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AB-821 Pupil instruction: high school graduation requirements: career technical education. (2025-2026)

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Assembly Bill No. 821

CHAPTER 622

An act to amend and repeal Section 51225.3 of the Education Code, relating to pupil instruction.

[Approved by Governor October 11, 2025. Filed with Secretary of State October 11, 2025.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 821, Gipson. Pupil instruction: high school graduation requirements: career technical education.

Existing law requires a pupil to complete designated coursework while in grades 9 to 12, inclusive, in order to receive a diploma of graduation from high school. The coursework requirements include, among others, the completion of one course in visual or performing arts, foreign language, or career technical education. Existing law eliminates the authorization for career technical education to count toward that graduation requirement on July 1, 2027, or upon the occurrence of a specified event relating to career technical education requirements of the University of California and the California State University, whichever occurs earlier, as specified.

This bill would indefinitely extend the authorization for career technical education to count toward that graduation requirement. To the extent this bill would impose additional duties on local educational agencies, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program. The bill also would make conforming changes.

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 51225.3 of the Education Code, as amended by Section 45 of Chapter 8 of the Statutes of 2025, is amended to read:

51225.3. (a) A pupil shall complete all of the following while in grades 9 to 12, inclusive, in order to receive a diploma of graduation from high school:

(1) At least the following numbers of courses in the subjects specified, each course having a duration of one year, unless otherwise specified:

(A) Three courses in English.

(B) Two courses in mathematics. If the governing board of a school district requires more than two courses in mathematics for graduation, the governing board of the school district may award a pupil up to one mathematics course credit pursuant to Section 51225.35.

(C) Two courses in science, including biological and physical sciences.

(D) Three courses in social studies, including United States history and geography; world history, culture, and geography; a one-semester course in American government and civics; and a one-semester course in economics.

(E) One course in visual or performing arts, world language, or career technical education.

(i) For purposes of satisfying the requirement specified in this subparagraph, a course in American Sign Language shall be deemed a course in world language.

(ii) For purposes of this subparagraph, "a course in career technical education" means a course in a district-operated career technical education program that is aligned to the career technical model curriculum standards and framework adopted by the state board, including courses through a regional occupational center or program operated by a county superintendent of schools or pursuant to a joint powers agreement.

(iii) This subparagraph does not require a school or school district that currently does not offer career technical education courses to start new career technical education programs for purposes of this section.

(iv) If a school district or county office of education elects to allow a career technical education course to satisfy the requirement imposed by this subparagraph, the governing board of the school district or county office of education, before offering that alternative to pupils, shall notify parents, teachers, pupils, and the public at a regularly scheduled meeting of the governing board of all of the following:

(I) The intent to offer career technical education courses to fulfill the graduation requirement specified in this subparagraph.

(II) The impact that offering career technical education courses, pursuant to this subparagraph, will have on the availability of courses that meet the eligibility requirements for admission to the California State University and the University of California, and whether the career technical education courses to be offered pursuant to this subparagraph are approved to satisfy those eligibility requirements. If a school district elects to allow a career technical education course to satisfy the requirement imposed by this subparagraph, the school district shall comply with subdivision (l) of Section 48980.

(III) The distinction, if any, between the high school graduation requirements of the school district or county office of education, and the eligibility requirements for admission to the California State University and the University of California.

(F) Two courses in physical education, unless the pupil has been exempted pursuant to this code.

(G) (i) Commencing with pupils graduating in the 2029–30 school year, including for pupils enrolled in a charter school, a one-semester course in ethnic studies. A local educational agency, including a charter school, may require a full-year course in ethnic studies at its discretion. Commencing with the 2025–26 school year, a local educational agency, including a charter school, with pupils in grades 9 to 12, inclusive, shall offer at least a one-semester course in ethnic studies.

(ii) Subject to the course offerings of a local educational agency, including a charter school, a pupil may fulfill the requirement of clause (i) through the completion of any of the following types of courses:

(I) A course based on the model curriculum developed pursuant to Section 51226.7.

(II) An existing ethnic studies course.

(III) An ethnic studies course taught as part of a course that has been approved as meeting the A–G requirements of the University of California and the California State University.

(IV) A locally developed ethnic studies course approved by the governing board of the school district or the governing body of the charter school. The proposed course shall first be presented at a public meeting of the governing board of the school district or the governing body of the charter school, and shall not be approved until a subsequent public meeting of the governing board or governing body at which the public has had the opportunity to express its views on the proposed course.

(iii) A course that does not use ethnic studies content as the primary content through which the subject is taught shall not be used to satisfy the requirement of clause (i).

(iv) A pupil completing a course described in clause (ii) shall also accrue credit for coursework in the subject that the course is offered, including, if applicable, credit toward satisfying a course required for a diploma of graduation from high school pursuant to this section.

(v) Curriculum, instruction, and instructional materials for a course described in clause (ii) shall meet all of the following requirements:

(I) Be appropriate for use with pupils of all races, religions, nationalities, genders, sexual orientations, and diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, pupils with disabilities, and English learners.

(II) Not reflect or promote, directly or indirectly, any bias, bigotry, or discrimination against any person or group of persons on the basis of any category protected by Section 220.

(III) Not teach or promote religious doctrine.

