
Introduced by Senator Romero

February 27, 2009

An act relating to public education.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 604, as introduced, Romero. Public education: mission.

Existing law establishes the public school system in this state, and, among other things, provides for the establishment of school districts throughout the state and for the provision of instruction at the public elementary and secondary schools that these districts operate and maintain.

This bill would declare the intent of the Legislature to elicit input from pupils, parents, teachers, school administrators, and all members of the public about the core values and mission of public education in California, and to enact legislation that would add a preamble to the Education Code that reflects a collective statement of these values and that mission.

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. (a) The Legislature hereby finds and declares
- 2 all of the following:
- 3 (1) California law requires the state to provide universal access
- 4 to a free public education and guarantees each child a fundamental
- 5 right to equal access to a quality education.
- 6 (2) Public education, which means education that is publicly
- 7 financed, tuition-free, accountable to public authorities, and

1 accessible to all pupils, has evolved to include not only traditional
2 schools, but also charter and magnet schools, vocational and career
3 technical education schools, business partnership academies, and
4 other alternatives designed to meet unique needs and equip pupils
5 with the knowledge and skills necessary for the 21st century global
6 economy.

7 (3) Common to all public schools is that adequacy and equity
8 of funding is a prerequisite to providing equal educational
9 opportunity so that all pupils from every background have the
10 chance to achieve their potential. The perennial battles over
11 disparities in education funding demonstrate, however, the
12 continuing challenge to ensure equality of opportunity in every
13 corner of the state, from large urban centers to sparsely populated
14 rural areas.

15 (4) Public education in America has always been, in the words
16 of Horace Mann, the “great equalizer,” and has played a key role
17 in unifying diverse cultures and helping millions of children of
18 immigrants from all parts of Europe and Asia find their way into
19 the middle class. Public schools have been less successful,
20 however, in helping African American, Latino, and English learner
21 pupils, who face an alarming and unacceptable achievement gap
22 compared to their Caucasian and Asian counterparts.

23 (5) Since the founding of the republic, from Thomas Jefferson
24 through modern-day academics, it has been recognized that
25 engaging the public in debate about the core values and mission
26 of public education is necessary to ensure achievement of that
27 mission, and that this public discussion is important in itself and
28 an essential part of a democratic culture.

29 (6) During a period of reduced resources, and at a time when
30 funding disparities and a pernicious achievement gap keep the
31 promise of public education unfulfilled for many California pupils,
32 including special education pupils, a public dialogue about public
33 education is especially useful to guide difficult decisions on
34 allocation of resources and to ensure a firm commitment to the
35 fundamental right to equal opportunity to a quality education.

36 (b) It is the intent of the Legislature to elicit input from pupils,
37 parents, teachers, school administrators, and all members of the
38 public about the core values and mission of public education in
39 California and to enact legislation that would add a preamble to

- 1 the Education Code that reflects a collective statement of these
- 2 values and that mission.

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