

## RESOLUTION 10-04-2016

### DIGEST

#### High School Curriculum: One-Semester Course in Health for Graduation

Amends Education Code section 51225.3 to add a course in health as a requirement for high school students to complete in order to graduate.

### TEXT OF RESOLUTION

**RESOLVED** that the Conference of California Bar Associations recommends that legislation be sponsored to amend Education Code section 51225.3 to read as follows:

#### §51225.3

- 1 (a) A pupil shall complete all of the following while in grades 9 to 12, inclusive, in order  
2 to receive a diploma of graduation from high school:
- 3 (1) At least the following numbers of courses in the subjects specified, each course  
4 having a duration of one year, unless otherwise specified:
- 5 (A) Three courses in English.  
6 (B) Two courses in mathematics. If the governing board of a school district requires more  
7 than two courses in mathematics for graduation, the governing board of the school district may  
8 award a pupil up to one mathematics course credit pursuant to Section 51225.35.  
9 (C) Two courses in science, including biological and physical sciences.  
10 (D) Three courses in social studies, including United States history and geography; world  
11 history, culture, and geography; a one-semester course in American government and civics; and  
12 a one-semester course in economics.  
13 (E) One course in visual or performing arts or foreign language. For purposes of  
14 satisfying the requirement specified in this subparagraph, a course in American Sign Language  
15 shall be deemed a course in foreign language.  
16 (F) Two courses in physical education, unless the pupil has been exempted pursuant to  
17 the provisions of this code.  
18 (G) A one-semester course in health.
- 19 (2) Other coursework requirements adopted by the governing board of the school district.  
20 (b) The governing board, with the active involvement of parents, administrators, teachers,  
21 and pupils, shall adopt alternative means for pupils to complete the prescribed course of study  
22 that may include practical demonstration of skills and competencies, supervised work experience  
23 or other outside school experience, career technical education classes offered in high schools,  
24 courses offered by regional occupational centers or programs, interdisciplinary study,  
25 independent study, and credit earned at a postsecondary educational institution. Requirements for  
26 graduation and specified alternative modes for completing the prescribed course of study shall be  
27 made available to pupils, parents, and the public.  
28 (c) If a pupil completed a career technical education course that met the requirements of  
29 subparagraph (E) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) of Section 51225.3, as amended by the act  
30 adding this section, before the inoperative date of that section, that course shall be deemed to  
31 fulfill the requirements of subparagraph (E) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) of this section.  
32 (d) This section shall become operative upon the date that Section 51225.3, as amended  
33 by the act adding this section, becomes inoperative.

(Proposed new language underlined; language to be deleted stricken)

**PROPOSER:** Bar Association of San Francisco

## **STATEMENT OF REASONS**

The Problem: California is experiencing a health care emergency, and it is mostly caused by obesity. Obesity is a condition that can be prevented, especially in young people. State Controller John Chiang recently reported: “The economic cost to California of adults who are obese, overweight, and physically inactive is equivalent to more than a third of the State’s total budget.” “California Wellness Plan,” California Department of Public Health (CDPH) p. 9 (2014). The CDPH also reported: “California has the highest obesity-related costs in the United States, estimated at \$15.2 billion with 41.5% of these costs financed through Medicare and Medi-Cal.” “Obesity in California: the Weight of the State, 2000-2012,” CDPH, p. 4, n. 42 (2014). The State Controller and the CDPH are telling us that we have a very expensive healthcare problem, and that we must control it.

The Solution: If Californians were able to lose some weight, then we would save money on treatment costs. For example, the CDPH reported: “If adult BMI [Body Mass Index] was reduced by 5%, California could save \$81.7 billion in obesity-related health care costs by 2030. “Obesity in California,” CDPH, p. 4, n. 44 (2014). Prevention is necessary to reduce the trends, and it must be taught to our youth. Fortunately, California is able to influence every teenager by adding a one-semester course in “health” to its list of high school graduation requirements.

