

Date of Hearing: April 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Darshana R. Patel, Chair
AB 2189 (Nguyen) – As Amended April 16, 2026

SUBJECT: State Council on Developmental Disabilities

SUMMARY: Authorizes the State Council on Developmental Disabilities (State Council) to award a grant, subject to appropriation by the Legislature, to a statewide advocacy organization to conduct outreach and training through local meetings or forums for the purpose of providing special education pupils and their families with information regarding special education advocacy and rights. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Authorizes the State Council to award a grant, subject to appropriation by the Legislature, to a statewide advocacy organization to conduct outreach and training through local meetings or forums for the purpose of providing special education pupils and their families with information regarding special education advocacy and rights.
- 2) Defines a statewide advocacy organization to mean an organization with demonstrated success representing the interests of families and persons with disabilities, as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) In federal law, establishes the IDEA and provides that it is the right of a child to receive free appropriate public education (FAPE) and related services for eligible children with disabilities from birth through 21 years of age. (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.)
- 2) Establishes the responsibilities of the State Council to include serving as an advocate for individuals with developmental disabilities and, through council members, staff, consultants, contractors, and grantees, and to conduct advocacy, capacity building, and systemic change activities, as specified. (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 4540)
- 3) Establishes Family Empowerment Centers on Disability (FECs) to provide training, information, and support to parents and families of children and young adults with disabilities. (EC 56400 et seq)
- 4) Requires, through the California Early Start Intervention Services Act (CEISA) that services be provided by Family Resource Centers (FRCs) that provide parents of infants and toddlers from birth to two years of age parent-to-parent support, information dissemination and referral, public awareness, family professional collaboration activities, and transition assistance for families. (Government Code (GC) 95004)
- 5) In federal law, establishes Parent Training and Information Centers (PTICs) to provide training and information that meets the needs of parents of children with disabilities, particularly underserved parents and parents of children who may be inappropriately identified, to enable their children with disabilities to meet developmental and functional goals, and be prepared to lead productive independent adult lives. (20 U.S.C 1471)

- 6) Requires each Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) to have a Community Advisory Committee (CAC), composed of parents, teachers, and others. Sets forth their responsibilities, including advising the SELPA on its local plan, supporting activities on behalf of students with disabilities, assisting in parent awareness of the importance of regular school attendance, and supporting community involvement. (EC 56912 et seq)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, “With oversight and enforcement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) shifting onto the California Department of Education it is more important now than ever for California to develop a coordinated infrastructure that unifies and trains parent leaders statewide on how they can stand up for the rights of students with disabilities. As a mother of a child with special needs, I know firsthand how complex and overwhelming the special education system can be. Parents should not have to navigate it alone. AB 2189 ensures families have access to training, support, and a coordinated voice so we can protect the rights of students with disabilities and help ensure the system is working for families.”

Existing state and federal family support initiatives in special education. This bill proposes to establish a grant to a statewide advocacy organization to conduct outreach and training through local meetings or forums for the purpose of providing special education pupils and their families with information regarding special education advocacy and rights.

There are a number of existing state and federally-funded programs to provide support to families of students with disabilities. They include:

- **Family Empowerment Centers:** The FECs provide specialized training, peer-to-peer support, information, and referral services to families of children and young adults with disabilities. They aim to assist parents to better understand their child’s educational and developmental needs, effectively communicate with service providers, serve as a resource for the individual education program (IEP) process, participate in school reform and improvement activities, promote alternative dispute resolution (ADR), and support positive relationships between parents and professionals. FECs operate as or through non-profit organizations and participate in the statewide Family Empowerment and Disability Council (FEDC), composed of the executive directors of the FECs.
- **Family Resource Centers:** Part of the Early Start program for infants and toddlers with disabilities, FRCs work in partnership with local regional centers and education agencies to provide families with information about early intervention services and how to navigate the Early Start system. California’s FRC are staffed by parents who have children with special needs and provide information and parent-to-parent support. Each FRC is unique, reflecting the needs of their community. They may operate as independent sites or be based in regional centers, local education agencies (LEAs), public health facilities, hospitals or homes. Family support services are available in many languages and are culturally responsive to the needs of the individual family.

