



# CAPITOL WEEKLY

COVERING CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

## OPINION

### Strengthening oversight without crippling public charter schools



by JEFF RICE posted 07.16.2025

OPINION – Recent headlines and audits have raised legitimate concerns about financial mismanagement and lapses in governance of public schools and their oversight entities. While increased accountability throughout our public education system is essential, policymakers must not single out public charter schools alone. Financial management standards should apply to all types of public schools. Legislation that will cripple good quality charter schools that are high-performing, law-abiding, and student-focused is not the right answer.

Flex-based personalized learning public charter schools are one of many successful public charter school models that are designed and have proven to be positive laboratories of innovation. They are able to pivot more quickly, tailor programs to student needs, and engage families in ways traditional school systems cannot. But with that flexibility comes responsibility. Charter school leaders agree that more robust checks and balances are needed. That’s why we support SB 414 (Ashby) which provides common sense reforms to close loopholes in accountability and oversight that allowed a few bad actor public school organizations to misuse state funds.

SB 414 addresses four areas including charter school governing board policies around vendor relationships, authorizer oversight and accountability, auditing practices and auditor training and expertise, and state oversight and review. These important reforms are designed to protect students and taxpayer dollars and put guardrails in place to catch inappropriate school policies and practices.

SB 414 also addresses a concern raised in a report by the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) and Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) that the term "nonclassroom-based instruction" is a misnomer. Changing the term in statute to "flex-based instruction", as proposed in SB 414, more accurately reflects the flexible and personalized structure of these public charter schools to better accommodate the needs, challenges, interests, and goals of hundreds of thousands of individual students who have previously struggled in a traditional classroom-only environment and rigidly structured schedule.

While SB 414 takes a responsible and targeted approach, AB 84 (Muratsuchi) instead presents an existential threat to all public charter schools by wielding a very broad and punitive heavy-handed hammer against good quality public charter schools and the students who choose them. The students targeted for these severely restrictive measures are among the most marginalized and fragile public school students including students with disabilities, socio-economically disadvantaged and minority students, LGBTQ+ students, drop-out recovery students, pregnant teens, and more.

These vulnerable students consistently share success stories about how flex-based personalized learning public charter schools have been a lifeline and safety net for them. They receive education tailored to their needs, interests, and goals as well as targeted academic and social-emotional support to ensure they are staying on track.

Further proof of these students' success is in the publicly available data on the [California School Dashboard](#) which shows how local educational agencies and schools are performing. Of particular note are the academic results of students enrolled in [APLUS+](#) fully virtual member schools. This data shows that over the past three school years, students enrolled in APLUS+ flex-based fully virtual member schools for 2+ years have consistently outperformed the state average in both English Language Art and Math.

In the 2023-24 school year, 53% of students at APLUS+ fully virtual member schools met or exceeded grade level standards in English Language Arts compared to 47% of students statewide, while 37% of students at APLUS+ fully virtual schools met or exceeded grade level standards in math compared to 36% of students statewide. Additionally, a higher percentage of students are engaged in learning as evidenced by APLUS+ member schools' lower chronic absenteeism (5.9% vs 18.6%) and suspension rates (.3% vs 3.2%) than the state average.

Under the guise of so-called reforms, AB 84 will undermine an entire sector of public schools that are successfully educating many of our most challenged students by restricting student access to this personalized and flexible education model. While we share the goal of preventing fraud and protecting public funds, AB 84 is a significant and harmful overreach. Instead, the

Legislature should pass SB 414 to provide increased accountability, oversight, and transparency without harming vulnerable students in need.

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