

# California Democrats strip elected education superintendent of authority

Marc Wells  
1 July 2026

California Governor Gavin Newsom has reached a deal with legislative leaders to strip the independently elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction of all managerial authority over the California Department of Education, transferring control to a governor-appointed Director of Education. The plan was embedded in Assembly Bill 181 and coincides with the June 29–30 voting window to pass the complete fiscal budget blueprint before the midnight start of the new fiscal year on July 1.

Under the current system, the Superintendent is elected by voters statewide and oversees a public education system with a budget exceeding \$100 billion, serving millions of students. AB 181 eliminates that independent mandate. Beginning January 15, the next governor would appoint a Director of Education, confirmed by the state Senate, who would assume all operational control. The elected Superintendent would be reduced to a largely ceremonial role.

The bill is being sold in the language of technocratic efficiency. Newsom acted on recommendations from Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), a Stanford-based research institute, which argued that splitting authority between an elected superintendent and the governor creates “inefficiency and ineffectiveness.” Dozens of education advocacy organizations endorsed the concept. Ted Lempert of Children Now praised Newsom for providing “strong leadership.” Former State Board President Michael Kirst called it “an important milestone.”

PACE and its endorsers are instruments of the ruling class, staffed by personnel who circulate between universities, foundations and state agencies, serving as conduits for the corporate restructuring of public education. The “efficiency” they invoke is code for removing institutional obstacles to the imposition of

austerity.

Both candidates running for Superintendent in the November election—Sonja Shaw of Chino Valley Unified and Richard Barrera of San Diego Unified—opposed the measure. The California Teachers Association also criticized the reform, noting that voters had recently cast ballots assuming candidates would run the Department of Education.

The significance of weakening the elected Superintendent is not that it violates democratic principles in the abstract. The Superintendent election was always a mechanism of bourgeois democracy, a form through which the bourgeoisie rules. What AB 181 reveals is that the ruling class can no longer tolerate even the limited institutional buffers that bourgeois democracy once provided. The Democrats are jettisoning their own legal forms when they become inconvenient, a sign of the advanced decay of American democracy.

Newsom represents a ruling class terrified by the rise of workers’ opposition. His proposal forms part of a broader, bipartisan offensive against public education unfolding across the United States. At the federal level, the Trump administration has moved aggressively to dismantle the Department of Education and convert schools into centers of nationalist and religious indoctrination, most recently demanding that universities submit to a “Compact for Academic Excellence” that imposes ideological conformity in exchange for funding, an American version of the Nazi policy of *Gleichschaltung*.

Newsom, who has carefully cultivated an image as the leader of the Democratic “resistance” to Trump, is replicating the same authoritarian logic at the state level. He has already led the charge in expanding state repression, deploying the California Highway Patrol as

“domestic shock troops” for crime suppression sweeps and homeless encampment clearances across the state’s major cities. His “SAFE Task Force” mobilized six state agencies to forcibly destroy the belongings of homeless residents.

The education power grab extends this logic to public schools. The weakening of the independently elected Superintendent and the concentration of authority in a single appointed administrator reporting directly to the governor streamlines the implementation of budget cuts, layoffs, school closures and, fundamentally, the suppression of labor unrest.

The ruling class is concerned with removing obstacles to austerity on a public education system facing devastating deficits, including a potential \$1.6 billion collapse in Los Angeles alone by 2027-28.

These deficits are being manufactured to fund the trillions poured into militarism, above all, the war against Iran. The same political establishment that claims “there is no money” for schools is lavishing hundreds of billions on the war machine. The assault on public education is inseparable from the drive to war.

The concentration of executive power in education cannot be understood in isolation from the role of the trade union apparatus. The same Democratic Party that is dismantling democratic checks on education relies on the union bureaucracy to police the working class and prevent independent mobilization.

In April 2026, a unified strike of near 70,000 Los Angeles educators—teachers, administrators and classified workers walking out together for the first time in the district’s history—was cancelled in the middle of the night through a joint operation involving the union apparatus, LAUSD management and Democratic Mayor Karen Bass. At 2:30 a.m., just hours before the walkout, SEIU Local 99 announced a last-minute deal. United Teachers Los Angeles and the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles had already capitulated days earlier. Mayor Bass personally intervened in the overnight talks and later appeared at a press conference flanked by union presidents, who thanked her for “stepping in.”

Yvonne Wheeler, president of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, declared she would “rather be here today than on the picket line,” a remark met with loud applause from assembled officials and union executives.

The cancellation paved the way for a wave of layoffs already outlined in the district’s “fiscal stabilization” plan, under which 3,200 workers had received pink slips. Ratification took place in late April and early May. By the time final budget decisions were made, the workforce was already bound by a new contract while management retained full freedom to implement cuts—the same bait-and-switch used earlier this year in San Francisco and last year in Chicago.

The union bureaucracy actively suppresses struggles. The UTLA is controlled by members of the Democratic Socialists of America, and the Los Angeles City Council includes four DSA-endorsed members who voted unanimously to declare a fiscal emergency paving the way for mass layoffs. The pseudo-left provides a left cover for Democratic Party austerity, channeling opposition back into the safe confines of capitalist politics.

These developments evince the essential unity of the Democratic Party, the union bureaucracy and the pseudo-left in managing the social crisis produced by capitalism. The Democrats refuse to fight Trump because they are a capitalist party committed to the same basic policies of war and austerity. Their function is to provide a liberal cover for the dismantling of democratic rights and the immiseration of the working class. Newsom’s 2025-26 budget already imposed \$5 billion in cuts targeting undocumented adults, the disabled and foster youth.

Newsom’s education power grab is the administrative expression of the same class logic that the union bureaucracy enforces on the industrial front. The Democratic Party dismantles democratic forms from above; the union bureaucracy suppresses resistance from below. Both serve the same master: the financial oligarchy that is waging war abroad, slashing social spending at home and preparing for the explosion of class conflict that the deepening crisis of American capitalism will inevitably produce.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**