(vi) It is the intent of the Legislature that local educational agencies, including charter schools, consider that, pursuant to Section 51226.7, the Instructional Quality Commission undertook a lengthy, thorough, deliberative, and inclusive process before submitting a model curriculum in ethnic studies to the state board. To the extent that local educational agencies, including charter schools, choose to locally develop an ethnic studies program for approval by their governing board or governing body, it is the intent of the Legislature that local educational agencies not use the portions of the draft model curriculum that were not adopted by the Instructional Quality Commission due to concerns related to bias, bigotry, and discrimination.

(vii) The amendments made to this section by Section 1 of Chapter 661 of the Statutes of 2021 shall not be construed to alter any other requirement of this section for pupils enrolled in a charter school.

(H) (i) Commencing with pupils graduating in the 2030–31 school year, including for pupils enrolled in a charter school, a separate, stand-alone one-semester course in personal finance, that shall not be combined with any other course.

(ii) Commencing with pupils graduating in the 2030–31 school year, a local educational agency may exempt a pupil who completes a separate, stand-alone one-semester course in personal finance, that is not combined with any other course, from the requirement to complete a one-semester course in economics pursuant to subparagraph (D).

(iii) (I) A local educational agency may elect to eliminate one or more locally required courses established pursuant to paragraph (2) in order to accommodate the requirement that pupils, commencing with pupils graduating in the 2030–31 school year, complete a separate, stand-alone one-semester course in personal finance.

(II) This clause does not constitute a change in, but is declaratory of, existing law.

(iv) Commencing with the 2027–28 school year, a local educational agency, including a charter school, with pupils in grades 9 to 12, inclusive, shall offer in all of its high schools at least a separate, stand-alone one-semester course in personal finance, that is not combined with any other course.

(v) To satisfy the requirement of this subparagraph, a separate, stand-alone one-semester course in personal finance shall include information for pupils in grades 9 to 12, inclusive, on all of, and only, the topics listed in paragraphs (1) to (13), inclusive, of subdivision (a) of Section 51284.5.

(2) (A) Other coursework requirements adopted by the governing board of the school district.

(B) The governing board of a school district may, at its discretion, adopt a policy to exempt pupils from any coursework requirements adopted pursuant to subparagraph (A). It is the intent of the Legislature that the policy include a consultation with the pupil and the educational rights holder for the pupil regarding any impact of not fulfilling locally required coursework on the pupil's ability to gain admission to an institution of higher education.

(C) This paragraph does not affect a pupil's rights pursuant to Section 51225.1 or 51225.31.

(b) The governing board, with the active involvement of parents, administrators, teachers, and pupils, shall adopt alternative means for pupils to complete the prescribed course of study that may include practical demonstration of skills and competencies, supervised work experience or other outside school experience, career technical education classes offered in high schools, courses offered by regional occupational centers or programs, interdisciplinary study, independent study, and credit earned at a postsecondary educational institution. Requirements for graduation and specified alternative modes for completing the prescribed course of study shall be made available to pupils, parents, and the public.

(c) On or before July 1, 2017, the department shall submit a comprehensive report to the appropriate policy committees of the Legislature on the addition of career technical education courses to satisfy the requirement specified in subparagraph (E) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (a), including, but not limited to, the following information:

(1) A comparison of the pupil enrollment in career technical education courses, world language courses, and visual and performing arts courses for the 2005–06 to 2011–12 school years, inclusive, to the pupil enrollment in career technical education courses, world language courses, and visual and performing arts courses for the 2012–13 to 2016–17 school years, inclusive.

(2) The reasons, reported by school districts, that pupils give for choosing to enroll in a career technical education course to satisfy the requirement specified in subparagraph (E) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (a).

(3) The type and number of career technical education courses that were conducted for the 2005–06 to 2011–12 school years, inclusive, compared to the type and number of career technical education courses that were conducted for the 2012–13 to 2016–17 school years, inclusive.

(4) The number of career technical education courses that satisfied the subject matter requirements for admission to the University of California or the California State University.

(5) The extent to which the career technical education courses chosen by pupils are aligned with the California Career Technical Education Model Curriculum Standards, and prepare pupils for employment, advanced training, and postsecondary education.

(6) The number of career technical education courses that also satisfy the visual and performing arts requirement, and the number of career technical education courses that also satisfy the world language requirement.

(7) Annual pupil dropout and graduation rates for the 2011–12 to 2014–15 school years, inclusive.

(d) For purposes of completing the report described in subdivision (c), the Superintendent may use existing state resources and federal funds. If state or federal funds are not available or sufficient, the Superintendent may apply for and accept grants, and receive donations and other financial support from public or private sources for purposes of this section.

(e) For purposes of completing the report described in subdivision (c), the Superintendent may accept support, including, but not limited to, financial and technical support, from high school reform advocates, teachers, chamber organizations, industry representatives, research centers, parents, and pupils.

(f) The amendments made to this section by Section 1 of Chapter 661 of the Statutes of 2021 shall become operative only upon an appropriation of funds by the Legislature for purposes of these amendments in the annual Budget Act or another statute.

SEC. 2. Section 51225.3 of the Education Code, as amended by Section 46 of Chapter 8 of the Statutes of 2025, is repealed.

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.