

AGENDA

ASSEMBLY BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE NO. 2 ON EDUCATION FINANCE

Assembly Member Julia Brownley, Chair

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11, 2007
STATE CAPITOL, ROOM 126
4:00 PM

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS:

I. OPENING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTIONS

ASSEMBLYMEMBER JULIA BROWNLEY, CHAIR
MEMBERS OF SUBCOMMITTEE No. 2

II. PRESENTATION OF “IMPROVING ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA” PAUL WARREN, PRINCIPAL PROGRAM ANALYST, LEGISLATIVE ANALYST’S OFFICE

III. PANEL DISCUSSION OF RECOMMENDATIONS RAISED BY THE LAO REPORT

- **PANELISTS:**

- **PAUL WARREN**, PRINCIPAL PROGRAM ANALYST, LEGISLATIVE ANALYST’S OFFICE
- **PATRICK AINSWORTH**, DIVISION DIRECTOR – SECONDARY, POSTSECONDARY AND ADULT LEADERSHIP DIVISION, CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
- **TERI BURNS**, DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY, SCHOOL INNOVATIONS AND ADVOCACY – SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE CALIFORNIA CONTINUATION EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
- **MIKE RICKETTS**, DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CALIFORNIA COUNTY SUPERINTENDENTS EDUCATIONAL SERVICES ASSOCIATION
- **PAUL PRESTON**, YOLO EDUCATION CENTER – SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

- **ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION (SEE ISSUE 1 BELOW)**

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

ITEMS TO BE HEARD

6110 DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

ISSUE 1: LAO REPORT, "IMPROVING ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA."
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The issue for the subcommittee to consider is the LAO's recent report, "Improving Alternative Education in California," as well as a follow-up discussion by a panel of stakeholders.

BACKGROUND:

LAO report, "Improving Alternative Education in California." In February, the LAO released its report, "Improving Alternative Education in California," which contains a number of findings and recommendations relative to alternative schools. Alternative schools are specific models of schools (and programs, in the case of independent study) established by the state over a number of years to serve students (especially high schools students) who need an alternative to the regular school model due to behavioral, logistical or academic issues. The LAO report includes an analysis of the following types of alternative schools:

- continuation schools – operated by school districts
- community day schools – operated by school districts and county offices of education
- community schools – operated exclusively by county offices of education

An executive summary of the report is attached. Copies of the report are available on-line at www.lao.ca.gov and will also be provided at today's hearing.

Topics for discussion by the panel. The panel has been asked to consider the following topics for discussion at today's hearing. The topics are all recommendations in the LAO report:

- 1) **Revise attendance rule regarding which students get included in the accountability system.** Under current law, only the test scores from those students who have been in attendance at a school from October until the time the statewide STAR test is administered in the spring are "counted" in the state's accountability system whereby the state assigns an API score to a school based on a composite of achievement data. This "attendance rule" is also used for the state's determination of whether a school met its annual yearly progress target for the federal NCLB accountability system. Any student who transfers to another school after October is not counted toward his or her old school's accountability score or the new school's score. Given that alternative schools have very high mobility rates (many students stay for less than one semester), the LAO points out that the API and AYP scores of these schools fail to accurately measure the school's performance. The attendance rule also allows regular high schools to avoid responsibility for the progress of low-performing students by referring them to alternative schools during the year.

The LAO accordingly recommends replacing the current "entire school year" rule with one that assigns accountability scores based on each student's "home" school. This change would assign the test scores of alternative school students to the comprehensive high school of each alternative school student.

- 2) **Revamp Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM).** Under current law, alternative schools pick three performance measures from a list of 14 possible measures, and report their performance on those measures for students enrolled for at least 90 days. Many of these measures do not consider educational performance and do not allow comparisons among schools. Also, the requirement that schools only report data on students enrolled for at least 90 days excludes more than half of all students attending these schools. In addition, the state's ASAM model does not contain any consequences for poor performance.

The LAO accordingly recommends that the state revamp ASAM to focus on the goals of accelerated learning and graduation for the students that attend these schools. Specifically, it recommends a) including measures of short-term success that can be evaluated every three to six months and b) include a measure of student-level growth on state tests over time (the current testing system does not measure year-to-year growth – see the "vertical scaling" discussion under the testing items at the April 10 hearing).

- 3) **Deem independent study programs “schools” for purposes of accountability systems, and restrict use of independent study for students who are behind grade level.** The LAO found that independent study participants account for a large proportion of high school students enrolled in alternative programs. Yet, despite the frequent use of these programs, particularly for students who are not having success at regular programs, the LAO found a severe lack of data on independent study programs, how they are used, and how students do in them, since districts house these programs at various sites. The LAO accordingly recommends that independent study programs be deemed separate schools for the purposes of the ASAM. This proposal would not require districts to create separate independent study schools. Rather, the state would simply aggregate relevant test score data for all students in the program in each district and calculate an API and an alternative API for full-time independent study students in the district.

The LAO report also notes the lack of research supporting the use of independent study for students who are behind grade level and questions the apparent over-use for this particular group of students. It accordingly recommends that CDE be authorized to evaluate how well students learn in independent study programs and prohibit the use of these programs for students who score below the basic level of statewide STAR tests, if it determines that students are not making significant progress in the program.

- 4) **Restructure state program subsidies into a flexible grant.** The LAO points out a number of problems with the current system of state-funded programs with their various requirements. Each state program (community day schools, community schools, continuation schools) has a different set of funding, minimum day requirements and description of the type of student that may attend. It notes that during visits to schools, several district administrators noted a need for additional options for students that go beyond the current requirements of the state’s programs. The LAO also notes that the programs may create negative incentives that push districts to act in ways contrary to the best interests of the students, specifically: a) the state’s allowance that some of these program provide a shorter day may lead to fewer hours of instruction than at traditional high schools; b) the direct funding of county office-run programs shifts responsibility for these children away from school districts; c) sending students to county programs sometimes requires students to travel long distances and may deny them access to services available at district programs (after school programs, sports, and vocational and elective courses).

The LAO accordingly recommends combining the existing funding streams for the various state alternative school programs into a district alternative program block grant. Funding would go directly to school districts based on a formula that considers total district population as well as the number of students that exhibit significant behavioral problems. The existing state requirements for the various programs would disappear and districts could use block grant funds to support needed alternative programs, as well as implement new types of alternative programs, such as short- and long-term programs based on the needs of students.

COMMENTS:

The LAO report was written by Paul Warren of the Legislative Analyst's Office. He will be present at today's hearing to present his report, as well as participate in the panel discussion.