

SUMMARY

Assembly Bill 2711 would revise school suspension and expulsion policies for drug-related infractions by requiring local education agencies to create policies using a public health approach, in lieu of suspensions and expulsions.

BACKGROUND

Youth alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use is a significant public health concern linked to a wide range of academic, social, and health problems. Adolescent substance use is highly predictive of adult substance abuse because the adolescent brain is still developing making it more susceptible to addiction.

Research shows that high feelings of school connectedness can decrease drug use. Unfortunately, under current law, school policies regarding drugs, tend to focus on a punitive approach when dealing with substance possession and school connectedness cannot be achieved when suspending or expelling students.

PROBLEM

Education Code §48900 allows school officials discretion in deciding whether to suspend or expel a pupil that unlawfully possessed, used, furnished, or been under the influence of a controlled substance, alcoholic beverage, or intoxicant or possessed or used tobacco or tobacco products. However, this discretion is not evenly exercised by school districts throughout the state. Over 60 percent of drug related suspensions are of boys, over 75 percent are of socioeconomically disadvantaged students and 59 percent are of youth of color.

For students who encounter drug infractions, suspension and expulsion have proven to be ineffective and can have long-lasting consequences like increasing dropout rates and accelerating delinquency in students.

SOLUTION

AB 2711 would require a school district or county office of education to establish a public health framework for identifying and referring youth with substance use needs to community-based services including mechanisms for screening/referral, education on overdose risk, training of school staff, and connecting with local community-based providers.

By requiring school districts to create a public health framework for assisting students with substance possession and use infractions, the administrators will have more resources and ability to make referral-based decisions for students. This allows administrators greater flexibility than just using suspensions and expulsions as a response while also addressing the health needs of students in these situations to reduce the likelihood of future substance abuse and addiction.

SUPPORT

CA Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (Sponsor)
CA Alliance of Child and Family Services (Sponsor)
California Youth Empowerment Network (Sponsor)
Children Now (Sponsor)
Mental Health America of California (Support)

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