- Community Advisory Committees: Every SELPA is required to establish a CAC, composed of parents, teachers, and others involved in the education of students with disabilities. The CAC's responsibilities include advising the SELPA on its local plan, supporting activities on behalf of students with disabilities, assisting in parent awareness of the importance of regular school attendance, and supporting community involvement.
- Parent Training and Information Centers: Each PTIC is a parent-directed non-profit organization funded and managed by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), under the IDEA. The PTICs provide a variety of direct services for children and youth with disabilities, families, professionals, and other organizations that support them. Some of the activities include helping parents participate effectively in their children's education and development, and partnering with professionals and policymakers to improve outcomes for all children with disabilities.
- Community Parent Resource Centers: CPRCs are managed and funded by the OSEP and help ensure that underserved parents of children, ages birth through age 26 with disabilities, including low-income parents, parents of limited English-proficient children, and parents with disabilities, have the training and information the parents need to enable the parents to participate effectively in helping their children with disabilities.

The Committee may wish to consider that these organizations primarily provide education and support to families for purposes of supporting individual students, not advocacy on statewide issues.

Bill needs substance. This bill would authorize the State Council to award a grant to a statewide advocacy organization to conduct outreach and training through local meetings or forums for the purpose of providing special education pupils and their families with information regarding special education advocacy and rights.

This bill does not address a number of key questions typically addressed by proposed legislation of this nature. These include:

- What is the overarching goal of this initiative, in terms of student outcomes?
- What is meant by advocacy? Does this mean advocacy related to individual students and their IEPs, or advocacy at a state level for policy purposes? Is there overlap between this initiative and the many existing family support programs noted above?
- What would the grantee's responsibilities be, and what are the desired outcomes of the grant?
- Would this work be done independently or in collaboration with existing family support organizations?
- What is the process for awarding this grant? Would it be competitively awarded, or simply designated by the State Council? What are the qualifications to be a grantee?
- How would the state be informed of the implementation of the grant and its outcomes?

- Why is this grant proposed to be housed at the State Council, when the grant related to all students with disabilities, and the State Council's focus is on students with developmental disabilities?

These unanswered questions have led some stakeholders to oppose this bill. *The Committee may wish to consider that* the Committee amendments shown below would address a number of these questions.

Federal government dismantles civil rights complaints function. According to the Assembly Human Services Committee, in 2024 the USDOE's Office of Civil Rights received 22,687 complaints, which is an 18% increase from years prior. Complaints containing allegations of disability discrimination comprised 37% (8,457) of all complaints received. According to a 2024 annual report by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, "overall staffing level has declined significantly – falling from nearly 1,100 FTE staff in [fiscal year] (FY) 1981 to 588 FTE staff in FY 2024. This reduction comes even as the volume of complaints received has grown significantly, increasing from under 3,000 in FY 1981 to 22,687 in FY 2024." Furthering the trend of reducing resources, the USDOE announced on March 11, 2025 its plans to reduce 50% of its workforce through deferred resignation, voluntary separation, early retirement, and reduction-in-force. This reduction in force was later upheld by the Supreme Court.

According to the Assembly Human Services Committee, in addition to the Office of Civil Rights, on October 10, 2025, 121 employees from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) were laid off, and seven remain within the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), housed within OSERS. OSEP monitors states and territories' compliance with IDEA, administers technical assistance to families, and monitors the rights of students with disabilities.

Recommended Committee amendments. Staff recommends that the bill be amended to replace its current content with the following:

- 1) Require, contingent upon an appropriation, the State Council to establish and administer a Statewide Special Education Parent Advocacy Collaborative for the purpose of building statewide capacity for parent and pupil engagement in special education advocacy, systems change, and policy development.
- 2) Establish relevant definitions for purposes of the act, including clarifying that advocacy means activities that promote, support, or influence public policy, systems, or practices at the local, regional, or state level to improve outcomes for pupils with disabilities, including systems advocacy, capacity building, and systems change, and does not include representation other advocacy related to individual pupils in special education processes, including but not limited to dispute resolution.
- 3) Require that the grant be awarded through a competitive grant process and provide \$800,000 annually for three years, to an eligible nonprofit statewide advocacy organization, defined to mean an organization with demonstrated success representing the interests of families and persons with disabilities, through local or statewide forums. Authorize the State Council to retain an unspecified amount of the funding appropriated for the grant for administration.

