

Date of Hearing: March 26, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Al Muratsuchi, Chair
AB 903 (Ávila Farías) – As Introduced February 19, 2025

SUBJECT: School accountability: local control and accountability plans: education technology: best practices

SUMMARY: Requires the State Board of Education (SBE), on or before December 31, 2026, to prepare a compilation of best practices to harness the power of technology to support pupil academic success and accelerate pupil academic achievement for local educational agencies (LEAs) that receive Title I funding, including a model policy for incorporation of those best practices into local control and accountability plans (LCAPs). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the SBE, in consultation with the department and the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), on or before December 31, 2026, to prepare a compilation of best practices to harness the power of technology to support pupil academic success and accelerate pupil academic achievement for LEAs that have a priority school, as defined, or that receive funding pursuant to Title I of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 6301 et seq.), as amended by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (Public Law 114-95), including a model policy for incorporation of those best practices into LCAPs.
- 2) Requires, on or before December 31, 2028, and at least once every two years thereafter, the SBE, in consultation with the California Department of Education (CDE) and the CCEE, to update the compilation of best practices.
- 3) Requires the SBE publish and post the compilation of best practices and model policy on its website on or before December 31, 2026.
- 4) Requires the SBE publish and post updates to the compilation of best practices and model policy on its website.
- 5) Requires the CDE, in collaboration with the CCEE, to conduct at least three informational webinars in 2027 for LEAs to understand how to incorporate the best practices into their LCAPs under the model policy.
- 6) Requires each county office of education to compile, and submit to the SBE, on or before December 31, 2028, a summary of school district practices and LCAPs related to harnessing the power of technology to accelerate pupil academic performance in comparison to the compilation of best practices developed by the SBE.
- 7) Requires the CDE, in consultation with the SBE and the CCEE, to develop a concise questionnaire and conduct a statistically reliable sample of LEAs to participate in a baseline survey, on or before June 30, 2027, to determine the status of the use of technology in schools, and shall administer a follow up survey, on or before June 30, 2030, to measure changes in the adoption of best practices to harness the power of technology to accelerate academic performance, including, but not limited to, comparing changes in academic

performance, if any, associated with the implementation of those best practices. Authorizes the questionnaire and surveys to be incorporated into the standardized template for the existing School Accountability Report Card.

- 8) Requires the SBE establish a School Technology Empowerment Advisory Committee (Committee) that includes one representative with experience regarding the effective use of technology in accelerating pupil academic performance from at least the following organizations:
 - a) The California School Boards Association;
 - b) The Association of California School Administrators;
 - c) The California Association of African American Superintendents and Administrators;
 - d) The Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents;
 - e) The California Teachers Association;
 - f) The American Federation of Teachers;
 - g) The CCEE;
 - h) The International Society for Technology in Education;
 - i) Computer-Using Educators;
 - j) The California Emerging Technology Fund;
 - k) Families in Schools;
 - l) The California State Parent Teachers Association;
 - m) Common Sense Media;
 - n) The Silicon Valley Education Foundation; and
 - o) Any other organizations or philanthropic foundations determined by the SBE to be experienced and willing to contribute to harnessing the power of technology to accelerate pupil academic achievement.
- 9) Requires the committee to be staffed by the CDE and meet at least three times in each fiscal year.
- 10) Requires, on or before December 31, 2028, and annually thereafter, the Committee to prepare an annual report on the progress in harnessing the power of technology to accelerate pupil academic achievement and submit the report to the SBE.

