
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Senator Melissa Hurtado, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	SB 341	Hearing Date:	4/29/25
Author:	Pérez		
Version:	4/22/25 Amended		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Reichel Everhart		

Subject: Instructional School Gardens Program: reestablishment: Department of Food and Agriculture

SUMMARY:

This bill places the Instructional School Gardens Program under the administration of the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA). The bill requires CDFA to convene a working group to advise and assist the department on carrying out the program. The working group would consist of CDFA, the California Department of Education (CDE), the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle), the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and instructional school garden community-based organizations. The bill requires CDFA, in consultation with the working group, on or before July 1, 2026, develop a competitive grant process for local educational agencies or other entities that have an established track record of operating outdoor school programs and are in partnership with at least one local educational agency. The bill requires the department to hold at least 2 public meetings to gather input on the development of the competitive grant process. Finally, the bill is contingent on receiving sufficient appropriations or private funds.

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the Instructional School Gardens Program under CDE. The program was established to promote, create, and support instructional school gardens through the allocation of grants, and through technical assistance provided, to school districts, charter schools, or county offices of education (*Education Code Section 51796*).

PROPOSED LAW:

This bill:

- 1) Revises and recasts the Instructional School Gardens Program under the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

- 2) Revises the findings and declarations to include, as part of the garden based learning, information on the importance of composting organic waste as part of a statewide effort to reduce the current rate of organic waste comprising 48% of landfill waste, to help meet California's 75% overall recycling goal, and to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases through reductions in landfilling organic waste.
- 3) Defines the following, for purposes of this section:
 - a. "CAL FIRE" to mean the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.
 - b. "CalRecycle" to mean the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery.
 - c. "Eligible project" to mean any project or action identified in Section 4799.12 of the Public Resources Code or in paragraph 2 of subdivision (d) of Section 12802.10 of the Government Code that can feasibly be completed on the school site of a local educational agency.
 - d. "Local educational agency" to mean a school district, county office of education, or charter school.
 - e. "School garden" to mean any eligible project located within the property boundaries of a school site of a local educational agency that is used specifically for a wide range of academic instruction and other uses, including nutrition, social and emotional learning, building agency, and other related activities.
 - f. "Working group" to mean the working group on instructional school gardens convened pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 51796.
- 4) Requires the department to convene a working group consisting of, but not limited to, CDFA, CDE, CalRecycle, CAL FIRE, CDPH and instructional school garden community-based organizations to advise the secretary and assist the department in carrying out the program.
- 5) Establishes the Instructional School Gardens and Maintenance Fund.
- 6) Requires the department, in consultation with the working group, to establish a competitive grant process, including selection criteria, goals, prioritizations, and guidelines on or before July 1, 2026.
- 7) Requires eligible applicants to be local educational agencies or other entities that have an established track record of operating outdoor, experiential learning programs in schools and that are in partnership with at least one local educational agency.
- 8) Defines, for purposes of this subparagraph "partnership" to mean a memorandum of understanding, services agreement, or letter of support between the applying entity and a local educational agency.
- 9) Requires applicants to designate one of 2 grant categories for each proposed school site and submit a plan and measurable outcomes for a program of experiential, outdoor instruction, that meet certain requirements.

- a. An operational grant: For school sites that have adequate outdoor learning facilities and experiential learning programs that offer regular opportunities to all pupils.
 - b. An in-development grant: For school sites whose facilities need improvements or whose programs are not regularly involving all pupils. School sites receiving an in-development grant shall be eligible for additional short-term funding to support infrastructure and program development and shall be required to partner with a technical assistance provider approved by CDFA, in consultation with the working group.
- 10) Makes the program contingent upon an appropriation or receipt of sufficient private funds received.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT:

According to the author:

Understanding how food and plants grow can be read in a book, but the feel of soil and seeds, and seeing the time it takes to nurture a garden is an experience like no other. 25 years ago, California created the popular Instructional School Garden Program (ISGP) which planted the seed by allowing schools to apply for grants to establish gardens. But without the expertise and funding for maintenance and instruction, many school garden programs have withered and died. SB 341 will restart and expand the unused, unfunded statewide ISGP for on-site school garden-based education by creating a pathway for future ISGP funding and programming.

Co-sponsors of the bill are confident that the bill paves the way for students statewide to benefit from hands-on, nature-based learning that fosters lifelong skills and environmental stewardship. They feel instructional school gardens are a proven, cost-effective approach for addressing a myriad of issues including, but not limited to: equity issues, academic achievement, health and nutritional education, hands-on learning opportunities, such as gardening, and food insecurity issues by providing healthy food options, anxiety and social and emotional issues through outdoor experiential learning, attendance issues and low test scores by engaging kids in stimulating, hands-on, project-based, standards-based learning that increases academic engagement; and environmental issues by reducing emissions through sustainable practices like composting, local food production, and carbon sequestration

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION:

None received.

RELATED LEGISLATION:

AB 1014 (Cardoza, Chapter 713, Statutes of 1999): Established the Instructional School Gardens Program under the California Department of Education.

SUPPORT:

Garden School Foundation (Co-Sponsor)
Growing Together (Co-Sponsor)
Life Lab (Co-Sponsor)
Living Classroom (Co-Sponsor)
SEI (Co-Sponsor)
Ventura County Farm to School (Co-Sponsor)
Alliance for a Better Community
Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education
Blueblossom Consulting
California State PTA
Center for Environmental Health
Children & Nature Network
Christine Land Tutoring
Coast Water Solutions
Coastal Community Preschool
Comite Civico Del Valle, INC
Community Roots Academy
Edible Schoolyard Project, the
Epic Gardening
Facts Families Advocating for Chemical and Toxics Safety
Fairwood Alliance
Food Empowerment Project
Food Exploration and Discovery
Food for Thought Ojai
Island Art Therapy
Latimer Garden & Outdoor Classroom
Lu Sutton Elementary School
Master Gardener Association of San Diego County
Mountain View Whisman School District
New Mettle Farms
Oakland Goes Outdoors

Ojai Unified School District
One Green Step
Otay Ranch Academy for the Arts
Our Global Family Farm
Oxnard Union High School District
Poway Unified School District
Rio Real Middle School
Rio School District
River City High School Garden Club
Roots and Wings
San Diego Children and Nature
San Diego County Office of Education
San Diego Unified School District
San Francisco Youth Commission
San Luis Coastal Unified School District
Ten Strands
The Heal Project
Turning Point Foundation
University Elementary At LA Fiesta School Garden
Veggielution
Westside Farm and Feed
Yuba River Charter School

-- END --