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POLICY BRIEF:

Replicating California's Safe Learning Environments Act (SB 848) Accountability Standards to Protect Homeschooled Children in Other States

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief recommends additional state legislatures adopt the foundational mechanisms established in California's Senate Bill 848¹ (provisions of which went into effect for the 2026-2027 school year), which explicitly include and protect children inside and outside of public schools. Introduced by Senator Pérez, the *Safe Learning Environments Act* "...broadens mandated reporting requirements, enhances training for employees and students, and revises relevant provisions in law to ensure stronger protections"². By shifting from retroactive intervention to active administrative accountability, states can eliminate the regulatory insulation that can mask catastrophic harm across multiple educational environments - including homeschooling under California's Private School Satellite Programs (PSPs) and charter school options.

Homeschooling is the fastest growing education modality in the country, with an estimated 5-6 million children currently being homeschooled³. However, child abuse prevention and institutional accountability systems have not maintained pace, frequently treating public schools, private schools, and home-based educational programs differently. These inconsistencies can leave children in less conventional settings outside safeguards designed to prevent abuse, identify misconduct, and stop unsafe adults from moving between educational institutions. Additionally, as more families participate in "sector mixing" (entering and exiting various schooling environments over the course of a child's life⁴), there is a renewed need for collaboration between systems for their safety.

¹ California State Legislature, *SB 848, Pupil Safety: School Employee Misconduct: Child Abuse Prevention*, 2025–2026 Reg. Sess., chap. 460 (2025)

² Sasha Renée Pérez, "Governor Newsom Signs Senator Pérez's SB 848, the Safe Learning Environments Act, to Protect Students from Sexual Misconduct by School Employees," *California State Senate*, October 7, 2025.

³ Angela R. Watson, "Homeschool Growth: 2024–2025," *Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy*, November 2025.

⁴ Jeff Murray, "Examining Education Sector Mixing within Homeschool Families," *Thomas B. Fordham Institute*, September 8, 2026

OVERVIEW

CA SB 848 additionally integrates private and charter educational institutions directly into the state’s rigorous child abuse prevention, vetting, and reporting frameworks, explicitly including alternative education. Rather than interfering with family homeschooling autonomy, this reform targets administrative entities—requiring them to provide personnel vetting and employment-history review, auditable abuse prevention plans, and adult-youth codes of conduct in order to legally operate and participate in larger systems of information sharing. Including private and charter institutions is a critical component of ensuring children in alternative environments (like those homeschooled under PSP or charter school programs) are protected in legislation designed to prevent the “pass the trash”⁵ phenomenon exhibited across education policy.

THE POLICY PROBLEM

Children’s safety should not depend on where they are educated. Inconsistent requirements across public, private, and home-based settings can leave vulnerable children outside systems designed to prevent abuse and baseline safety nets, restricting access to mandated reporters and critical resources⁶. Organizations that explicitly work with homeschool populations are frequently not required at a local or state level to have child protection policies in place, perform background checks, or be mandated reporters.

In a pattern called “pass the trash”, identified by the federal government⁷, an adult in a trusted role, such as a teacher or coach, is allowed to transfer to another school or district despite allegations of sexual or other misconduct with students. This risk extends to homeschool programs that employ staff, supervise children, or organize activities. CA SB 848 addresses this gap by requiring applicable homeschool programs to adopt safeguards, train personnel, and share relevant misconduct information. Criminal background checks may not reveal credible complaints, boundary violations, or substantiated investigations, allowing unsafe adults to move between institutions; including these alternative education institutions in vetting and information sharing is critical.

⁵ Matt Drange, “‘Something Can Be Done About This’: New Plan Aims to Stop Sex Abuse in California Schools,” *CalMatters*, September 8, 2025, updated June 19, 2026

⁶ Coalition for Responsible Home Education, “Homeschooling’s Invisible Children,” accessed September 16, 2026

⁷ A. P. Dillon, “Education Department Tackles ‘Pass the Trash’ in K-12 Schools,” *North State Journal*, July 27, 2026

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT - CALIFORNIA HOMESCHOOLING

California offers five “tracks” to families who choose to homeschool legally.⁸

CA SB 848 addresses PSPs, sometimes colloquially called “umbrella schools”, which file a collective affidavit for homeschool families, making employees, governing board members, and qualifying adult volunteers mandated reporters and requiring applicable personnel vetting and employment-history review, and additionally requires the PSP to adopt written policies establishing professional boundaries between staff/volunteers and students (including rules for social media communication). If the PSP operates a physical facility (such as a weekly co-op building), the policy must detail how the campus is supervised to prevent blind spots.