Education Code §51225.3 currently requires thirteen one-year-long courses for high school graduation. This means that most high school students can complete the state requirements within the first three years of high school. As a result, adding a one-semester health course requirement would displace an elective course. Yes, it will cost money for every school district to add a “health course” requirement. The issue is whether to invest in prevention – or to keep spending outrageous sums of money on expensive medical treatments.

New York already requires a one-half-year course in health for high school graduation. Chapter 11 Regulations of the Commissioner, State of New York, §135.3 Health Education (c). Fortunately, the California Department of Education has already created a curriculum for a high school “health” class, and it includes lessons in proper nutrition, diet and exercise. The curriculum has already been developed, and all we need to do is to apply it to every California high school student.

## **IMPACT STATEMENT**

This proposed resolution does not affect any other law, statute or rule.

## **CURRENT OR PRIOR RELATED LEGISLATION**

“The California Healthy Young Act,” added by Stats., 2015, Ch. 398 (established a high school graduation requirement for comprehensive sex education).

“The Pupil Nutrition, Health, and Achievement Act of 2001,” added by Stats. 2001, Ch. 913 (established requirements for healthier foods and beverages to be provided by school nutrition programs).

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**RESPONSIBLE FLOOR DELEGATE:** Catherine Rucker

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**RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION**  
**APPROVE IN PRINCIPLE**

History:

Similar to Resolution 07-12-15, which was disapproved.

Reasons:

This resolution amends Education Code section 51225.3 to add a course in health as a requirement for high school students to complete in order to graduate. This resolution should be approved in principle because health education is a critical life competency which impacts individual and community health and welfare, and should be required, along with academics and physical education, in a high school curriculum.

Fourteen million Californians live with at least one chronic disease, and half that number suffer from multiple chronic conditions. Chronic disease and injury cause the majority of deaths and contribute to poor quality of life, disability and premature death. The prevalence of chronic disease carries a heavy economic impact on individuals and society. Yet chronic diseases are largely preventable. It is estimated that \$10 per person per year invested in prevention would yield \$1.7 billion annually in health care savings in California within five years, a return of \$4.80 for each \$1 spent. Education and resources concerning chronic conditions tend to be reactive rather than proactive with regard to promoting the prevention of disease. There is the need for, and significant value to be derived from cogent education in the area of health. It is optimally addressed as part of a high school education. (See, e.g., Calif. Dept. of Public Health, *California Wellness Plan* (2014).) An effort to educate California students in health (see Educ. Code, § 51210.8 [2008 implementation and 2011 revision of the Health Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten through Grade Twelve]) was suspended due to budgetary reasons. (See Assem. Bill No. 42, 2008-2009 Reg. Sess.) & Sen. Bill No. 70 (2010-2011 Reg. Sess.) This resolution would redouble the worthwhile plan to make health education an integral part of a high school education.

## **COUNTERARGUMENTS**

### **SANTA CLARA COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION**

This resolution seeks to add a mandatory one semester course in “Health” that high school students would need to take in order to graduate. The purpose behind the resolution is to address California’s obesity problem. However, it is unclear how a one semester course given to high school students – who, depending on when the course is taught, may be all of 14 or 15 years old – will act to suddenly reverse or halt the obesity issue.

The resolution also refers to New York State, pointing out that it already has a mandatory Health class, i.e., if New York can do it, so can California. Of course, that example is made in the abstract, without any information as to what other classes New York does or not require, or what its graduation requirements are compared to California. Moreover, the resolution’s solution fails to state what exactly is taught in that class or what its purpose is, making it a less than effective comparison.

The resolution is also problematic for the same reason as a similar resolution last year (07-12-2015 which sought to add classes in health and nutrition), in that it lacks specificity and adds a class to the mandatory graduation requirements that would be better suited as an elective. It is highly unlikely that education as to obesity would take a full semester. Of course, the specifics of what is to be taught are not included in the resolution, meaning that much, if not all, of the proposed “Health” course could cover topics having nothing to do with obesity, not to mention that people could differ on the propriety of some of the items the proponent includes within the ambit of these subjects and/or the point of view taught on some of the issues.

While one can certainly see the logic in offering a class in health as an elective, making such a class mandatory is not the proper avenue. Santa Clara County, therefore, recommends disapproval.