

## EDITORIAL: Kids will get educated under vaccination bill



Protesters rally against a measure requiring California schoolchildren to get vaccinated at the Capitol in Sacramento early this month.

RICH PEDRONCELLI, FILE — AP Photo

Twenty-nine states require schoolchildren to be vaccinated unless they can prove they should have a medical or religious exemption. Two more allow opt-outs only with a doctor's note.

Somehow the children in these states have managed to get an education, though their communities surely include the odd anti-vaxxer who thinks people shouldn't have to immunize kindergartners if they don't want to. If nearly two-thirds of the rest of the country can protect public health and public education at the same time, so can California.

The bill to eliminate the state's overly broad "personal belief" exemption hit a roadblock last week, as yet another emotional crowd of vaccine opponents filled the Capitol hallways. With kids in tow (on a school day), the anti-vax parents claimed their children would be deprived of their right to an education if the state were to make it harder to put the un-immunized into classrooms with other children.

This is nonsense, and members of the Senate Education Committee shouldn't be swayed when Senate Bill 277, co-authored by Sen. Richard Pan, D-Sacramento — a pediatrician — comes back for a vote.

The bill does not, as one senator put it during Wednesday's hearing, pit two equivalent rights against each other. It simply makes it harder for a vocal minority of science deniers to endanger the health of the majority's children. There are several ways to get a free public education in California but only one way to prevent a polio epidemic.

SB 277 would require all kindergartners to be immunized against diseases such as polio, whooping cough, mumps and measles unless they have a legitimate medical reason to opt out. It applies to public, private and charter schools, but parents who absolutely refuse to comply could home-school their kids. California has a well-established home-schooling platform that serves thousands of students, from Silicon Valley tech offspring whose parents believe in "natural learning" to religious fundamentalists who don't want their kids to learn about evolution.

Anti-vaxxers argue that not all parents have the education to home-school, and they note that the law prohibits impingement on education rights without a compelling state interest. But public health is as compelling a state interest as it gets; that's why schools require vaccines.

Children who medically can't endure immunization can get a note from a doctor. And members of the tiny minority of churches that prohibit medical treatment could, if push came to shove, lobby legislators to consider writing a formal religious exemption into the statute.

State lawmakers need to keep their priorities straight here. California has one of the most lax vaccine laws in the United States. Bringing it more in line with the rest of the country is a much-needed step. No one has an inalienable right to endanger public health.