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.

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.

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.

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).

The Luskin Center for Innovation does not endorse any specific legislation. For additional citations and details, refer to our 2023 policy brief, “Protecting Californians with Heat-Resilient Schools.” To learn more, visit our heat equity webpage or contact associate director V. Kelly Turner at vkturner@ucla.edu.