

Changing Behavior on Hot School Days

In the middle of a heat wave, schools have to decide how they will keep students safe — the state does not require any specific planning or actions.

Establishing protocols or guidelines for how to handle extreme heat events is the responsibility of individual school districts and schools — there is no statewide standard.

Multiple state agencies provide guidance to help schools and districts respond to heat. For instance, the Department of Public Health published [guidelines](#) for when schools should cancel certain sporting activities, referring to a [heat risk forecast](#) created by the National Weather Service. The Department of Education provides a limited set of guidelines on its webpage, referring schools to other agencies for more resources.



By 2035, researchers [estimate](#) that 60% of elementary school districts in the state will see 100+ days each year over 90 F.



Some schools and districts have implemented heat response emergency plans.



[San Diego Unified](#) calls for shortened school days when forecasts hit 95 F with a heat index of 103 F, if not all classrooms have air conditioning.



Heat is not a new issue: in 1992, the state Parent Teacher Association called for staff training on heat illness, among other [recommendations](#).

WHAT CAN THE STATE DO?

Collaborate with researchers and school staff to study and consider establishing guidelines for heat-related illness prevention and response in schools.

- » This is consistent with the [2022 Extreme Heat Action Plan](#), which recommends state agencies “explore implementation of indoor and outdoor heat-exposure rules for schools.”
- » Consider requiring all schools or districts to establish extreme heat emergency plans to protect students and workers. (Optionally, the state could create a baseline/template plan that school districts could use and improve upon.)
- » Consider providing guidance for creating these plans, including a recommended temperature or heat index threshold at which outdoor activities should be modified or canceled.
- » Create an educational packet on heat-related risks and preventative actions for schools to share with students and guardians each year.

Policy Action Example

[AB 1653](#), signed into law in October 2023, requires schools and districts to include procedures for sports-related heat illness in athletic programs’ emergency action plans. It requires the California Interscholastic Federation to develop guidance on athletic activity safety based on [wet bulb globe temperature](#) (which assesses heat stress based on temperature, humidity, and other factors).