

May 10, 2024

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 24-32

The purpose of this All County Letter is to inform County Welfare Departments of statutory changes enacted by Senate Bill 768. These changes impact California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids Welfare-to-Work participants who are enrolled in publicly funded and nonprofit postsecondary education, effective January 1, 2023.



KIM JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
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GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR

May 10, 2024

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 24-32

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CALWORKS PROGRAM SPECIALISTS
ALL COUNTY WELFARE-TO-WORK COORDINATORS
ALL COUNTY CONSORTIA PROJECT MANAGERS
ALL COUNTY REFUGEE COORDINATORS
ALL TRIBAL TANF ADMINISTRATORS

SUBJECT: IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE FOR SENATE BILL (SB) 768,
CALIFORNIA WORK OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILITY TO
KIDS WELFARE TO WORK PARTICIPANTS ATTENDING
PUBLICLY FUNDED AND NONPROFIT POSTSECONDARY
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

REFERENCE: [SENATE BILL 768](#) (CHAPTER 447, STATUTES OF 2022); [SB 1232](#) (CHAPTER 366, STATUTES OF 2020); [ALL COUNTY LETTER \(ACL\) 21-04E](#); [ACL 21-75E](#); [ACL 22-31](#); [WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE \(WIC\) SECTIONS 11322.84, 11323.2, 11323.21, 11325.23, AND 11523](#); [MANUAL OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES \(MPP\) SECTIONS 42-711 AND 42-712.5](#).

This All County Letter (ACL) informs County Welfare Departments (CWDs) of statutory changes enacted by SB 768, effective January 1, 2023. SB 768 makes changes to the program established by SB 1232, which impacts California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) Welfare-to-Work (WTW) participants who are enrolled in publicly funded and nonprofit postsecondary education by providing an advance standard payment to students to help pay for books and supplies.

Moving forward, the program established by SB 1232 and impacted by the passage of SB 768 will be known as the Student Training and Education Program or “STEP”.

SENATE BILL 768 SUMMARY

SB 768 affects previously released guidance for WTW participants enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions. Specifically, it:

1. Establishes that eligibility for the program established by SB 1232 (the Student Training and Education Program or “STEP”), includes participation in nonprofit postsecondary educational institutions ([WIC section 11322.84](#), [WIC section 11323.21](#)).
2. Clarifies that a student who does not meet eligibility for STEP may be enrolled in the Self-Initiated Program (SIP) if otherwise eligible ([WIC section 11325.23](#)).
3. Establishes that a summer session must be deemed a quarter for STEP participants ([WIC section 11323.21\(a\)\(2\)](#)).
4. Revises WTW plan policy for STEP participants by eliminating the requirement for a new plan to be signed each academic quarter or semester ([WIC section 11322.84\(e\)\(1\)](#)).
5. Establishes that STEP participants must not be required to participate in WTW activities during school breaks ([WIC section 11322.84\(a\)\(4\)](#)).
6. Allows CWDs to calculate hourly participation rates based on instructional hours or academic units ([WIC section 11322.84](#)).
7. Defines an “instructional hour” as class time of 50 minutes ([WIC section 11322.84\(f\)](#)).
8. Establishes that STEP participants must not be required to participate in orientation and appraisal more than once unless they have a break in receipt of CalWORKs cash aid or supportive services for more than a year ([WIC section 11322.84\(a\)\(2\)](#)).

SENATE BILL 768 IMPACTS

Codification of Existing STEP Policies

SB 768 enacted into law three STEP policies which were previously established solely via ACL.

STEP Eligibility and Nonprofit Postsecondary Educational Institutions

In alignment with previous CDSS policy guidance, SB 768 codifies “nonprofit” postsecondary educational institutions as entities which a participant can attend and be eligible for STEP. See ACL 21-75E for more information on the definition of publicly funded postsecondary educational institutions for the purposes of STEP.

SIP Eligibility

In alignment with previous CDSS policy guidance, SB 768 codifies that postsecondary students who do not meet eligibility for STEP must be enrolled in the SIP, if otherwise eligible. See ACL 21-75E, Q&A #5 for more information on SIP eligibility.

