
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 2354 (Gabriel) - Pupil instruction: California Serves Program

Version: March 19, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

Policy Vote: ED. 7 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Lenin Del Castillo

Bill Summary: This bill expands the existing California Serves Program to promote access to effective service-learning for students in grades 6 through 12. This bill also requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop updated recommendations to the Legislature on evidence-based strategies to expand access to high-quality service-learning programs.

Fiscal Impact:

- By expanding the California Serves Program to include additional grade levels, this bill would likely result in additional, Proposition 98 General Fund cost pressures on the program, potentially in the low millions of dollars each year. The program currently distributes \$5 million in annual grants. The bill's expansion to students in grades six through eleven (in addition to the 12th grade) would put increasing demand on the program and likely require additional funding.
- The CDE estimates one-time General Fund costs of \$395,000 and \$407,000 in ongoing costs and 2.0 positions to administer the expanded program.

Background: Existing law establishes the California Serves Program under the CDE in collaboration with California Volunteers, to promote access to effective service learning for pupils in grade 12 who are enrolled at participating LEAs, with the goal of expanding access for high school graduates in obtaining a State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) through service learning. The program awards grants to LEAs 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 paid planning time for teachers to increase the use of service-learning in instruction, professional development on service-learning for administrators and teachers, and the purchase of instructional materials to help integrate service-learning in instruction.

Existing law 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.

Proposed Law: This bill expands the existing California Serves Program to serve students in grades 6 through 12 inclusive.

This bill requires CDE, in collaboration with CaliforniaVolunteers, to do the following:

1. 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.
2. 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.

This bill 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.

Related Legislation: SB 1378 (Ochoa Bogh, 2026) requires the CDE to establish the California Excellence in Service Learning Designation Program to publicly recognize and designate schoolsites and LEAs that demonstrate excellence in service learning. SB 1378 is currently pending 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 on the Suspense File in this committee.

Staff Comments: The 2022 Budget Act included \$5 million for the California Serves Program to promote access to effective service-learning for high school students and support them in obtaining an SSCE through service-learning. The program provides 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. Applicant LEAs must have at least 55 percent of their student enrollment as unduplicated pupils and serve students in grade 12. Since its inception in 2022-23, the California Serves Grant Program has awarded 45 LEAs with award amounts ranging from roughly \$24,000 to \$500,000, which is the maximum grant amount. This bill would expand the eligibility criteria for the program to LEAs that serve students in grades 6 through 12, inclusive, rather than just 12th grade. The bill also requires CDE to provide an updated set of recommendations to the Legislature on or before January 1, 2028, reflecting the expanded grade levels.

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