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SB-596 Civics education: Student Empowerment Commission. (2017-2018)

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CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2017–2018 REGULAR SESSION

SENATE BILL

NO. 596

**Introduced by Senator Stern
(Coauthor: Assembly Member Gonzalez Fletcher)**

February 17, 2017

An act to add Article 3.5 (commencing with Section 48960) to Chapter 6 of Part 27 of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Education Code, relating to civics education.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 596, Stern. Civics education: Student Empowerment Commission.

Existing law establishes various educational programs and activities for pupils, including programs and activities relating to civics education.

This bill would establish the Student Empowerment Commission program, under which a public school, including a charter school, and a private school may choose to participate in the program and each year elect a pupil in grade 9, 10, or 11 to participate in regional and statewide conferences and to prepare proposals addressing legislative solutions to public policy issues, as specified. The bill would require the Superintendent of Public Instruction, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to solicit proposals and select one or more qualified nonprofit organizations to assist in the administration of the program. The bill would require the Secretary of State to divide the state into 12 regions and would require the program administrators to conduct

regional conferences and a statewide conference for participating pupils each year and to set forth procedures for the preparation, discussion, and vetting of issues at the conferences.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) The fastest growing voting demographic in California and nationwide is made up of millennials, youths 18 to 34 years of age.

(2) Millennials are consistently and dramatically underrepresented in every election type in California, with the greatest disparities among 18 to 24 year olds.

(3) A person's first vote matters most, as demonstrated by the correlation between young people's early experiences with voting and future rates of voting participation.

(4) Increased youth and millennial voter turnout is a key step to increasing future turnout for California and the nation as a whole.

(5) Without significant action to remove barriers to building the habits of the next generation of citizens, youth voter turnout disparities will persist, resulting in continued stagnancy in overall civic engagement and voter turnout rates.

(6) The California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning analyzed the central role the K-12 public education system has in developing the next generation of citizens and addressed all of the following:

(A) The correlation between income levels and access to high-quality civic learning.

(B) The absence of civic engagement technology from curriculum and instruction.

(C) The overemphasis on memorization over participatory skills and experiential learning about the power of democracy.

(b) The intent of the Legislature in enacting this act is to empower and engage pupils statewide in the democratic process and to provide pupil insight and feedback on public policy issues to state and local government.

SEC. 2. Article 3.5 (commencing with Section 48960) is added to Chapter 6 of Part 27 of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Education Code, to read:

Article 3.5. Student Empowerment Commission

48960. For purposes of this article, the following terms have the following meanings:

(a) "Program" means the Student Empowerment Commission program established pursuant to this article.

(b) "Administrators" means one or more nonprofit organizations selected by the Superintendent pursuant to Section 48961.

48961. (a) The Superintendent, in consultation with the Secretary of State, shall solicit proposals and select one or more nonprofit organizations to assist in administering the program. Preference shall be given to nonprofit organizations working collaboratively and in partnership with other nonprofit organizations that present multiorganizational proposals. A nonprofit organization shall satisfy both of the following criteria to be eligible for selection:

(1) The nonprofit organization shall be registered as a nonprofit public benefit corporation under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code.

(2) The nonprofit organization presents documentation of sufficient private resources to fund the costs required to administer the program.

(b) The duties of the administrators shall include, but are not limited to, organizing and conducting annual regional conferences and a statewide conference.

48962. (a) To participate in the program, a public school, including a charter school, or a private school may conduct an election of the student governing body to determine whether the school will participate in the program. If a majority of the student governing body votes to participate in the program, an election of the student body shall be held each school year to nominate one regional delegate.

(b) To qualify as a candidate for regional delegate, a pupil shall meet both of the following requirements:

(1) The pupil shall be enrolled in the school in grades 9, 10, or 11.

(2) The pupil agrees to faithfully and diligently represent all pupils at the school.

(c) The term of a regional delegate participating in the program shall begin upon nomination and shall terminate two years later or upon the pupil's graduation, whichever occurs first.

(d) The Secretary of State, in consultation with the Superintendent, shall annually recommend the date or dates on which elections to opt into the program and to nominate regional delegates shall be held. In making these recommendations, the Secretary of State shall take into consideration the dates of regularly scheduled student body elections as well as programs to encourage pupil civic engagement, including, but not limited to, high school voter education weeks pursuant to Article 7 (commencing with Section 49040).

(e) Participation in the program by a school is subject to approval by the school administration.

48963. (a) The Secretary of State shall divide the state's counties, or segments thereof, into 12 geographic regions, which shall be designated as region 1 to region 12, inclusive. The regions shall be designed to be relatively equal in population.

(b) The administrators, in consultation with the Superintendent, shall organize and conduct a conference in each of the 12 regions each year, to be attended by each pupil nominated by their school in the region in which the school is located.

(c) Regional conferences shall be conducted in the spring and shall be scheduled to give participating schools and regional delegates sufficient notice of important dates and responsibilities. The Superintendent, in consultation with the Secretary of State, shall annually determine the date of the regional conferences.

(d) Each regional conference shall be attended by pupils from each participating school in the region that elected a pupil as a regional delegate.

(e) Regional delegates attending the regional conference shall prepare proposals addressing legislative solutions to public policy issues identified by regional delegates at their own schools.

(f) The administrators shall set forth procedures for the preparation, discussion, and vetting of issues at the regional conference that include peer-to-peer facilitation and consensus-based decisionmaking.

(g) At the conclusion of each regional conference, the regional delegates shall do both of the following:

(1) 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.

(2) 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 shall represent the regions at the statewide conference.

(h) Regional delegates are encouraged to present their proposals to local governmental agencies and to take action to implement their proposals in their communities.

48964. (a) The administrators, in consultation with the Superintendent, shall organize and conduct a statewide conference in Sacramento each year, to be attended by the Student Empowerment Commission.

(b) The statewide conference shall be conducted in the fall and shall be scheduled on a date determined by the Superintendent in consultation with the administrators.

(c) The administrators shall set forth procedures for the preparation, discussion, and vetting of issues at the statewide conference that include peer-to-peer facilitation and consensus-based decisionmaking.

(d) 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 Student Empowerment Commission, shall be presented to the appropriate committees of the Legislature before the deadline for bills to be introduced in the Legislature. The Legislature is encouraged to provide the Student Empowerment Commission with opportunities to formally present their recommendations and proposals to the appropriate legislative committees.