Summer Sessions Deemed a Quarter for Purposes of STEP

In alignment with previous CDSS policy guidance, SB 768 codifies that for the purposes of STEP, summer sessions must be counted as quarters. STEP participants enrolled in summer sessions must receive advance standard payment (ASP) amounts in alignment with academic quarters, i.e., \$350 for full-time enrollment in a summer session and \$175 for part-time or condensed summer session enrollment. See [ACL 22-31](#) for more information regarding STEP policy addressing enrollment in summer sessions.

Revised STEP Policies

In addition to codifying previous CDSS policy guidance, SB 768 also revises STEP policy. The guidance provided below supersedes previous CDSS guidance on this topic.

WTW Plan Requirements

SB 1232 and previous CDSS policy guidance established that counties were required to provide STEP participants with a new WTW plan (sent by mail or electronically) at least 30 days prior to the beginning of each academic quarter or semester. See ACL 21-04E, page 10 for more information.

SB 768 eliminates the requirement for counties to provide a new plan each academic term. However, STEP participants who wish to receive supportive services are still required to sign a WTW plan. All other existing WTW Plan guidance provided in MPP 42-711.6 continues to apply to STEP participants.

As a reminder, counties must not require a WTW plan to be signed prior to issuing ASP. Eligibility for ASP is based solely upon proof of the participant’s enrollment in a STEP-eligible institution (see ACL 21-75E, Q&A #19).

Participation During School Breaks

Previous CDSS policy guidance established that counties were allowed to grant STEP participants good cause for nonparticipation during school breaks. See [ACL 21-75E Q&A #11](#) for more information.

SB 768 establishes that STEP participants must not be required to participate in WTW activities during school breaks to satisfy the educational hours portion of their WTW hourly participation requirements. This includes both within and between terms. For example, spring and Thanksgiving breaks typically occur within a given academic term, while winter and summer breaks typically occur between academic terms.

School breaks are defined by the educational institution and include winter and summer breaks and transfer periods from one qualifying educational institution to another. To qualify under this provision, transfer periods must fall between adjacent school-year terms for which enrollment and/or admission verification has been provided to the CWD.

STEP participants on school breaks may be encouraged to participate in voluntary WTW activities to maximize the benefit of CalWORKs programs and associated supportive services. Counties must treat STEP participants who choose to participate during school breaks like other voluntary participants in that they must be provided all necessary supportive services to enable their participation and will not be subject to noncompliance and sanction for any failure to participate (see [WIC section 11323.2](#) and [MPP 42-712.5](#)).

Instructional Hours

Previous CDSS policy guidance allowed counties to calculate a part-time STEP participant's hourly participation using instructional hours (plus the hours of study time required for those instructional hours or academic units) when academic units are not available or applicable.

SB 768 establishes that counties may calculate a part-time STEP participant's hourly participation using either academic units or instructional hours interchangeably. SB 768 also defines an "instructional hour" to mean class time of 50 minutes for purposes of STEP participation.

As a reminder, full- and part-time status are determined according to the rules and regulations of the educational institution that an individual is attending. Students enrolled full-time are considered to be meeting their CW hourly participation requirements (see ACL 21-75E, Q&A #13). However, counties will still need to calculate full- or part-time status based on instructional hours for students attending eligible institutions that do not use academic units for the educational activity and when proof of enrollment does not indicate full- or part-time status, e.g., for non-credit courses and adult schools.

Calculating Full- or Part-Time Status Using Instructional Hours

To determine full- or part-time enrollment using instructional hours, the CWD should calculate the total weekly instructional hours for the courses in which they are enrolled by adding the weekly instructional hours then dividing the total weekly hours by 50 (i.e., an instructional hour).

For more information on calculating ASP amounts, including for summer, winter, and other types of sessions refer to ACL 21-04E and ACL 22-31.

Example 1: *A STEP participant is taking two semester term courses at an adult school that does not use academic units and whose proof of enrollment does not indicate whether they are enrolled full- or part-time.*

Course A meets for 50 minutes, three times a week.