- 11) Defines “LEA” to mean a school district, county office of education (COE), or charter school.
- 12) States numerous findings and declarations of the Legislature, including: that best practices that facilitate the effective use of technology to enhance pupil performance can form the foundation of a state initiative to be implemented in all high-need and priority schools, defined as a school with 55% or more of its enrollment being English learners, pupils who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, or foster youth, and that the state initiative should be developed based on the following principles:
 - a) **Integration:** Implementation of the effective use of technology to improve and accelerate pupils academic performance requires integration of best practices into existing school-improvement initiatives that are tailored to each local educational agency and school;
 - b) **Leadership:** Effective implementation requires the establishment and facilitation of regular meetings of school leadership teams to set goals, adopt metrics, and facilitate continuous assessment for transparency and accountability;
 - c) **Capacity Building:** Schools need assistance and a catalyst to move away from siloed approaches to interrelated systems and integrated technology implementation with well-defined goals for pupils and parents;
 - d) **Digital Divide:** Pupils need a suitable digital computing device to use at school and to take home to help close the digital divide, extend the learning day, and promote educational continuity;
 - e) **Internet Access:** All low-income households in California need to have access to lower-cost affordable home internet service through public subsidies or affordable subscription plan offers from internet service providers for eligible households;
 - f) **Professional Learning and Coaching:** Teachers need to have access to ongoing professional development and learning opportunities and embedded coaching to help them incorporate technology into effective classroom practices and lessons;
 - g) **Parent Engagement:** Schools need to provide ongoing parent training with standards performance metrics to ensure that parents can use computing devices and navigate the internet to communicate with teachers in languages spoken at home, access information about their children’s assignments and grades, contribute to the development of the LCAPs, participate in other school activities, and access community services to improve their daily living;
 - h) **Learning Academies:** Building school performance capacity and accelerating pupil academic achievement is greatly accelerated by bringing together school leadership teams from several schools and local educational agencies in regular learning academies to share experiences and lessons learned;
 - i) **Accountability:** School leadership teams need to lead continuous assessment and share evaluation results with the entire school community to provide feedback to inform ongoing implementation; and

- j) Transparency: LEAs need to report on the technology environment at their schools as part of the California School Dashboard section on basic services and conditions.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the K-12 High-Speed Network (K-12 HSN), which provides high-speed, high-bandwidth internet connectivity to the public school system for the purposes of enriching pupil experiences and improving pupil academic performance. (Education Code (EC) 11800)
- 2) Authorizes the SPI to award educational technology competitive grants based on a school district's regular average daily attendance (ADA). (EC 33132)
- 3) Required the stated one-time funds in the education omnibus measure, AB 104 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 13, Statutes of 2015, for school districts to prioritize, among other things, professional development, instructional materials, and technology infrastructure. (EC 41207.41)
- 4) Appropriated funds from the General Fund and the Federal Trust Fund to the SPI for COVID-19 relief and includes LEAs that provide distance learning in the 2020-21 school year. (EC 43521)
- 5) Requires LEAs offering in-person instruction for the 2020-21 school year to include all prioritized pupil groups. Prioritized pupil groups include all of the following:
 - a) Pupils at risk for abuse, neglect, or exploitation;
 - b) Homeless pupils;
 - c) Foster youth;
 - d) English learners; and
 - e) Pupils without access to a computing device, software, and high-speed internet necessary to participate in online instruction, as determined by the LEA. (EC 43521)

FISCAL EFFECT: This bill has been keyed as a possible state-mandated local program by the Office of Legislative Counsel.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, "The global pandemic underscored the Digital Divide in K-12 education, exposing deep disparities that disproportionately affect students attending public schools in underserved communities. These historical disparities hinder equitable access to educational opportunities, limiting student success, and long-term economic prosperity. AB 903 takes an important first step in addressing the deep Digital Divide in K-12 education.

This bill would require the State Board of Education, in consultation with the California Department of Education and California Collaborative for Education Excellence, to craft best practices and accelerate academic success by ensuring our students have the tools needed to

thrive in an increasingly digital world. By expanding access to technology and its incorporation in our public education, we are opening doors for the next generation workforce, and empowering them to compete in the modern economy.”

Technology in classrooms. Whether being used to supplement teaching a course, e-mail communications, or assigning homework, the need for technological connectivity intensified during the pandemic and is inevitably essential moving forward. According to a 2019 Learning Policy Institute article, the ways in which technology is utilized in the classroom can positively affect academic outcomes, such as, “Advancing learning for high school students that are at the greatest risk of failing a class or dropping out of school when it’s interactive rather than one-way, used to support discussions and projects with peers and teachers, and serves as a tool for creation rather than passive consumption. When technologies try to replace teachers, research consistently finds little benefit.”

The CDE and regional technology support. The CDE maintains the Information and Technology Branch within the CDE. It primarily serves as an internal department that manages the information technologies for CDE employees and handles the educational data relating to assessments and accountability of schools and students. The Branch is not equipped to support the technical support needs of individual LEAs.

