
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 422
Author: Jackson (D)
Amended: 9/4/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 7-0, 6/25/25
AYES: Pérez, Ochoa Bogh, Cabaldon, Choi, Cortese, Gonzalez, Laird

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: State Seal of Civic Engagement

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: 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.

Senate Floor Amendments of 9/4/25 strike the requirement for the SBE to adopt, reject, or modify the revised SSCE criteria recommendations within one year of receiving them from the SPI.

ANALYSIS:

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

This bill:

- 1) Requires the SPI to recommend revised criteria to the SBE during its next revision of criteria for 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.

Comments

Need for this 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.”

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.

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 include the following:

- Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens in a Democracy.
 - The Three Branches of Government as Established by the United States Constitution.
 - Federalism: Different Levels of Government.
 - The Fourth Estate: The Role of the Media in American Public Life.
- 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.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- The CDE estimates one-time General Fund costs of \$355,000 to develop and recommend criteria revisions to the State Board of Education (SBE) upon the next revision of the State Seal of Civic Engagement criteria, while maintaining administration and oversight of the program.

SUPPORT: (Verified 9/4/25)

California Teachers Association
Delta Kappa Gamma International - Chi State

OPPOSITION: (Verified 9/4/25)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/2/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

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9/8/25 21:10:22

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