

---

# SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

---

<b>Bill No:</b>	AB 2354	<b>Hearing Date:</b>	June 24, 2026
<b>Author:</b>	Gabriel		
<b>Version:</b>	March 19, 2026		
<b>Urgency:</b>	No	<b>Fiscal:</b>	Yes
<b>Consultant:</b>	Therresa Austin		

**Subject:** Pupil instruction: California Serves Program.

## SUMMARY

This bill expands the existing California Serves Program to promote access to effective service-learning for students in grades 6 through 12, inclusive, and requires the California Department of Education (CDE), in partnership with CaliforniaVolunteers, to develop updated recommendations to the Legislature on evidence-based strategies to expand access to high-quality service-learning programs, as specified.

## BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the California Serves Program under the CDE in collaboration with CaliforniaVolunteers, to promote access to effective service learning for pupils in grade 12 who are enrolled at participating local educational agencies (LEAs), with the goal of expanding access for high school graduates in obtaining a State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) through service learning. (Education Code (EC) § 51475)
- 2) Establishes the California Serves Program for the purposes of awarding grants to promote access to effective service-learning for students in grade twelve, with the goal of expanding access for high school graduates in obtaining an SSCE through service-learning. Allowable uses for grants include:
  - a) Paid planning time for teachers to increase the use of service-learning in instruction.
  - b) Professional development on service-learning for administrators and teachers.
  - c) Purchase of instructional materials to help integrate service-learning in instruction.
  - d) Participation costs, including materials or travel expenses related to service-learning activities.
  - e) Personnel costs for coordinating service-learning at the LEA or a school site.

- f) Participation costs associated with grant program evaluation. (EC § 51475)
- 3) Establishes the SSCE, affixed to the diploma or transcript of an eligible pupil, to encourage, and create pathways for, pupils in elementary and secondary schools to become civically engaged in democratic governmental institutions at the local, state, and national levels. (EC § 51475)

## ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Expands the existing California Serves Program to serve students in grades 6 through 12 inclusive.
- 2) Requires CDE, in collaboration with CaliforniaVolunteers, to do the following:
  - a) Review the available evidence on ways to incorporate effective service learning for pupils in grades 6 through 12, and, on or before January 1, 2028, provide recommendations to the Legislature, consistent with the recommended criteria and implementation guidance for the SSCE on evidence-based strategies to expand access to high-quality service-learning programs in LEAs serving grades 6 through 12, inclusive, and promote equitable access to these programs.
  - b) On or before January 1, 2028, develop and post on the CDE's and CaliforniaVolunteers' internet websites evidence-based strategies for expanding access to high-quality service-learning programs that may be used by teachers and LEAs for grades 6 through 12, inclusive.
- 3) Requires the annual evaluation report on service learning to be submitted by the CDE, in partnership with CaliforniaVolunteers, to specify the number of pupils by grade, in addition to other required data.

## STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, "AB 2354 strengthens California's investment in service-learning by allowing schools to implement programs across grades 6 through 12, rather than limiting access primarily to grade 12. By supporting multi-year service-learning opportunities, this bill will help ensure that all students have a meaningful opportunity to develop the skills and experiences needed to earn the State Seal of Civic Engagement."
- 2) ***California Serves Program.*** The California Serves Program was established through the 2022 State Budget Act as a collaboration between the CDE and CaliforniaVolunteers to promote access to effective service-learning for high school students and support them in obtaining an SSCE through service-learning.

At the onset of the program, CDE and CaliforniaVolunteers were tasked with reviewing the available evidence on ways to incorporate effective service-learning for pupils in grades 9 through 12, and to provide recommendations to the Legislature consistent with the recommended criteria and guidance for the SSCE, on evidence-based strategies to expand access to high-quality service-learning programs. The final report, published in January 2024, issued the following recommendations:

- a) Establish effective standards and indicators to guide the development of equitable, high-quality service-learning programs;
- b) Incorporate curriculum and strategies that encourage deep civic learning;
- c) Ensure teacher access to ongoing professional development and learning;
- d) Prioritize efforts to track who earns the SSCE; and
- e) Design meaningful infrastructure that promotes service-learning at all levels.

The corresponding California Serves Grant Program was also established in the 2022 Budget Act with an annual ongoing allocation of \$5 million to provide grants to eligible LEAs to help cover specified costs incurred in the development and facilitation of service-learning programs and to expand access for high school graduates in obtaining an SSCE. To apply for this grant, applicant LEAs must (1) have at least 55% of their student enrollment be unduplicated pupils as defined in statute and (2) serve students in grade 12. While promoting access to effective service-learning for students in grade 12 is the focus and eligibility criteria, the grant program provides LEAs with the flexibility to also support such programming for students as early as grade 9.

Since its pilot year in the 2022-23 school year, the California Serves Grant Program has awarded 45 LEAs with award amounts ranging from \$24,000 to \$500,000—the maximum allowable under statute.