Previously, the state supported a robust Educational Technology program, which included the California Technology Assistance Project (CTAP) and Statewide Education Technology Services (SETS). The CTAP provided a regional network of technical assistance, coordination, and services to schools and school districts in education technology throughout 11 regions throughout the State. The SETS provided was a centralized program that addressed locally defined needs through four projects, including an online resource list aligned with state content standards, online resource providing training and support for school information technology staff, resources to support school administrators for school management and data-driven decision making, and access to online assessments and student proficiency assessment data. In 2012, the CTAP and SETS were subsumed into the Local Control Funding Formula.

Title I. This bill would require an LEA that receives Title I funding to incorporate the best practices to harness the power of technology to support pupil academic success into their LCAP by no later than July 1, 2028. Title I, Part A (Title I) of the ESEA provides supplemental financial assistance to school districts for children from low-income families. Its purpose is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps by allocating federal funds for education programs and services. Title I allocations to state education agencies and LEAs are based primarily on annually updated LEA poverty estimates produced by the U.S. Census Bureau. Then, within-LEA allocations to schools are based on school poverty rates, for which a common measure used by LEAs is the number of public school children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL). However, not all Title I-eligible schools participate in Title I programs, due to rules governing within-LEA allocations and state and district flexibility for allocating Title I funds. These rules also mean that Title I per-pupil allocations for schools vary across schools within LEAs, across LEAs within a state, and across states. California received \$2.4 billion in Title I funds for the 2024-25 school year.

LCAPs. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was established in the 2013-14 fiscal year to address the achievement gap by providing more equitable funding among LEAs, that is, to

provide a higher level of funding to LEAs that enroll larger numbers of English learners, foster youth, and students eligible for free-or reduced-price meals (unduplicated pupils) so they could provide those students with additional services and support. The reforms to the funding system were accompanied by changes to the state accountability system, including LCAPs. The LCAP is a three-year plan that describes the goals, actions, services, and expenditures to support positive student outcomes that address state and local priorities. The LCAP provides an opportunity for LEAs (school districts, COEs, and charter schools) to share their stories of how, what, and why programs and services are selected to meet their local needs.

All LEAs must use the LCAP template adopted by the SBE. The LCAP template has been updated nearly every year since its inception, primarily to reflect changes established through legislation. ***The Committee may wish to consider*** that many LEAs have expressed frustration that the template changes regularly and the changes often lead to the disruption of local planning and implementation efforts.

The digital divide. According to a 2024 Public Policy Institute of California report, *California School Districts and the Emergency Connectivity Fund*, digital literacy is crucial for ensuring positive educational outcomes. Districts could benefit from sharing information on their best methods for establishing and maintaining effective communication with families. Providing culturally and linguistically competent support for English learners, Black/Latino, and low-income students and their families is particularly important. Libraries, library consortia, and community-based organizations have provided helpful examples in this realm.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in March 2020, public schools were charged with providing high-quality instruction through distance learning and independent study, paying employees, and providing meals to students. Distance learning gave the opportunity for teachers to provide students instruction in different locations from each other to adhere to social distancing health requirements to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The pandemic upended educational instruction as most LEAs in California opted to shut down, continue instruction through distance learning, and scrambled to provide laptops and connectivity services to all its students. While many households in California already had internet connectivity prior to the onset of the pandemic, disadvantaged student populations such as low-income, Black, and Latino households were less likely to have reliable access to the internet and a digital device. According to a 2022 Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) report, *The Digital Divide in Education*, the trend continues. Although Black and Latino households increased in access to a digital device, access to reliable internet connection remained stagnant from 2020 to present day. Increases in reliable access to internet service moved at a slower rate, from 71% to 75%, which reflects the challenges for households in remote areas where internet infrastructure and low-income households in crowded urban areas that could not afford reliable internet connection. The PPIC also noted that households with school children who had full digital access, which includes both a computing device and an internet connection for educational purposes, increased from 60% in spring of 2020, but stalled at 71% in spring of 2021. Although schools resumed in-person instruction in the 2021-22 school year, the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized our reliance on and need for technology as distance learning continued for some students in the form of independent study.

