *(f) Permitting pupils to earn credit for released time instruction*
5 *enables those pupils to remain in public school while also*
6 *accommodating their right to receive private religious instruction.*

7 ~~53330.~~

8 53331. For purposes of this chapter, the following definitions
9 apply:

10 (a) (1) “Released time instruction” means the instruction
11 received by a pupil for the purposes and under the conditions of
12 Section 46014, not including subdivision (d) of Section 46014.

13 (2) For purposes of this chapter, Section 46014 shall be
14 construed to additionally permit a pupil to be excused from school
15 to participate in instruction in nonsectarian morals and systems of
16 belief by a nonsectarian entity.

17 (b) “Sponsoring entity” means the entity that provides released
18 time instruction to a pupil pursuant to this chapter.

19 ~~53331.~~

20 53332. (a) The governing board of a school district may adopt
21 a policy authorizing a pupil in high school to earn up to two
22 elective credits toward that pupil’s high school graduation
23 requirements for the completion of released time instruction.

24 (b) A policy adopted pursuant to subdivision (a) shall state that
25 a pupil in high school may receive elective credits for the
26 completion of released time instruction only if the following
27 conditions are met:

28 (1) The pupil’s parent or guardian makes a written request.

29 (2) The released time instruction is conducted off school district
30 property.

31 (3) No public funds are expended and no public school personnel
32 are involved in providing the instruction.

33 (4) The sponsoring entity maintains attendance records and
34 makes those records available to the school district the pupil
35 attends.

36 (5) Transportation to and from the place of released time
37 instruction, including transportation for pupils with disabilities, is
38 the complete responsibility of the sponsoring entity, parent,
39 guardian, or pupil.

1 (6) The sponsoring entity makes provisions for and assumes
2 liability for the pupil.

3 (7) The pupil assumes responsibility for any missed schoolwork.

4 (8) The pupil does not miss any core curriculum subject courses
5 to attend released time instruction.

6 (c) (1) A policy adopted pursuant to subdivision (a) shall
7 include secular criteria for determining whether to authorize a
8 pupil to earn credit for the completion of released time instruction.
9 The criteria shall be substantially the same criteria used to evaluate
10 a similar nonpublic high school course for the purpose of
11 determining whether to award credit for that course to a pupil
12 transferring from a nonpublic high school to a public high school.

13 (2) The secular criteria may include, but are not limited to, the
14 following:

15 (A) The number of hours of classroom instruction time.

16 (B) A review of the course syllabus that reflects course
17 requirements and materials used.

18 (C) The methods of assessment used in the course.

19 (D) The qualifications of the course instructor, which shall be
20 similar to the qualifications of other teachers in the school district.

21 (3) There shall be no criteria requiring that released time
22 instruction be completed only at a nonpublic school.

23 ~~53332.~~

24 53333. A decision to award credit for released time instruction
25 shall be neutral to, and shall not involve any test for, religious
26 content or denominational affiliation.

27 ~~53333.~~

28 53334. School district staff and faculty shall not encourage or
29 discourage participation by pupils in released time instruction.

30 ~~53334.~~

31 53335. An absence for released time instruction pursuant to
32 this chapter shall not be deemed an absence in computing average
33 daily attendance.