CA SB 848 also addresses homeschooled children registered through charter schools, requiring these education systems to implement strict vetting procedures for non-certified employees, review the statewide misconduct database before hiring once the system is funded and operational, and requiring that staff and certain regular volunteers must undergo expanded, annual child abuse and grooming prevention training.

CA SB 848 additionally addresses private schools with online learning or independent study options; the administration operating these programs is bound by the requirements of the *Safe Learning Environments Act*, including in their virtual spaces.

Home-based private schools are not included in the *Safe Learning Environments Act*. Parents who exclusively teach their own children in their own homes do not have to adopt school safety plans, implement professional boundary policies, or take the expanded mandatory reporter training.

California residents are also able to hire a certified tutor to complete their child’s homeschooling. CA SB 848 does not address this form of homeschooling.

US Census data estimates that 4.42% of children in California were homeschooled during the 2023-24 school year⁹. It is unknown how many participate in each “track” of homeschooling.

⁸California Department of Education, “Schooling at Home,” last reviewed September 3, 2025

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, “Household Pulse Survey Data Tables,” accessed September 17, 2026

NATIONAL RELEVANCE: A TEXAS CASE STUDY

Senator Perez was inspired to act by a Business Insider article that detailed grooming crimes and “passing the trash” in a Southern California high school¹⁰, as well as her own experience. However, this issue is not strictly relevant to the state of California or narrowed to students in public school programs.

In 2026, THESA (Texas Home Educators Sports Association), a Texas homeschool-specific sports organization, knowingly hired Tommy Whiteman after his conviction of online solicitation of a minor¹¹. Without any regulation surrounding homeschooling, this was legal hire in the state of Texas¹². Whiteman was able to additionally secure employment at the neighboring Carroll Independent School District as an off-campus athletics provider, exemplifying the need for stricter “pass the trash” laws to protect both homeschool and public school children. CA SB 848’s model would have imposed stronger screening, disclosure, and reporting duties on the educational institutions - homeschool and public school - that hired Whiteman to work with children.

RECOMMENDATION

States should require every organization that assumes administrative, instructional, supervisory, or employment responsibilities for children in non-public education to participate in the same basic abuse-prevention, reporting, personnel-vetting, and information-sharing systems that govern other educational institutions; homeschooled children deserve the same protections as their peers in public school.

Drawing from California’s *Safe Learning Environments Act*, organizations supporting homeschooled children should maintain written abuse-prevention policies, establish boundaries for adult-student interactions, train employees and qualifying volunteers as mandated reporters, preserve records of substantiated misconduct, and review applicants’ education employment histories. When supported by appropriate infrastructure, organizations should also report and review substantiated misconduct through a secure statewide system with privacy and due-process protections.

¹⁰ Matt Drange, “At Rosemead High, Generations of Students Were Harassed or Groomed for Sex as They Tried to Get an Education,” *Business Insider*, October 3, 2023,

¹¹ Sarah Bahari, “North Texas Youth Baseball Coach Revealed as Registered Sex Offender,” *The Dallas Morning News*, April 27, 2026

¹² Marshall Sudbury, “Homeschool Programs Need More Oversight,” *ReMarker*, May 15, 2026

Coverage should reflect an organization's responsibilities, regardless of its label. This may include umbrella schools, private school satellite programs, homeschool academies, virtual schools, co-ops, athletic programs, contractors, and other organizations that employ adults, supervise children, or maintain educational records. Compliance can be incorporated into existing private-school filings, organizational registrations, public funding requirements, or vendor-approval processes.

States should pair these institutional reforms with basic homeschool notification systems that confirm children's educational status, provide families with reporting information, and activate appropriate safety measures.

Educational freedom and child safety are compatible goals. No organization should be exempt from basic abuse-prevention and accountability standards simply because the children it serves receive some or most of their instruction at home.

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