

# State schools leader promises drought relief for Valley districts

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California schools facing temporary closures, or increased numbers of absences due to the drought, can breathe a sigh of relief following an announcement Wednesday that the state won't punish districts when budget time comes around later this year.

School districts are funded based on a formula that accounts for the average number of students who attend class daily -- when that number goes down, districts could get fewer dollars the next year.

State schools Superintendent Tom Torlakson made a trip to Fresno and other Valley cities such as Earlimart and Firebaugh to announce he'll spare districts in parched regions from cuts.

"Some impacts of the drought seem obvious as we see water levels drop while fire risks and food prices climb," Torlakson said in a statement. "But one of the less obvious impacts is happening every day in our classrooms, where empty desks reflect children whose families could no longer find work on the farms and ranches of the Central Valley."

State code already allows the superintendent to give districts a reprieve in other types of emergencies like floods or earthquakes. The decision adds drought to that list.

The drought relief was welcomed by Fresno County Schools Superintendent Jim Yovino. "It protects the programs school districts are currently running that may be in jeopardy as a result of decreased average daily attendance," he said. "We believe that some districts have lost large numbers of students because of the drought."

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