

Panel passes schools measure

Assembly member Swanson upbeat about legislation's prospects

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OAKLAND — A bill that would speed the return of local governing authority to the Oakland school board cleared the Senate Education Committee Wednesday with a decisive 6-1 vote.

The legislation, introduced late last year by Assemblyman Sandre Swanson (D-Oakland), was approved by the state Assembly in June. If it passes the Senate Appropriations Committee, the next move is to the Senate floor.

Swanson said he met with almost every member of the Senate committee to explain the purpose of the bill and to foster bipartisan support. One Republican senator, Jeff Denham, voted for it. Republican Sen. Mark Wyland opposed it. A third Republican lawmaker, Abel Maldonado, was visiting his district today and wasn't able to cast a vote.

"I feel very good about the momentum of the bill as we approach the full Senate," Swanson said.

The Oakland school district came under state control in mid-2003 amid a fiscal crisis. After issuing a multimillion dollar loan, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell appointed an administrator to run the district, and the board lost its voting powers.

Assembly Bill 45 ties the gradual return of authority to periodic progress reports by the Fiscal Crisis & Management Assistance Team.

As of now, O'Connell — who opposes the bill — decides when to restore areas of oversight to the school board. On Monday, the state superintendent gave the Oakland board authority over an area named "Community Relations and Governance."

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