

SENATOR  
BOB HUFF

TWENTY-NINTH SENATE DISTRICT



## Senate Bill 379 Licensure Requirements: Heritage Schools

**Source/Sponsor:** Author sponsored.

**Background:** Heritage schools are a relatively recent phenomenon in California. They vary in their size and location, but are bound by their commitment to teaching foreign language and history in an effort to maintain California's diversity and cultural heritage. These schools are currently treated as child care facilities by default due to the absence of a relevant state code section.

Many heritage schools have traditionally imposed high standards upon themselves. Others have actively sought out governmental authorities in attempts at compliance. Walnut-based Confucius Chinese Language School, for example, applied for and received membership in the American Camping Association in order to satisfy DSS inspectors. Other schools have not been so lucky – the lack of a clear standard specifically for heritage schools has made this process disjointed, confusing, and difficult.

The state should be doing as much as it can to encourage the continued operations of heritage schools. These institutions are typically run on the weekends and after regular school on weekdays throughout the year and thus keep our children productive and off the streets. Their focus on foreign language and history are vital for students seeking to compete in an increasingly global economy. The culturally enriching activities that are also part of their programs, be it art, singing, or the like, help foster tolerance and diversity in our communities.

**Proposal:** Senate Bill 379 would create a new definition in state code for schools operating mainly for foreign language and cultural education. Facilities that fall under this definition need only follow a basic set of health and safety requirements, including maintaining an emergency disaster plan and completing criminal background checks and health screening reports for staff members. This will ensure that these institutions clearly understand their responsibilities as they seek to further cultivate their students' intellectual and academic capabilities.

By introducing SB 379, we hope to offer a pathway towards legality for heritage schools, which have traditionally preferred to fly under the radar. This bill would clear up confusion, reduce the burden on the Department of Social Services, and provide a clear and responsible option for heritage schools seeking compliance with state law.

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