Recent state and federal funding to support closing the digital divide. The Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) was a 2021 federal pandemic-relief program to improve digital access,

whose mission emphasized school districts with higher shares of historically underserved populations, including ELs, Black and Latino students, and low-income students. The program ended in June 2024. Although it is too early to gauge the effects of the ECF, the funds were distributed to school districts serving high-needs students, so there is hope that the ECF reached its target audience.

The Federal Communications Commission’s Digital Opportunity Fund (funds to bring high-speed fixed broadband service to rural homes and small businesses that lack it), the Treasury’s Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund (funds to ensure that all communities have access to high-quality modern infrastructure, including broadband), and the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program (funds to expand high-speed Internet access by funding planning, infrastructure deployment and adoption programs) are together slated to provide more than \$60 billion in federal funding to states over the next several years. SB 156 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 112, Statutes of 2021, emphasizes connecting historically high-needs communities throughout the state.

Arguments in support. The California Emerging Technology Fund (sponsor) writes, “The global pandemic illuminated the Digital Divide in K-12 education, exposing deep disparities that disproportionately affect students attending public schools in underserved communities. These historical disparities hinder equitable access to educational opportunities, limiting student success and long-term economic prosperity. The Digital Divide is a significant factor contributing to the Achievement Gap.

AB 903 declares that it is the policy of the State of California to harness the power of computing and Internet technologies to support acceleration of student academic performance, with special attention to Title I and high-need Districts and underperforming Schools in low-income neighborhoods. AB 903 delineates 10 Principles for Best Practices that will form the foundation of an initiative that will be useful for all Districts and Schools.”

Arguments in opposition. The Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE) writes, “Although the bill appears to have an admirable goal, it raises too many unanswered questions. ACOE is committed to serving the most vulnerable students, including those in schools that receive federal Title I funding. We also support leveraging technology to improve equitable student outcomes. However, it is unclear what “harnessing the power of technology to accelerate pupil academic performance” means in practice, what information COEs are to collect from school districts, and what the ultimate outcome intended by the bill is. These questions should be addressed before subjecting COEs and school districts to more reporting requirements – a recurring concern despite the passage of SB 1315 (Archuleta, 2024).”

Recommended Committee Amendments. *Staff recommends that the bill be amended as follows:*

- Require the CDE, rather than the SBE, to prepare compilation of best practices to harness the power of technology to support pupil academic success and accelerate pupil academic achievement for local educational agencies be posted to the CDE’s website by December 31, 2026.
- Require the CDE, rather than the SBE, to develop a model policy for incorporation of those best practices into LCAPs.

- Remove the requirement for each COE to compile, and submit to the SBE, on or before December 31, 2028, a summary of school district practices and local control and accountability plans related to harnessing the power of technology to accelerate pupil academic performance in comparison to the compilation of best practices developed by the SBE.
- Remove the requirement for the CDE to develop a concise questionnaire and conduct a statistically reliable sample of LEAs to participate in a baseline survey, on or before June 30, 2027, to determine the status of the use of technology in schools, and to administer a follow-up survey, on or before June 30, 2030, to measure changes in the adoption of best practices to harness the power of technology to accelerate academic performance, including, but not limited to, comparing changes in academic performance, if any, associated with the implementation of those best practices. Remove the authorization for the questionnaire and surveys may be incorporated into the standardized template for the existing School Accountability Report Card.
- Require the CDE, rather than the SBE, to establish a School Technology Empowerment Advisory Committee. Require the Advisory Committee to share and advise the SPI on best practices to harness the power of technology to support pupil academic success and accelerate pupil academic achievement for local educational agencies. Require the membership to include representatives from the following, rather than naming specific organizations: school board member, administrator, teacher, CCEE, and multiple individuals or organizations that represent the interests of supporting the use of technology in public schools.

Related legislation. AB 1496 (Papan) of the 2021-22 Session would have created, subject to an appropriation, a pilot program at COEs related to educational technology and would have established an office at the CDE to provide technical assistance and teacher professional development to LEAs on educational technology. This bill was held in the Assembly Education Committee.

SB 156 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 112, Statutes of 2021, emphasizes connecting historically high-needs communities throughout the state.