- 4) Require the State Council to consider all of the following when awarding the grant:
 - a) Demonstrated experience in statewide special education advocacy for the purpose of systems advocacy, capacity building, and systems change;
 - b) Demonstrated experience in coalition building across diverse geographic regions and demographic groups;
 - c) Demonstrated experience and expertise in advocacy on behalf of the disability community; and
 - d) Experience working with existing entities providing training and support to parents of pupils with disabilities, including, but not limited to, FECs, FRCs, CACs, PTICs, and LEAs.
- 5) Require that the grantee conduct outreach and training through meetings or forums for the purpose of providing parent leaders, student advocates, and other stakeholders, inclusive of postsecondary students, with culturally and linguistically responsive information regarding statewide special education advocacy for the purpose of systems advocacy, capacity building, and systems change.
- 6) Require the grantee to, at a minimum, do all of the following:
 - a) Identify and build a network of at least 200 leader stakeholders engaged in advocacy for students with disabilities;
 - b) Establish and facilitate a statewide collaborative of parents, pupils, and stakeholders, including identifying and supporting a cohort of approximately 40 to 50 parent and pupil leaders representing diverse geographic regions of the state;
 - c) Conduct not fewer than three convenings annually to provide training, build relationships, and coordinate statewide advocacy efforts;
 - d) Develop and implement a statewide training program, including virtual and in-person opportunities, to build participant knowledge and skills;
 - e) Provide training and technical assistance designed to develop participant capacity in all of the following areas:
 - i) State-level advocacy and legislative engagement;
 - ii) Statewide communications, messaging, and public engagement;
 - iii) Sharing best practices in effective parent and pupil advocacy and leadership development;
 - iv) Coalition building and community organizing across regions;
 - v) Understanding of the IDEA; and

- vi) Use of data, including pupil outcome data used for purposes of the California School Dashboard and the State Performance Plan, to inform advocacy and systems change.
 - f) Coordinate and collaborate with and leverage existing local, regional, and statewide parent and family support entities to ensure alignment and avoid duplication of services;
 - g) Collect, analyze, and document the experiences of parents and pupils to inform state-level policymaking, oversight, and systems improvement;
 - h) Be guided in the activities specified in this subdivision by the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence's (CCEE) theory of action, including principles of continuous improvement, capacity building, and data-driven decision-making; and
 - i) Report on the activities as required.
- 7) Require the grantee to submit an annual report to the State Council, and the State Council to submit a report to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature that includes, but is not limited to, all of the following:
- a) A description of activities conducted;
 - b) Outcomes of the activities required by this section, including but not limited to:
 - i) Increased participation of parents and pupils in statewide advocacy efforts;
 - ii) Improved coordination among parent and family support organizations; and
 - iii) Increased capacity of participants to engage in systems-level advocacy.
 - c) The number, geographic distribution, and demographics of participants; and
 - d) Recommendations for improving statewide special education advocacy and oversight.
- 8) Require that the report be made publicly available on the State Council's website.
- 9) State the intent of the legislature that \$800,000 be appropriated annually for three fiscal years to the State Council for purposes of the measure.

Arguments in support. The Arc California writes, "For decades, the federal government has played a central role in overseeing and enforcing the rights of students with disabilities through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, administered by the Office of Special Education Programs within the U.S. Department of Education. However, recent federal actions have significantly weakened this oversight. Families are already feeling the impact. In 2025, from March to September alone, the Department received 9,269 civil rights complaints, of which 6,353, or 68 percent, were dismissed without resolution. As federal capacity diminishes, responsibility for enforcement is increasingly shifting to states, local education agencies, and ultimately to parents and self-advocates."

California has strong local infrastructure through Family Empowerment Centers, Family Resource Centers and other community-based organizations. These organizations play a critical role in supporting families through individual advocacy, providing information, resources, and peer support tailored to a child's specific educational needs. However, local organizations train and organize parents, but that doesn't necessarily translate into coordination and action in Sacramento. This proposal is also distinct from existing structures such as the Advisory Commission on Special Education. While the Commission plays an important advisory role to the State Board of Education and Superintendent, its function is limited to providing recommendations. It is not designed to organize, mobilize, or support a statewide network of advocates engaged in systemic change.

What California lacks is a coordinated, statewide advocacy structure focused on systemic change. AB 2189 is designed to fill this gap. Rather than duplicating individual advocacy efforts, the bill focuses on building a statewide coalition of leaders drawn from local networks across California who can engage in coordinated, systems-level advocacy."

