



SB 394 (Gonzalez) Master Plan for Sustainable and Climate-Resilient Schools

SUMMARY

Senate Bill (SB) 394 will require the California Energy Commission (CEC) to develop a Master Plan for Healthy, Sustainable, and Climate-Resilient Schools (Master Plan).

EXISTING LAW

Assembly Bill (AB) 1279 (Muratsuchi, Chapter 337, Statutes of 2022) established a commitment for California to reach carbon neutrality no later than 2045 and achieve 85% greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions below the 1990 level by 2045.

SB 32 (Pavely, Chapter 249, Statutes of 2016) required the Air Resources Board to ensure that statewide GHG emissions are reduced to at least 40% below the 1990 level by 2030.

AB 841 (Ting, Chapter 372, Statutes of 2020) authorized the CEC to develop the California Schools Healthy Air, Plumbing, and Efficiency Program (CalSHAPE) to upgrade heating, air conditioning, and ventilation (HVAC) systems in schools and replace plumbing fixtures that fail to meet water efficiency standards.

Proposition 39 (2012) the California Clean Energy Jobs Act closed a corporate tax loophole and allotted more than \$1.7 billion over five years to K-12 schools across California to install energy efficiency upgrades and clean energy generation measures.

Proposition 51 (2016) the California Public School Facility Bonds Initiative authorized the state issuing \$9 billion in bonds to fund improvement and construction of school facilities for K-12 schools and community colleges.

BACKGROUND/PROBLEM

California is home to over 1,000 school districts that utilize more than 10,000 school facilities, comprising 125,000 acres of grounds, and 730 million square feet of facilities that produce substantial GHG emissions and contribute to other environmental impacts.¹ Nationally, schools operate the largest mass transit fleet in the country with 480,000 school buses, and serve over 7 billion meals a year that generate 530,000 tons of food waste.²

California students who utilize these facilities each day are increasingly burdened by climate-related threats like extreme heat, flooding, wildfire smoke, and countless other existential impacts that can hinder their ability to learn and stay healthy in school.³ A recent report from the Legislative Analyst Office indicated that students will face learning loss, poorer academic outcomes, food insecurity, along with traumatic mental health problems that can affect their ability to learn due to the numerous impacts caused by climate change.⁴

¹ <https://education.wellcertified.com/hubfs/IWBI%20-%20State%20of%20Our%20Schools%202021.pdf>

² <https://www.thisisplaneted.org/img/K12-ClimateActionPlan-ExecutiveSummary-Screen.pdf>

³ <https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2022/4586/Climate-Change-Impacts-K-12-Education-040522.pdf>

⁴ <https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2022/4586/Climate-Change-Impacts-K-12-Education-040522.pdf>

Further, frontline and low-income communities bear a disproportionate amount of the impacts of climate change, and Black, Hispanic, and Native American students disproportionately attend school districts with lower average spending and investments on their facilities, and operations and maintenance.⁵ Research has also shown that an estimated 5% of the existing gap in standardized test scores between Black and Hispanic students and their White counterparts can be attributed to heat exposure.⁶

While each of these facilities plays an integral part in the mission of educating California's students, there is currently no existing information on how sustainable these facilities are; no measure of their contributions to our climate crisis; and no existing plan on how to make these facilities climate resilient to protect the health and safety of students.

The \$7 billion California spends each year to build and modernize school facilities, including state and local outlays, must be invested in alignment with the State's legally-required GHG reduction targets, and the latest climate Scoping Plan Update for California which requires cutting emissions by 48% this decade to reach carbon neutrality by 2045.

This generational challenge demands broad vision and clear, multi-directional communication across state, county, and local agencies.

It is abundantly clear that for California, and its 1,000 school districts, to meet our climate goals and ensure the health and safety of students, there must be a comprehensive road map that provides guidance on how we can meet and overcome this challenge.

This conclusion is supported by a recent report⁷ authored by the Stanford Center for Innovation in Global Health and the Center for Cities and Schools at the University of California, Berkeley which posits: "the Master Plan should establish as priorities actions to build climate-resilient, sustainable school facilities (campus), to develop cultures of resilience in and around the schools (community), and to prepare climate-literate leaders for tomorrow's California (curriculum)."

⁵ <https://education.wellcertified.com/hubfs/IWBI%20-%20State%20of%20Our%20Schools%202021.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257%2Fpol.20180612>

⁷ <https://www.climate-readyschoolscoalition.org/ourwork/climate-resilient-schools-report>

SOLUTION

SB 394 will address the lack of guidance and planning around school facilities and sustainability by requiring the CEC to collaborate with various state agencies, and education stakeholders, to develop a Master Plan for Healthy, Sustainable, and Climate-Resilient Schools.

Specifically, SB 394 requires the CEC to organize a steering team to facilitate stakeholder engagement in developing the Master Plan, and requires the plan to contain a statewide baseline assessment of our school facilities' vulnerability to climate threats, their sustainability, and their contributions to harmful emissions.

The Master Plan will also provide the State and the public with substantive guidance and a policy roadmap in how we can ensure California's school facilities can be resilient in the face of climate change and its acute impacts on the health and wellbeing of our students.

A Master Plan will recommend overall priorities for school facilities programs, identify conflicts and gaps in state policy, and ensure that state funds are deployed equitably and cost-efficiently.

Relatedly, a Master Plan will position California schools to take full advantage of forthcoming grants and incentives for decarbonization and climate adaptation under the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act.

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