
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	AB 422	Hearing Date:	June 25, 2025
Author:	Jackson		
Version:	April 21, 2025		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Therresa Austin		

Subject: State Seal of Civic Engagement.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), during the State Board of Education's (SBE) next revision of the eligibility criteria for the State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE), to recommend additional award criteria requiring students to show a demonstrated understanding of the importance of preserving democracy and its vital institutions, including, but not limited to, the free press, free access to libraries, compulsory education, and the federalist system.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the SSCE, affixed to the diploma or transcript of an eligible student, to encourage, and create pathways for, students in elementary and secondary schools to become civically engaged in democratic governmental institutions at the local, state, and national levels. (Education Code (EC) § 51475)
- 2) Requires the SPI, in developing criteria for the State Seal of Civic Engagement, to incorporate the Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning, and to consult with a diverse group of credentialed, current classroom teachers who teach the subject of history-social science, including government, in secondary schools. Requires the SPI to also consider including criteria based on each of the following:
 - a) Successful completion of history, government, and civics courses, including courses that incorporate character education;
 - b) Voluntary participation in community service or extracurricular activities; and
 - c) Any other related requirements as deemed appropriate. (EC § 51470)
- 3) Requires the SPI, on or before January 1, 2020, to recommend to the SBE criteria for awarding a SSCE to students who have demonstrated excellence in civics education and participation and have demonstrated an understanding of the United States Constitution, the California Constitution, and the democratic system of government. (EC § 51470)

- 4) Requires the SBE, on or before January 31, 2021, to adopt, reject, or modify the criteria. (EC § 51471)
- 5) States that school district participation in this program is voluntary. (EC § 51471)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Requires the SPI to recommend revised criteria to the SBE during its next revision of criteria the SSCE. Requires the revised criteria to include, along with meeting all other eligibility criteria for the award, a demonstrated understanding of the importance of preserving democracy and its vital institutions, including, but not limited to, the free press, free access to libraries, compulsory education, and the federalist system.
- 2) Requires the SPI to limit criteria recommendations to content that is not already included in the existing adopted criteria.
- 3) Requires the SBE to adopt, reject or modify the additional criteria recommended by the SPI within one year of receiving of receiving them.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, “Expanding the democracy criteria for the state seal of civic engagement is crucial for fostering informed, active, and responsible citizens. Comprehensive democracy education empowers students with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society and combat misinformation. It promotes critical thinking, encourages participation in civic activities, and helps students appreciate the principles of justice, equality, and freedom.”
- 2) ***State Seal of Civic Engagement.*** On September 10, 2020, the 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 the California Department of Education's (CDE) 2023-24 school year data, 15,627 seals have been awarded across the 345 schools that participate in the SSCE.

This bill requires the SPI to recommend revised criteria to the SBE including a criteria for students to show a demonstrated understanding of the importance of preserving democracy and its vital institutions, including, but not limited to, the free press, free access to libraries, compulsory education, and the federalist system. The bill also requires that the criteria recommended to the SBE be limited to those not already included in the previously established criteria.

- 3) **California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning of 2014 (Task Force).** In 2014, the Chief Justice of California, Tani Cantil-Sakauye, and the SPI formed the Task Force to develop a set of recommendations aimed at improving civic learning in California schools and addressing the need to revitalize civic learning across the 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).
- 4) ***Civic Education within California's History-Social Science Curriculum Framework.*** California's History-Social Science Framework (Framework), adopted by the SBE in July 2016, provides considerable information and instructional support on civic learning, consistent with the work of the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning. The Framework serves as a guide for instruction to ensure that students acquire the essential tools needed for meaningful participation in democratic institutions. It focuses on building foundational knowledge about state and local governments, markets, courts and legal systems, civil society, the systems and practices of other nations, international institutions, and the methods available to citizens for preserving and transforming society.

Suggestions for lessons and activities include simulations of government, student-led debates and research projects, voter education, and service learning that engage students in an active role within their local communities. Classroom examples featured in the Framework include several with a civic focus, such as:

- a) Kindergarten: Being a Good Citizen.
- b) Grade Three: Classroom Constitution.
- c) Grade Five: The Preamble.
- d) Grade Eight: The Civic Purpose of Public Education.