50 minutes multiplied by 3 classes = 150 minutes of weekly class time.
150 minutes divided by 50 minutes (an instructional hour as defined) =
3 weekly instructional hours.

Course B meets for 80 minutes, twice a week.

80 minutes multiplied by 2 classes = 160 minutes of weekly class time.
160 minutes divided by 50 (an instructional hour) = 3.2 weekly instructional
hours.

Therefore, the STEP participant in this example is enrolled in a total of 6.2 instructional hours (3 for Course A, plus 3.2 for Course B) this semester. **This is less than a total of 12 weekly instructional hours and is considered part-time enrollment.**

Calculating Part-Time STEP Participant Hourly Participation Using Instructional Hours

Calculating CalWORKs hourly participation requirements for part-time STEP participants is based on a formula of total academic units or instructional hours (50 minutes) plus 3 hours of study time per instructional hour or academic unit enrolled (WIC section 11322.84).

Example 2: *A part-time STEP participant is taking two semester term courses at an adult school.*

Using the same calculation in Example 1, the STEP participant in this example is enrolled in a total of 6.2 instructional hours this semester. Next the CWD needs to add the study time hours to get total participation hours for this student.

Course A meets for 50 minutes, three times per week. We concluded this course is 3 instructional hours per week.

3 instructional hours X 3 study time hours = 9 study time hours.
9 study time hours + 3 instructional hours = 12 participation hours per week.

Course B meets for 80 minutes, twice per week. We concluded this course is 3.2 instructional hours per week.

3.2 instructional hours X 3 study time hours = 9.6 study time hours.
9.6 study hours + 3.2 instructional hours, or **12.8 participation hours per week.**

Therefore, the STEP participant in this example is participating for a total of 24.8 hours weekly (12 for Course A, plus 12.8 for Course B) that count toward their CalWORKs hourly participation requirements.

Note that because instructional hour is defined as 50 minutes of class time, CWDs should not round calculations up or down.

As a reminder, per ACL 21-75E, Q&A #14 some students also receive actual homework time hours that exceed the academic or instructional hours if the school verifies that there is a higher need for a given course or based on an individual's need (e.g. for a client with a learning disability that requires additional homework time to be allotted).

New STEP Policies

Finally, SB 768 establishes new STEP policies.

Orientation and Appraisal

SB 768 establishes that a CalWORKs STEP participant must not be required to participate in orientation and appraisal (i.e., Online CalWORKs Appraisal Tool (OCAT)) more than once, unless that participant has had a break of one year or more in receiving aid or supportive services.

Impact on CalWORKs Outcomes and Accountability Review (CAL-OAR) and Work Participation Rate (WPR)

The Cal-OAR is a local, data-driven program management system that facilitates continuous improvement of county CalWORKs programs by collecting, analyzing, and disseminating outcomes and best practices. As required by [WIC section 11523](#), Cal-OAR consists of three core components: performance measures, a county CalWORKs self-assessment (Cal-CSA), and a CalWORKs system improvement plan (Cal-SIP).

Updates to STEP policy impact the Cal-OAR Engagement Rate performance measure, defined as individuals with at least one hour of participation in the month among WTW Active and WTW Exempt Volunteers, by allowing full-time STEP participants to participate zero hours during school breaks. Accordingly, the Engagement Rate

performance measure logic will be revised to show participants in educational activities assigned one participation hour per month, thereby evidencing participation in their educational activity for purposes of the Cal-OAR Engagement Rate. This logic will be applied only when the activity status is open and in good standing.

Finally, federal reporting requirements and procedures associated with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Work Participation Rate (WPR) are unchanged. Counties must continue to verify and document hours in accordance with California's [TANF Work Verification Plan](#) and federal data reporting instructions. For more information on Federal WPR calculation and the STEP program see ACL 21-04E.

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the CalWORKs Engagement Bureau at (916) 654-2137 or at CWEngagementPolicy@dss.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By

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Deputy Director
Family Engagement and Empowerment Division