

## Changes to California Independent Study Documentation and Staffing Requirements Effective Immediately

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The 2026 Education Omnibus Budget Trailer Bill, also known as Assembly Bill (AB) 126, includes revisions to California's independent study statutes, effective July 9, 2026. These changes include new pupil work product documentation requirements and revised options for calculating student-to-teacher staffing ratios for school districts, county offices of education (COEs), and charter schools (collectively referred to as LEAs).

Compliance with these new requirements will be included within the scope of the annual audit, and noncompliance will impact ADA and apportionment.

### **New Documentation Requirements**

AB 126 amended Education Code section 51747.5 to establish specific requirements regarding pupil work products that must be maintained by an LEA for pupils participating in traditional independent study as a condition of eligibility for apportionment funding.

Previously, the Education Code required LEAs to maintain records sufficient to support attendance claims but did not specify what must be retained. Under the amended statute, *an LEA must maintain at least one completed pupil work product in each of the following subject areas:*

- English Language Arts
- Mathematics
- History–Social Science
- Science

These pupil work products must be retained for each of the three attendance periods during the school year. The three required attendance periods are:

1. From the beginning of the school year through the end of the first attendance period.
2. From the day following the end of the first attendance period through the end of the second attendance period.
3. From the day following the end of the second attendance period through the end of the school year.

If a pupil is not enrolled in one or more of the required subject areas during a particular attendance period, the LEA must instead maintain four completed pupil work products that are representative of the pupil's course schedule during that attendance period.

## **Expanded Application of Independent Study Staffing Ratios**

AB 126 also amended Education Code section 51745.6 to expand the certificated employee staffing ratio requirements to expressly include COEs and charter schools, in addition to school districts. The staffing ratios apply to COEs and school districts for independent study pupils age 18 years or less, and to charter schools regardless of pupil age.

Under the revised statute, an LEA must satisfy one of the following staffing ratio options:

1. Maintain an ADA-to-fulltime certificated employee ratio that does not exceed the ratio used in the LEA's other educational programs.
2. Use the prior year's ADA-to-certificated employee ratio of the high school district or unified school district with the largest average daily attendance in the county, or an alternative ratio established through that district's collective bargaining agreement. For charter schools serving multiple counties, the comparison is based on the largest high school district or unified school district in the county in which the chartering authority is located.
3. Maintain a fixed ADA-to-certificated employee ratio of 25 to 1, or a fixed ratio of less than 25 pupils per certificated employee.

Alternatively, a new higher or lower ratio for all other educational programs offered by the LEA may be negotiated in a collective bargaining agreement or a memorandum of understanding that indicates an existing collective bargaining agreement contains an alternative average daily attendance ratio.

Attendance ratios will also be reported and made available to the public. Each high school and unified school district must annually report its attendance ratios to the county superintendent of schools by a deadline established by the county superintendent. The county superintendent must then annually publish those attendance ratios on the county office of education's website.

## **Takeaways**

While AB 126 does not fundamentally alter the operation of independent study programs, it slightly alters the independent study documentation requirements and expands the staffing ratio options for all LEAs. School districts, COEs, and charter schools should review their independent study policies, administrative procedures, record retention practices, and staffing ratios to ensure compliance with the new requirements.

If you have any questions regarding the above, please contact the authors of this Client News Brief or an attorney at one of our [eight offices](#) located statewide. You can also subscribe to our [podcast](#), follow us on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#), or download our [mobile app](#).

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