Arguments in opposition. Family Voices of California writes, "As currently drafted, the bill lacks sufficient clarity in several key areas that are critical to ensuring it achieves its intended impact. Specifically:

- **Clarity of Purpose:** It remains unclear whether AB 2189 is intended to support individual advocacy or to equip families for engagement in statewide systems-level special education advocacy. California already has an established infrastructure supporting individual advocacy through Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs), Family Resource Centers (FRCs), and Family Empowerment Centers (FECs). If the intent of AB 2189 is to advance systems-level advocacy, this should be explicitly stated to avoid duplication and ensure the program adds unique value.
- **Grant Structure:** The bill's reference to 'a grant' and 'a statewide advocacy organization' may unintentionally limit participation. A competitive grant process awarding funds to one or more nonprofit organizations would better reflect the diversity of California's communities and ensure that organizations with deep, established relationships with families can effectively participate.
- **Access and Equity:** Families' ability to engage in advocacy is often shaped by language, culture, and access. The bill should more clearly require that funded activities support families in engaging in culturally and linguistically responsive advocacy, not solely the provision of information. This includes ensuring that grantees have demonstrated expertise in engaging and elevating the voices of diverse communities of families of students receiving special education services."

Related legislation. AB 130 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 44, Statutes of 2021, revised the statutes related to the FECs, including requiring the California Department of Education (CDE) to award grants by March 1, 2022, to applicants in those of the 32 regions in the state that did not have a center and to give priority to certain applicants, increasing the minimum base rate for each center awarded a grant from \$150,000 to \$246,000 commencing on July 1, 2021.

AB 126 (Garcia) of the 2021-22 Session would have required the establishment of additional FECs, established increased funding levels awarded to each FEC, established new requirements

for data collection and reporting to the CDE, and required, subject to an appropriation for this purpose, the CDE to \$20 million in one-time funding to FECs and other organizations to support families of students with disabilities whose education had been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This bill was held in the Senate Education Committee.

AB 2056 (Eduardo Garcia) of the 2019-20 Session was substantially similar to AB 126 of the 2021-22 Session. This bill was held in the Assembly Education Committee.

AB 236 (Eduardo Garcia) of the 2019-20 Session was substantially similar to AB 126 of the 2021-22 Session. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 2704 (O'Donnell) of the 2017-18 Session was substantially similar to AB 126 of the 2021-22 Session. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

SB 695 (Portantino) of the 2019-20 Session would have required LEAs to communicate in the native language of a parent during the planning process for an IEP, and provide a student's parent with a copy of the completed IEP and other related documents in the native language of the parent within 30 days of the IEP team meeting. This bill was vetoed by the Governor, who stated:

Current law already requires that non-English speaking parents and guardians understand their child's IEP, and LEAs must take any action needed to ensure that pupil's non-English speaking parent understands the IEP process and LEAs must also provide any materials used to assess or place a student with exceptional needs in the parent's native language.

By establishing more prescriptive requirements, particularly specifying a 30-day timeline within which those documents must be translated, the bill would exceed the requirements of federal law (the Individuals with Disabilities Act), thereby creating a costly reimbursable state mandate that will reduce funding available to support broader educational programs for these students.

If a California school district's practices of providing translation services are inadequate, avenues already exist to remedy these problems.

SB 884 (Beall), Chapter 835, Statutes of 2016, requires the CDE to include in its sample procedural safeguards, maintained on its website, a link to the CDE's webpage that lists FECs.

SB 511 (Alpert), Chapter 690, Statutes of 2001, required the CDE to establish FECs in each of 32 Early Start regions in the state, established the FEDC, allocated a base grant of \$150,000 to each FEC, established an allocation mechanism that is determined according to school enrollment of the region served, required FECs to collect specified types of data, and specified certain responsibilities for the FEDC.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Arc and United Cerebral Palsy California Collaboration
Association of Regional Center Agencies
California Disability Services Association

Down Syndrome Association of Santa Barbara County
Educate. Advocate.
Epilepsy Foundation Los Angeles
FASD Network of Southern California

Opposition

California Teachers Association
Care Parent Network
Family Voices of California
Marin Center for Independent Living
Parents Helping Parents
Support for Families of Children with Disabilities

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