- 3) ***State Seal of Civic Engagement.*** This bill is intended to provide support to LEAs and charter schools serving students in grades 6 through 12 so that they may provide equitable student access to service-learning and the opportunity to earn the SSCE. On September 10, 2020, the State Board of Education (SBE) adopted criteria and guidance to award an SSCE to California students who demonstrate excellence in civics education and participation, and an understanding of the United States Constitution, the California Constitution, and the democratic system of government. To be eligible for the SSCE, students must:
  - a) Be engaged in academic work in a productive way;
  - b) Demonstrate a competent understanding of the United States and California constitutions; functions and governance of local governments; tribal government structures and organizations; the role of the citizen in a

constitutional democracy; and democratic principles, concepts, and processes;

- c) Participate in one or more informed civic engagement project(s) that address real-world problems and require students to identify and inquire into civic needs or problems, consider varied responses, take action, and reflect on efforts;
- d) Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection; and
- e) Exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact the classroom, school, community, and/or society.

Successful completion of the requirements is reflected by a seal affixed to student transcripts, diplomas, or certificates of completion. According to CDE's 2024-25 school year data, 23,040 seals have been awarded to students across 492 schools that participate in the SSCE.

- 4) ***California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning of 2014 (Task Force)***. In 2014, the Chief Justice of California and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) formed the Task Force to develop a set of recommendations to improve civic learning in our schools to address the need to revitalize civic learning in our state. To this end, the Task Force made the following system-wide recommendations to improve civic learning in every district, in every school, for every child:

- a) Revise the California History-Social Science Content Standards and accompanying curriculum frameworks to incorporate an emphasis on civic learning, starting in kindergarten, so that all students acquire the civic knowledge, skills, and values they need to succeed in college, career, and civic life.
- b) Integrate civic learning into state assessment and accountability systems for students, schools, and districts. Civic knowledge, skills, values, and whether students are receiving learning opportunities that promote these outcomes must be assessed and linked to revised California History-Social Science Content Standards and relevant Common Core State Standards. This will enable periodic reporting to the Legislature and the public on the state of students' civic learning.
- c) Improve professional learning experiences for teachers and administrators to help them implement civic learning in schools. Connect professional learning in civics to Common Core State Standards professional learning experiences.
- d) Develop an articulated sequence of instruction in civic learning across all of K-12, pegged to revised standards. At each grade level, civic learning should draw on the research-based and include work that is action-oriented and project-based and that develops digital literacy.

- e) Establish a communication mechanism so community stakeholders can easily connect with teachers and students on civic education and engagement. Students need to get out of the school building to practice civic engagement, and civic leaders need to come into schools to engage students.
  - f) Provide incentives for local school districts to fund civic learning in Local Control Accountability Plans under the new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).
- 5) ***Practical effect of expanded eligibility.*** This bill would expand the eligibility criteria for the California Serves Grant Program to LEAs serving students in grades 6 through 12, inclusive, rather than just grade 12. As noted above, the foundational goal of the California Serves Program and Grant is to support students in obtaining an SSCE. SSCEs can only be conferred in high school and reflected on a student's 11th- or 12th-grade transcript. While elementary and middle school students are not eligible to earn an SSCE, LEAs are encouraged to create pathways for those grade levels to become civically engaged as part of their experiences working toward earning the SSCE in high school, or to adopt a seal locally for elementary and middle school students. *The committee may wish to consider that expanding eligibility for the California Serves Program without increasing the annual ongoing allocation may make the program more competitive and the funds less accessible to the high schools that participate in the SSCE program.*
- 5) ***Prior and related legislation.***
- SB 1378 (Ochoa Bogh, 2026) requires the CDE to establish the California Excellence in Service Learning (CESL) Designation Program to publicly recognize and designate schoolsites and LEAs that demonstrate excellence in service learning. *SB 1378 is currently in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.*
- SB 584 (Limon, 2025) would have expanded the existing California Serves Program to promote access to effective service learning for grades 1 through 12; required LEAs to implement a Civic Engagement Pathways Program for pupils in grades 1 through 8; and required the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC), during its next consideration for the revision of the History and Social Sciences Framework, to include civic engagement experiences, as specified. *This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.*
- AB 422 (Jackson, Chapter 692, Statutes of 2025) requires the SPI, by January 1, 2027, to recommend revised criteria to the SBE for awarding the SSCE, including a demonstrated understanding of the importance of preserving democracy and its vital institutions.
- AB 24 (Eggman, Chapter 604, Statutes of 2017) established the SSCE, to be affixed to the diploma of qualifying high school graduates, based on a demonstration of excellence in civics education and participation.

**SUPPORT**

GenUp (co-sponsor)  
Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and  
Sonoma Counties (co-sponsor)  
Alameda County Office of Education  
California State PTA  
Center for Volunteer & Nonprofit Leadership

**OPPOSITION**

None received

**-- END --**