

Assembly Bills encourage expansion on cultural, alcohol education

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opposed to trying to highlight and represent more voices than we traditionally have.”

While the goals of AB 1821 are widely supported, some educators are concerned about the practical challenges of integrating additional content into an already-packed curriculum. Howard expressed how the demands of balancing state mandates with College Board requirements can complicate efforts to teach effectively.

“This (bill) is separate from (the) College Board, and those of us who teach AP classes are balancing a lot of curriculum,” she said. “So when we are (forced) to cover more, there comes a point where we’re covering so much that we can’t actually cover anything in the way that we would love to. ‘What are we taking out? How are we going to fit this all to make a story that students can learn and understand and still relate to?’”

Assembly Bill 2865

Authored by former Assemblymember Wendy Carrillo, AB 2865 mandates that California schools enhance health education by providing detailed instruction on the short- and long-term risks of excessive alcohol use. Topics include the effects of alcohol on mental and physical health, such as impaired judgment, addiction, depression and chronic illnesses.

“Schools are an important setting for interventions aimed at preventing alcohol use and abuse among adolescents,” Carrillo said in a statement. “Early education is a critical step to avoid alcoholism and the associated harms that come with the disease.”

Berman echoed these sentiments, emphasizing the importance of early and preemptive intervention.

“AB 2865 will provide updated, evidence-based education to students early on,” he wrote. “This early intervention will foster greater awareness about excessive alcohol use and the health risks that come with it.”

Living Skills teacher Max Zipperstein sees firsthand how early education can shape students’ understanding of responsible alcohol consumption. He believes these lessons are crucial before students leave home and face real-world decisions about drinking.

“We tend to send our students off to college without having an understanding of what drinking responsibly actually means,” he said. “The culture around alcohol is very different compared to other parts around the world. In the U.S., you’re not legally able to drink until you’re 21. However, we do know that a lot of students are probably engaging in underage drinking, but they’ve never really been taught how to drink responsibly, whereas in Europe students are often introduced to alcohol at a younger age. They’re also learning how to drink with their parents who teaching them how to drink responsibly. But in the U.S. the drinking age is not available or doesn’t come into play until after you’ve left the home.”

According to Zipperstein, Gunn’s current Living Skills curriculum already includes lessons on alcohol education, something he views as a major advantage.

“The nice thing about Gunn is that we actually have (alcohol education) courses already in place,” he said. “We spend an entire unit on drug addiction and alcohol abuse in Living Skills, and we’re constantly making changes and updating it as more research is done on this topic.”

Zipperstein concedes, however, that implementing an alcohol education curriculum in schools that do not currently have one poses challenges — both for teachers and the community.

“Some of the challenges that some educators could face is figuring out a way to appropriately design a curriculum that provides adequate information to students, especially with a sensitive topic like this,” he said. “There might be some pushback from parents in the community saying that students are ‘too young’ to be introduced to material, that high school is not an appropriate setting for us to discuss alcohol.”

Ultimately, Zipperstein hopes that no matter how the curriculum is structured, students leave the classroom equipped with the tools to make informed decisions.

“We never have control over what our students do once they leave our classrooms, but we want to prepare them with the knowledge and the information that they will need in life so that they can make the best choices for themselves,” he said. ■

Controversial school board meetings lead to new courses, disagreement

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Student response was overwhelmingly positive, with freshman Quinn Boutin highlighting the inclusive curriculum.

“Moving to the Bay Area, I became part of a community that’s incredibly diverse,” Boutin said. “This class helped me better understand the experiences of my classmates — experiences I didn’t fully appreciate before. It also made me reflect on my own identity and privilege in ways I never had.”

Austin also shared his experience from the Superintendent’s Student Advisory Group, which held

their first in-person meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 15. Due to a full agenda on Jan. 21, student comments from the meeting were tabled to the next board meeting on Feb. 11.

Superintendent’s Student Advisory Board

From 5-7 p.m., students from all three PAUSD high schools — Gunn, Paly and Palo Alto Middle College High School — gathered at JLS to discuss the topics of artificial intelligence in the classroom environment, cell phone policies, Evidence-Based Grading and attendance zoning. While Austin had organized a similar event in 2019, it was revived by Paly’s C-Magazine staff members juniors

Talia Boneh, Amalia Tormala and Sophia Zhang.

“We were writing an article called ‘The Bay Area Bubble’ for C-Mag, and we saw one of Dr. Austin’s weekly letters where he talked about how he went to middle college and talked to students about their experiences,” Tomala said. “We found it really enlightening and, in talking to him, we realized it would be cool to establish a more regular way for students to communicate with the district.” ■

Wishing our Gunn
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spring semester!

2025

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