

CSBA's Gold Star-Rotten Apple bills

Highlighting policies that help students shine — and legislation that leaves a bitter taste for schools

WHAT MAKES A GOLD STAR BILL?

Returning a student's test with a gold star is an established sign of recognition for a job well done. There are few equivalents for the adults who help create the policy conditions for student success. CSBA aims to change that by annually honoring Gold Star legislation, some of the most outstanding education bills from this year's legislative session.

This Gold Star list acknowledges legislators who enact good policy with legislative proposals that benefit the state's public schools. Bills that make CSBA's Gold Star list distinguish themselves by supporting one of the association's goals or policy pillars: strengthening local governance, securing fair funding, improving conditions of children and ensuring achievement for all.

CSBA's 2026 Gold Star bills stand apart because they focus on addressing the root causes of California's educational stagnation such as fragmentation, lack of state accountability, disconnected policymaking, weak alignment between budgets and outcomes, insufficient support for local schools, lack of data transparency and excessive red tape and mandates.

WHAT MAKES A ROTTEN APPLE BILL?

Not every proposal coming out of the Legislature deserves praise. Some bills may be well intentioned, yet create serious unintended consequences for California's public schools.

That's why CSBA is introducing its Rotten Apple list — legislation that may sound appealing on the surface but, upon closer examination, threatens the ability of school districts and county offices of education to govern effectively, operate responsibly and serve students well.

Rotten Apple bills result in more mandates, erect barriers to local success, obscure critical data on state support for local schools, complicate local efforts to boost student outcomes and close achievement gaps, disrupt operations in local school districts and county offices of education, divert resources from student support and increase exposure to litigation.

★ GOLD STAR BILLS

- ▶ Better outcomes
- ▶ Shared accountability between the state and local levels
- ▶ Stronger local governance
- ▶ Transparent public reporting
- ▶ Smarter state support
- ▶ Coherent statewide strategy

See the 2026 list here ▶

🍏 ROTTEN APPLE BILLS

- ▶ Pile on one-size-fits-all mandates
- ▶ Increase litigation risk
- ▶ Build bureaucracy that interferes with school operations
- ▶ Undermine local governance
- ▶ Hamper local efforts to boost student performance and close achievement gaps

See the 2026 list here ▶

See the list of CSBA's 2026 Gold Star-Rotten Apple bills.

California students only get one chance at school. Let's make sure their experience is golden.