



# How far will California go on charter schools?

Bills would restrict charters and curb their growth

BY RICARDO CANO / CALMatters

**With new fast-tracked transparency rules for** charter schools in California, Gov. Gavin Newsom has fulfilled a January pledge to bring “long overdue” accountability measures to this growing sector of public schools.

But the open meeting and disclosure law signed last week—after Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed similar bills twice—may turn out to be the least controversial part of the Capitol push for tighter charter school regulation.

Several bills, introduced as teachers strikes have amplified the issue, would impose far more consequential and politically loaded restrictions on the state’s 1,300-plus charters, publicly funded schools that operate outside of the control of school districts and are mostly non-union.

Among them are a cap on charter schools at their current level, strict limits on charter school locations and the appeal of charters denied by local school districts, new rules that would let districts deny a charter based, at least in part, on the potential financial impact on traditional public schools.

Assembly Bills 1505, 1506, 1507 and 1508 would curb the growth of California’s charter schools, which educate about 10 percent of the state’s 6.2 million public school students.

Legislators pushing the proposals say they are long-needed revisions to laws that have gone mostly unchanged for decades.

But unlike Senate Bill 126, which Newsom signed March 5 and on which most charter advocates were neutral, the forthcoming proposals can expect vigorous and organized pushback.

“These are the policy equivalent of an extended middle finger,” said Eric Premack, executive director and founder of the Sacramento-based Charter Schools Development Center.

Unions were equally adamant.

“It’s been a long time coming,” Alex Caputo-Pearl, president of United Teachers Los Angeles, said, calling the bills “common-sense regulations.”

He added that the charter cap bill sponsored by Assemblyman Kevin McCarty of Sacramento was the “most important” bill for the union.

Newsom was noncommittal about the upcoming charter proposals at the bill signing ceremony for SB 126, which will make charter schools abide by the same conflict of interest and open meeting rules as traditional district schools.

But the governor also said that he was “exhausted” by the intense, polarizing debates surrounding the role of charter schools in California, grinding his knuckles together for emphasis.

“The goal over the next few months is to work to address a number of these vexing issues that frankly need to be addressed,” Newsom told reporters. “It’s long overdue to have these conversations.”

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The governor emphasized that he’s already asked state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond to commission a report studying the financial impact of charter school growth on districts’ budgets. But some lawmakers signaled they might not be willing to wait until summer, when Thurmond’s study is expected. “I’m not going to kick the can down the road, which has been done so many times in Sacramento, and wait and hope that some committee that someone has put together comes up with wise recommendations. I’m going to act,” Assemblyman Patrick O’Donnell, a Democrat from Long Beach and chairman of the Assembly Education Committee, told CALMatters.

Assemblyman Kevin Kiley of Rocklin, the education committee vice chairman and its sole Republican, said the proposed bills are “all very bad ideas—each and every one.”

“This is just fundamentally an issue of educational equity,” Kiley said. □

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