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AB-1503 Pupil attendance: excused absences: religious retreats. (2023-2024)

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Assembly Bill No. 1503

CHAPTER 846

An act to amend Section 48205 of the Education Code, relating to pupil attendance.

[Approved by Governor October 13, 2023. Filed with Secretary of State October 13, 2023.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1503, Lee. Pupil attendance: excused absences: religious retreats.

Existing law, notwithstanding the requirement that each person between 6 and 18 years of age who is not otherwise exempted is subject to compulsory full-time education, requires a pupil to be excused from school for specified types of absences, including, among others, for certain justifiable personal reasons. Existing law includes attendance at a religious retreat among these justifiable personal reasons and prohibits attendance at religious retreats from exceeding 4 hours per semester for purposes of this provision.

This bill, for purposes of the above-described provisions, would instead prohibit attendance at religious retreats from exceeding one schoolday per semester. To the extent that this bill would impose additional duties on local educational entities, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

This bill would incorporate additional changes to Section 48205 of the Education Code proposed by SB 350 to be operative only if this bill and SB 350 are enacted and this bill is enacted last.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement for those costs shall be made pursuant to the statutory provisions noted above.

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

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

SECTION 1. Section 48205 of the Education Code is amended to read:

48205. (a) Notwithstanding Section 48200, a pupil shall be excused from school when the absence is:

- (1) Due to the pupil's illness, including an absence for the benefit of the pupil's mental or behavioral health.
- (2) Due to quarantine under the direction of a county or city health officer.

(3) For the purpose of having medical, dental, optometrical, or chiropractic services rendered.

(4) For the purpose of attending the funeral services of a member of the pupil's immediate family, so long as the absence is not more than one day if the service is conducted in California and not more than three days if the service is conducted outside California.

(5) For the purpose of jury duty in the manner provided for by law.

(6) Due to the illness or medical appointment during school hours of a child of whom the pupil is the custodial parent, including absences to care for a sick child, for which the school shall not require a note from a doctor.

(7) For justifiable personal reasons, including, but not limited to, an appearance in court, attendance at a funeral service, observance of a holiday or ceremony of the pupil's religion, attendance at a religious retreat, attendance at an employment conference, or attendance at an educational conference on the legislative or judicial process offered by a nonprofit organization, when the pupil's absence is requested in writing by the parent or guardian and approved by the principal or a designated representative pursuant to uniform standards established by the governing board of the school district.

(8) For the purpose of serving as a member of a precinct board for an election pursuant to Section 12302 of the Elections Code.

(9) For the purpose of spending time with a member of the pupil's immediate family who is an active duty member of the uniformed services, as defined in Section 49701, and has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or has immediately returned from, deployment to a combat zone or combat support position. Absences granted pursuant to this paragraph shall be granted for a period of time to be determined at the discretion of the superintendent of the school district.

(10) For the purpose of attending the pupil's naturalization ceremony to become a United States citizen.

(11) For the purpose of participating in a cultural ceremony or event.

(12) (A) For the purpose of a middle school or high school pupil engaging in a civic or political event, as provided in subparagraph (B), provided that the pupil notifies the school ahead of the absence.

(B) (i) A middle school or high school pupil who is absent pursuant to subparagraph (A) is required to be excused for only one schoolday-long absence per school year.

(ii) A middle school or high school pupil who is absent pursuant to subparagraph (A) may be permitted additional excused absences in the discretion of a school administrator, as described in subdivision (c) of Section 48260.

(13) Authorized at the discretion of a school administrator, as described in subdivision (c) of Section 48260.

(b) A pupil absent from school under this section shall be allowed to complete all assignments and tests missed during the absence that can be reasonably provided and, upon satisfactory completion within a reasonable period of time, shall be given full credit therefor. The teacher of the class from which a pupil is absent shall determine which tests and assignments shall be reasonably equivalent to, but not necessarily identical to, the tests and assignments that the pupil missed during the absence.

(c) For purposes of this section, attendance at religious retreats shall not exceed one schoolday per semester.

(d) Absences pursuant to this section are deemed to be absences in computing average daily attendance and shall not generate state apportionment payments.

(e) For purposes of this section, the following definitions apply:

(1) A "civic or political event" includes, but is not limited to, voting, poll working, strikes, public commenting, candidate speeches, political or civic forums, and town halls.

(2) "Cultural" means relating to the habits, practices, beliefs, and traditions of a certain group of people.

(3) "Immediate family" means the parent or guardian, brother or sister, grandparent, or any other relative living in the household of the pupil.

SEC. 1.5. Section 48205 of the Education Code is amended to read:

48205. (a) Notwithstanding Section 48200, a pupil shall be excused from school when the absence is:

(1) Due to the pupil's illness, including an absence for the benefit of the pupil's mental or behavioral health.