SB 876 (Becker) of the 2021-22 Session would have established the Digital Education Equity Program (DEEP), administered by the CDE, in unison with the 58 COEs, to provide TA and teacher PD to LEAs on the implementation of educational technology as set forth in policies with the SBE, upon appropriation of the Budget Act or another statute. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

SB 767 (Becker) of the 2021-22 Session would have made various significant changes to educational technology in schools, including the creation of a new education technology grant program; a requirement that state agencies develop criteria for school technology plans and local educational agencies adopt technology plans; and would establish a new office at the CDE to administer the grant program, prepare a state technology plan, provide centralized statewide educational technology services and perform other duties. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 1176 (E. Garcia) of the 2021-22 Session would have established the California Connect Fund in the State Treasury. The bill, until January 1, 2031, would require the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to develop, implement, and administer the California Connect Program to ensure that high-speed broadband service is available to every household in the state at affordable rates. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 1560 (Daly) of the 2021-22 Session would have required the SPI to collect information about pupils' access to computing devices and residential broadband service, and would authorize the Department of Technology to enter into a sponsored service agreement on behalf of a LEA with a broadband service provider for providing free or reduced-cost residential broadband service to eligible pupils. This bill was vetoed by the Governor, with the following message:

Closing the digital divide is crucial to promoting equity in our schools, which is why I worked with the Legislature to secure \$6 billion to expand broadband infrastructure and enhance internet access for unserved and underserved communities. Further, SB 98 (Chapter 24, Statutes of 2020) appropriated \$5.3 billion for LEAs to support pupil academic achievement and mitigate learning loss related to the COVID-19 pandemic, funding which they can use for purposes including the purchase of computing devices. Therefore, the provisions of this bill are duplicative and unnecessary.

SB 732 (Bates) of the 2021-22 Session would have required the CDE to develop and implement a program for COEs, school districts, and charter schools to issue no-cash value vouchers to be distributed to households with eligible pupils, to be used during the 2021–22 fiscal year to assist those households with the impacts of distance or remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The bill would have established the Rural Broadband Infrastructure Fund as a continuously appropriated fund in the State Treasury in order to provide high-quality broadband service to rural areas that are unserved. This bill was held by the Senate Energy, Utilities, and Communications Committee.

AB 82 (Committee on Budget) Chapter 14, Statutes of 2020, in pertinent part, allowed the California Public Utilities Commission to provide matching funds through the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) to broadband providers as they pursue funding through the federal Rural Digital Opportunity Fund.

AB 570 (Aguiar-Curry) of the 2019-20 Session would have made numerous changes to CASF, to encourage deployment of broadband technology to all areas of the state. This bill was held on the Senate Floor.

SB 1130 (L. Gonzalez) of the 2019-20 Session would have made numerous changes to CASF, to encourage deployment of broadband technology to all areas of the state. This bill was held on the Assembly Floor.

ACR 268 (Thurmond) Resolution Chapter 221, Statutes of 2018, resolved that the Legislature considers education technology of the highest priority and that the Legislature convene a state level summit conference to address improvements in education technology and related topics.

AB 1665 (E. Garcia), Chapter 851, Statutes of 2017, revised the goal of the CASF to approve funding by December 31, 2022, for infrastructure projects that will provide broadband access to no less than 98% of California households in each consortia region, as identified by the PUC, among other provisions.

AB 1761 (Sweeney), Chapter 801, Statutes of 1997, required the CDE to establish the CTAP of regional consortia to administer a regionalized network of support to schools and school districts. Required the SBE to issue grants to LEAs to serve as lead agencies in each region.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Broadband Consortium Pacific Coast
California Emerging Technology Fund
Chester W. Nimitz Middle School
Chicana Latina Foundation
Community Tech Network
Cue, Inc.
Digital Equity Coalition
Digital Navigators
Economic Development Corporation
Families in Schools
Human-I-T
Mariposa County Board of Supervisors
Maywood Center for Enriched Studies
Newstart Housing Corporation
Parent University
Parent University Consortium
Rural Development Centers
Rural Prosperity Center
Silicon Valley Education Foundation
Wiconduit

Opposition

Alameda County Office of Education
Office of the Riverside County Superintendent of Schools

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