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Davis Signs Law on Parent Involvement; Vetoes Pesticide Bill

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By Jessica L. Sandham

California schools will be able to draw on \$15 million in grants to pay teachers to visit their students' homes after school and on weekends, under a program signed into law this month by Gov. Gray Davis.

The initiative, which also creates a training program for parents who wish to become more actively involved in schools and an awards program for schools that effectively increase parental involvement, was one of a raft of education-related bills the Democratic governor signed in the days leading up to the Oct. 10 state deadline for action on 1999 legislation.

But not all of the bills approved by the legislature received the governor's stamp of approval.

Mr. Davis' veto pile included the Healthy Schools Act, a bill that would have mandated that schools notify parents 72 hours before using pesticides on school grounds and required an assessment of air quality in the state's classrooms. In a statement explaining his action, the governor said the notification requirements for schools were too cumbersome and expensive. He cited a finance department estimate that the measure would cost up to \$2.7 million in its first year.

Supporters of the "healthy schools" measure, including the state PTA and various medical and environmental-advocacy groups, accused Mr. Davis of buckling under pressure from the pesticide industry.

"One could certainly argue for pesticides in agricultural communities, but I don't see how they're relevant in schools," said Assembly Majority Leader Kevin Shelley, the Democrat who sponsored the bill. "Pesticides, in my

view, are the next decade's lead poisoning. They're that harmful."

State officials are working out the details of the parent-involvement initiative, and will likely begin accepting grant proposals early next year. Schools with more than 1,000 students will be eligible for \$40,000 grants to compensate teachers for time spent visiting students' homes during evenings and weekends; schools with fewer than 1,000 students will be eligible for \$20,000 grants.

'National Model'

The legislation was modeled after a successful home-visitation program in the 51,000-student Sacramento district.

"The impact of parental involvement is such a tremendous benefit to the pupil," said Paul Van Dyke, the legislative director for Democratic Assemblywoman Nell Soto, the sponsor of the measure. "I'm hoping this will become a national model."

Other bills approved by Gov. Davis will do the following:

- Prohibit discrimination against students and teachers in the state's schools based on perceived or actual sexual preference;
- Increase the maximum loan amount for charter schools seeking start-up money from \$50,000 to \$250,000;
- Grant preliminary teaching credentials to qualified midcareer candidates with a master's degree and five years' teaching experience; and
- Require Harcourt Brace Educational Measurement, the publisher of the achievement tests used by the state, to administer the tests through one contract approved by the state board of education. Currently, the publisher holds individual agreements with more than 1,000 districts and charter schools.



Protesters stage a mock demolition of a school in response to California Gov. Gray Davis' veto of the Healthy Schools Act.