

Senate Bill 1091

School Greening Projects

Senator Caroline Menjivar (D – San Fernando Valley)

SUMMARY

SB 1091 will improve access for schools to pursue greening projects. Specifically, this bill will address one policy barrier to greening school grounds by capping the required improvements to the path of travel, beyond the greening project boundary to 20% of the adjusted construction cost for the project.

PROBLEM

Children, especially those that attend schools in urban areas that are ill equipped to shelter students from extreme heat, are at heightened risk of suffering heat-related illnesses, poor health and learning outcomes, as heat hinders students from engaging in outdoor activities and exercising.^{i, ii}

The lack of trees and natural areas disproportionately impacts communities of color and communities with the lowest incomes. When nature is absent where children spend their time, they are denied the health and learning benefits afforded to communities with access to more resources.ⁱⁱⁱ

Long term planning and sustained public funding investments are necessary to bring green schoolyards to scale across the state. Additionally, there are policy and institutional barriers that need to be addressed to ensure that those investments are successful in creating green climate resilient school grounds that serve some of the most vulnerable children and communities.^{iv}

BACKGROUND

Current law requires school-ground greening projects that remove asphalt, plant trees and create nature-based outdoor learning spaces to bring the path of travel to the project up to code without a limit on the cost. Path of travel improvements may include paving, bathroom, ramps, parking, and other building improvements beyond project boundaries. This represents a tremendous barrier to

greening school grounds because even a small project can trigger expensive upgrades.

Existing law, [SB 515](#) (Stern, Chapter 489, Statutes of 2023), limits the cost of complying with providing an accessible path of travel to certain shade structure projects to 20%.

The Legislature has recognized extreme heat as a serious and urgent threat and called on state agencies and departments to invest resources in increasing resilience to extreme heat. The 2022 California Extreme Heat Action Plan recognizes the urgency for cooling public schools in vulnerable communities and promotes the use of nature-based solutions. In addition, the state has recently made investments to start addressing climate resilience at schools.

SOLUTION

SB 1091 will improve access for schools to conduct greening projects. Specifically, this bill will limit the cost of complying with the requirement to provide an accessible path of travel to a schoolyard greening project to 20% of the adjusted construction cost of the project, in line with federal requirements in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

STATUS

Introduced – February 12, 2024

SUPPORT

Green Schoolyards America (Sponsor)
Trust for Public Land (Sponsor)
UndauntedK12

CONTACT

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- ⁱ Smith, C. J. (2019). Pediatric thermoregulation: Considerations in the face of global climate change. *Nutrients*, 11(9), 2010. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11092010>
- ⁱⁱ Uibel, D., Sharma, R., Pionkowski, D., Sheffield, P. E., & Clougherty, J. E. (2022). Association of Ambient Extreme Heat with pediatric morbidity: A scoping review. *International Journal of Biometeorology*, 66(8), 1683–1698. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00484-022-02310-5>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Latane, Claire. *Benefits of Schoolyard Forests*, Green Schoolyards America, 15 July 2023,

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- ^{iv} *Protecting Californians with Heat-Resilient Schools*, UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation, May 2023, innovation.luskin.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Protecting-Californians-with-Heat-Resilient-Schools.pdf.

