

Date of Hearing: March 22, 2017

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Patrick O'Donnell, Chair
AB 716 (O'Donnell) – As Introduced February 15, 2017

SUBJECT: Magnet schools

SUMMARY: Provides funding for magnet school startup grants, subject to funds being appropriated for this purpose in the annual Budget Act or other legislation. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to allocate magnet school startup grants in an amount not to exceed \$757,000, subject to funding being provided for this purpose in the annual Budget Act or other legislation.
- 2) Requires priority for grants to be given for the establishment of magnet schools in communities with high populations of pupils eligible for free or reduced-price means.
- 3) Authorizes the SPI to use prior year meal eligibility data if current year data are not available at the time priority for grants is determined.
- 4) Authorizes school districts to apply for a grant pursuant to a process determined by the SPI.
- 5) Provides that grants may be awarded for one-time costs associated with the startup of a new magnet school, including, but not limited to, all of the following:
 - a) Supplies, furnishings, equipment, and instructional materials;
 - b) Professional development, coaching, and support services for teachers and magnet school staff;
 - c) Curriculum and policy development and acquisition; and
 - d) Facility and schoolsite preparation or modifications necessary to implement the program in compliance with applicable laws.
- 6) Specifies that grant funds shall supplement, not supplant, existing services, and shall not be used to supplant federal, state, local, or nonfederal funds or to pay for existing levels of service funded from any other source; or for fundraising, civil defense, legal claims against the state or federal government, or contingencies.
- 7) Requires the SPI to apportion funding to applicants that meet both of the following conditions:
 - a) The magnet school and grant application have been approved by the governing board of the school district; and
 - b) The school district submits a proposed budget of how it intends to expand grant funding pursuant to the requirements of this section.

- 8) Requires grant funds to be disbursed to an applicant within 60 days of approval based on evidence of anticipated or incurred costs provided by the applicant.
- 9) Specifies that funding apportioned for this purpose is subject to the annual audits required by Section 41020.
- 10) Defines “magnet school” to mean a school that is operated by a school district and that has a special curricular focus or employs an alternative mode of instruction, or both.

EXISTING LAW: Appropriated \$20 million (Proposition 98) in the current fiscal year to make one-time grants for charter school startup costs.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Purpose of the bill. According to the author's office, the purpose of AB 716 is to help expand school choice by providing start-up funding for magnet schools. Magnet schools are schools that are operated by school districts that have a specific curricular focus, use alternative modes of instruction, or both. For example a magnet school may focus on music and performing arts or a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) curriculum. An elementary-level magnet school may employ the Montessori Method. Magnet school attendance is optional.

Magnet schools have positive outcomes. Although the original purpose of magnet schools was to promote voluntary school desegregation, the UCLA Civil Rights Project notes that, in recent years, the purpose has shifted in the direction of providing greater school choice and rigorous academic programs. The Civil Rights Project report cites several studies that found benefits of magnet schools, including:

- Higher test scores
- Higher graduation rates
- Closer student-teacher relationships
- More access to unique curricula
- More positive inter-racial relations among students¹

The finding of higher achievement persisted even after controlling for differences in student background, including comparing achievement differences between lottery "winners" and "losers" for magnet schools that were oversubscribed and admitted students through a random lottery.

Another review of the research found that magnet schools had a positive impact in Connecticut, San Diego, Nashville, Houston, Duval County (Florida), and Milwaukee, and only one study found higher achievement among non-magnet students.²

¹ Erica Frankenberg and Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, "The Forgotten Choice? Rethinking Magnet Schools in a Changing Landscape." The UCLA Civil Rights Project, November 2008.

Funding. The education budget trailer bill for the current year (SB 828, Chapter 29, Statutes of 2016) appropriates \$20 million from the state General Fund (Proposition 98) for charter school startup grants. The current year budget also provides federal funding for the same purpose, and SB 828 requires all federal funds to be spent before any state funds are used for charter school startup grants.

According to the California Department of Education (CDE), the federal funds will not be exhausted this year. Meanwhile, the \$20 million Proposition 98 appropriation must be spent on something to meet the minimum funding guarantee. Since it cannot be used for charter school startup grants, but must be spent this year, the author's office indicates that it will request a reappropriation of the \$20 million for magnet school startup grants. The author's office notes that magnet schools and charter schools both serve the same general purpose of expanding school choice.

How the grants can be used. This bill provides that grants may be used for one-time costs associated with the startup of a new magnet school, including, but not limited to, all of the following:

- Supplies, furnishings, equipment, and instructional materials;
- Professional development, coaching, and support services for teachers and magnet school staff;
- Curriculum and policy development and acquisition; and
- Facility and schoolsite preparation or modifications necessary to implement the program in compliance with applicable laws.

This is identical to the purposes for which charter school startup grant funds may be used. AB 716 requires districts requesting a grant to submit a proposed budget describing how the grant funds will be used.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None received

Opposition

None received

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² "A Review of the Research on Magnet Schools." Office of Assessment, Research, and Data Analysis, Miami-Dade Public Schools, January 2012.