
SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Nancy Skinner, Chair
2019 - 2020 Regular

Bill No: AB 413 **Hearing Date:** June 18, 2019
Author: Jones-Sawyer
Version: April 1, 2019
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** No
Consultant: JK

Subject: Education: At-Promise Youth

HISTORY

Source: Schools for Integrated Academics & Technology (SIATech)
Los Angeles County of Education

Prior Legislation: ACR 197 (Jones-Sawyer), Ch. 106, Stats. 2018

Support: Riverside County Superintendent of Schools; University of California Students Association; 2 individuals

Opposition: California Right to Life Committee, INC.

Assembly Floor Vote: 65 - 4

PURPOSE

The purpose of this bill is to delete the term “at-risk” to describe youth and replace it with the term “at-promise” for purposes of various sections of the Education and Penal Codes.

Existing law establishes that services and activities provided with funds under this chapter shall be used for at-risk youth who are defined as persons from age 5 to 20 years of age and who fall into one or more of the following categories:

- 1) Living in a high-crime or high-violence neighborhood as identified by local or federal law enforcement agencies.
- 2) Live in a low-economic neighborhood as identified by the U.S. Census or come from an impoverished family.
- 3) Are excessively absent from school or are doing poorly in school as identified by personnel from the youth’s school.
- 4) Come from a socially dysfunctional family as identified by local or state social service agencies.
- 5) Have had one or more contacts with the police.
- 6) Have entered the juvenile justice system.
- 7) Are identified by the juvenile justice system as being at risk.
- 8) Are current or former gang members.
- 9) Have one or more family members living at home who are current or former members of a gang.

- 10) Are identified as wards of the court, as defined in Section 601 of the Welfare and Institutions Code. (Pen. Code, § 13825.4 (c) (1)-(10).)

Existing law states that the chancellor of the Riverside campus may appoint an advisory committee to assist in establishing research priorities. These projects shall be related to at-risk youth and street gang activity. (Pen. Code, § 5087 (f).)

Existing law establishes the California Gang, Crime, and Violence Prevention Partnership Program, administered by the Department of Justice for the purposes of reducing gang, criminal activity, and youth violence in communities with a disproportionate at-risk youth population and defines “at-risk youth” as youth who live in a high-crime or high-violence neighborhood; live in a low-economic neighborhood; are excessively absent from school or are doing poorly in school; come from a socially dysfunctional family; have had one or more contacts with the police; have entered the juvenile justice system; are current or former gang members; have one or more family members living at home who are current or former members of a gang; or are identified as wards of the court. (Pen. Code, § 13825.2.)

Existing law states the Legislature hereby finds and declares that young people, especially at-risk youth, are more vulnerable to gang- and drug-related activity during the potentially unsupervised hours between the end of school and the time their parents or guardians return home from work and Los Angeles currently leads the nation in the number of gang members and gang sites, the consumption of drugs, the amount of drugs confiscated, drug-related violent crimes, and has the greatest number of young people between 6 and 18 years of age who are “at risk.”

This bill changes all usage of the term “at-risk” to “at-promise”.

COMMENTS

1. Need for This bill

According to the author:

Perception plays an important role in the success or failure of students. “At-risk youth” is a deficit-focused label used to describe children living in difficult situations. This is a term that spotlights the youths that are predicted to become just another statistic of high dropout rates or drug use, rather than looking at their potential to succeed. As a result of the stigma created through the use of “at-risk,” these students are subjected to an expectation to fail and can be treated as such. Educators and community leaders across the country are instead pushing for the strength-based approach of “at-promise youth” in order to better foster growth and empower these students. These groups recognize that a growth mindset must replace the current mindset that stymies the opportunities for California’s low-income and minority students.

Transitioning from “at-risk youth” to “at-promise youth” is an important step in eliminating the biased mindset that is too pervasive in schools and communities across the country. Larry Bell, a leading education consultant and co-chair of the Reaching At-Promise Students Association (RAPSA) wrote, “What we say to students matter. How we as educators refer to our students matter. When teachers

consistently and intentionally call their students encouraging names, the students begin to believe. They believe their teacher believes in them and this in turn makes them believe in themselves.” By improving the educational outcomes of students and believing in their capacity to succeed, these youth are being encouraged to stay in school and continue their education, a crucial step in ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline.

AB 413 targets the “at-risk” term throughout the Education and Penal codes, and transitions the State of California to recognizing the potential and possibilities of our children, instead of focusing on their deficits.

2. Usage of at-promise vs. at-risk

The use of the term “at-promise” vs. “at-risk” has been in youth development discourse for over two decades. Many scholars and youth activists have promoted the term for its self-identifying, positive outlook towards youth in difficult environments. The term “at-promise”, although it does not have a universal definition, follows this general premise, “‘At Promise’ references the extraordinary raw potential every young person possesses. The term views youth through a strength-based perspective. It also helps to fill in some of the details missing in the former labels, reminding us that youth have natural gifts and innate potential for greatness.”¹

Educators have shied away from the term “at-risk” due to its negative characterization that can often be seen as stigmatizing. According to Reaching At-Promise Students Association (RAPSA), “Linguistic researchers, sociologists, and early child educators argue that labeling someone “at-risk,” sends a message to the youth and others that the person is in a precarious situation, may engage in risky behavior, and lacks agency. We may feel bad for the youth, and we do not expect much of a youth that is “at-risk.” However, in changing the discourse, we may change the outcome.”²

AB 413 contributes to these initiatives by changing the term “at-risk” to “at-promise” in the education and penal code.

3. Argument in Support

According to the University of California Student Association:

AB 413 would replace the term “at-risk” with “at-promise.” Speaking about youth as being “at-promise” takes into account each child’s potential for success. The words we use to describe people has an impact on the way we treat them. The term “at-promise” youth invokes notions of these young people being able to work hard, be empowered, and uplift themselves and their peers.

The UC Student Association has made efforts to support members of underserved communities on their path towards higher education. We believe in the potential of “at-promise” youth and all that they can contribute to our state. Thus, it is imperative that we take this step in reshaping how our society views these young people.

¹ <http://facesforthefuture.org/why-at-promise-youth-are-good-for-global-health/>

² <https://rapsa.org/2018/05/14/why-does-rapsa-carry-the-at-promise-mantle/>

The University of California Student Association is proud to support AB 413 because it would positively impact our society's perception of "at-promise" youth. We appreciate your consideration of the UC students' views and encourage your 'aye' vote on this bill in committee.

4. Argument in Opposition

According to the California Right to Life Committee, INC.:

AB 413 assumes that a less threatening term would be welcome by counselors and students alike. Names are important and do signify concepts. Removing "at risk" and "high risk" for "at promise" and "high promise" signals that students should feel better about themselves and that their behavior will adapt to this feel good idea. Will voters and citizens and families experience better lives as a result?

Our elected representatives propose plans each legislative session to solve social problems. We voters are not observing much success with such bills and laws. CRLC does believe that these legislative endeavors are giving false hope to Californians.

However, many of these social issue bills/enacted laws are actually providing an expansion of the workforce with different levels of new employees. Generally, this happens at the expense of the schools and captive students.

CRLC urges a NO vote as AB 413 is another feel good measure and a waste of taxpayers' dollars.

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