While the foundations of civic education are woven throughout the Framework at several grade levels, the most targeted focus can be found in its grade twelve chapter, entitled "Principles of American Democracy." In this chapter, students are encouraged to apply the knowledge they have gained in previous years of study to pursue a deeper understanding of American government. Notable sections and guiding questions include the following:

- a) Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy:
 - What rights and responsibilities does a citizen have in a democracy?
 - What does it mean to be a citizen?
 - How can citizens improve a democracy?

- b) The Three Branches of Government as Established by the United States Constitution:
 - Why does the Constitution both grant power and take it away?
 - What is the most powerful branch of government?
 - Why does it take so long for government to act?
- c) Federalism: Different Levels of Government:
 - Why are powers divided among different levels of government?
 - What level of government is the most important to me—local, state, tribal, or federal?
 - What level of government is the most powerful—local, state, tribal, or federal?
- d) The Fourth Estate: The Role of the Media in American Public Life:
 - To what extent are the press and the media fulfilling a watchdog role?
 - Do media outlets provide enough relevant information about government and politics to allow citizens to vote and participate in a well-informed way?
 - How has the Internet revolution impacted journalism, and what are its effects on the coverage of public affairs and current issues?

Additionally, the Framework features two appendices that serve as companions to the extensive information on civic education and service learning found throughout the grade levels:

- a) Appendix D: Educating for Democracy: Civic Education in the History-Social Science Curriculum, which includes the Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning; and
- b) Appendix H: Practicing Civic Engagement: Service Learning in the History-Social Science Framework, which provides definitions, examples, and reasons for encouraging service-learning in the curriculum.

As articulated above, several of the components of the additional criteria for consideration are already addressed in the Framework. Completion of the grade-level history-social science course requirements, or their equivalent, in World History, U.S. History, and American Government with a passing grade is already included in implementation guidance to meet Criterion 2 (see Comment 2(b)). It is not entirely clear how students would demonstrate meeting the additional criteria recommended by the bill if the existing criteria is not sufficient. Ultimately, the SBE maintains the authority to either adopt, reject, or modify the recommendations.

2) **Related and prior legislation.**

SB 745 (Ochoa Bogh, 2025) would require, beginning with students graduating in the 2032–33 school year, the course in American government and civics to be a one-year course (rather than one semester) unless the governing board or body of a school district, county office of education (COE), or charter school, as applicable, through a formal action at a publicly noticed meeting, elects to require only a one-semester course in American government and civics. SB 745 also requires the CDE, in collaboration with the SBE, to enter into a contract with a COE or a consortium of COEs for the purpose of developing a model curriculum for the one-year course in American government and civics. *SB 745 has been referred to the Assembly Education Committee.*

SB 584 (Limon, 2025) would have (1) expanded the existing California Serves Program to promote access to effective service learning for grades 1 through 12; (2) required local educational agencies (LEAs) to implement a Civic Engagement Pathways Program for pupils in grades 1 through 8; and (3) required the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC), during its next revision of the history-social sciences framework, to consider including instruction specifically on civic engagement experiences with governmental institutions that are supportive of pupils earning the SSCE. *SB 584 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.*

SB 1094 (Limon, 2024) would have further defined the social sciences course of study for grades one through 12 to include civic engagement experiences with governmental institutions and instruction in principles of democracy and the State and Federal Constitutions. *SB 1094 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.*

AB 24 (Eggman, Chapter 604, Statutes of 2017) established SSCE to be affixed to the diploma of qualifying high school graduates, based on a demonstration of excellence in civics education and participation.

SB 521 (Wyland, 2013) would have required the SBE and the CDE to request that the IQC review and revise, as necessary, the course requirements in the history-social science framework to ensure that minimum standards for courses in American government and civics include the comparative differences between the rights of citizens in America and those in other countries, and the connection of civics and American government to western civilizations. *SB 521 was held in the Senate Education Committee.*

SUPPORT

California Teachers Association
Delta Kappa Gamma International - Chi State

OPPOSITION

None received

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