(2) Due to quarantine under the direction of a county or city health officer.

(3) For the purpose of having medical, dental, optometrical, or chiropractic services rendered.

(4) For the purpose of attending the funeral services or grieving the death of either a member of the pupil's immediate family, or of a person that is determined by the pupil's parent or guardian to be in such close association with the pupil as to be considered the pupil's immediate family, so long as the absence is not more than five days per incident.

(5) For the purpose of jury duty in the manner provided for by law.

(6) Due to the illness or medical appointment during school hours of a child of whom the pupil is the custodial parent, including absences to care for a sick child, for which the school shall not require a note from a doctor.

(7) For justifiable personal reasons, including, but not limited to, an attendance or appearance in court, attendance at a funeral service, observance of a holiday or ceremony of the pupil's religion, attendance at a religious retreat, attendance at an employment conference, or attendance at an educational conference on the legislative or judicial process offered by a nonprofit organization, when the pupil's absence is requested in writing by the parent or guardian and approved by the principal or a designated representative pursuant to uniform standards established by the governing board of the school district.

(8) For the purpose of serving as a member of a precinct board for an election pursuant to Section 12302 of the Elections Code.

(9) For the purpose of spending time with a member of the pupil's immediate family who is an active duty member of the uniformed services, as defined in Section 49701, and has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or has immediately returned from, deployment to a combat zone or combat support position. Absences granted pursuant to this paragraph shall be granted for a period of time to be determined at the discretion of the superintendent of the school district.

(10) For the purpose of attending the pupil's naturalization ceremony to become a United States citizen.

(11) For the purpose of participating in a cultural ceremony or event.

(12) (A) For the purpose of a middle school or high school pupil engaging in a civic or political event, as provided in subparagraph (B), provided that the pupil notifies the school ahead of the absence.

(B) (i) A middle school or high school pupil who is absent pursuant to subparagraph (A) is required to be excused for only one schoolday-long absence per school year.

(ii) A middle school or high school pupil who is absent pursuant to subparagraph (A) may be permitted additional excused absences in the discretion of a school administrator, as described in subdivision (c) of Section 48260.

(13) (A) For any of the purposes described in clauses (i) to (iii), inclusive, if an immediate family member of the pupil, or a person that is determined by the pupil's parent or guardian to be in such close association with the pupil as to be considered the pupil's immediate family, has died, so long as the absence is not more than three days per incident.

(i) To access services from a victim services organization or agency.

(ii) To access grief support services.

(iii) To participate in safety planning or to take other actions to increase the safety of the pupil or an immediate family member of the pupil, or a person that is determined by the pupil's parent or guardian to be in such close association with the pupil as to be considered the pupil's immediate family, including, but not limited to, temporary or permanent relocation.

(B) Any absences beyond three days for the reasons described in subparagraph (A) shall be subject to the discretion of the school administrator, or their designee, pursuant to Section 48260.

(14) Authorized at the discretion of a school administrator, as described in subdivision (c) of Section 48260.

(b) A pupil absent from school under this section shall be allowed to complete all assignments and tests missed during the absence that can be reasonably provided and, upon satisfactory completion within a reasonable period of time, shall be given full credit therefor. The teacher of the class from which a pupil is absent shall determine which tests and assignments shall be reasonably equivalent to, but not necessarily identical to, the tests and assignments that the pupil missed during the absence.

(c) For purposes of this section, attendance at religious retreats shall not exceed one schoolday per semester.

(d) Absences pursuant to this section are deemed to be absences in computing average daily attendance and shall not generate state apportionment payments.

(e) For purposes of this section, the following definitions apply:

(1) A "civic or political event" includes, but is not limited to, voting, poll working, strikes, public commenting, candidate speeches, political or civic forums, and town halls.

(2) "Cultural" means relating to the practices, habits, beliefs, and traditions of a certain group of people.

(3) "Immediate family" means the parent or guardian, brother or sister, grandparent, or any other relative living in the household of the pupil.

(4) "Victim services organization or agency" has the same meaning as defined in paragraph (7) of subdivision (g) of Section 230.1 of the Labor Code.

SEC. 2. Section 1.5 of this bill incorporates amendments to Section 48205 of the Education Code proposed by both this bill and Senate Bill 350. That section of this bill shall only become operative if (1) both bills are enacted and become effective on or before January 1, 2024, (2) each bill amends Section 48205 of the Education Code, and (3) this bill is enacted after Senate Bill 350, in which case Section 1 of this bill shall not become operative.

SEC. 3. If the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made pursuant to Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code.