
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SB 1048 **Hearing Date:** April 8, 2026
Author: Becker
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Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Therresa Austin

Subject: State Seal of Climate Literacy.

SUMMARY

This bill establishes the voluntary State Seal of Climate Literacy (SSCL) to be affixed to the diploma of qualifying high school graduates and requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to recommend criteria under which participating local educational agencies (LEA) may award said seal to qualified students. This bill also requires participating LEAs to collect and annually submit to the California Department of Education (CDE) specified data related to SSCL participation.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Office of Education and the Environment (OEE) in the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) and requires the OEE to implement a statewide environmental education program. (Public Resources Code (PRC) § 71300)
- 2) Requires the OEE, under the direction of CalRecycle and in cooperation with the CDE and the State Board of Education (SBE), to develop and implement a unified education strategy of the environment for elementary and secondary schools that does all of the following:
 - a) Coordinate instructional resources and strategies for providing active pupil participation in onsite conservation efforts.
 - b) Promote service-learning opportunities between schools and local communities.
 - c) Assess the impact of the unified education strategy on the achievement and resource conservation of participating pupils. (PRC § 71300)
- 3) Requires the CDE and SBE, in cooperation with CalRecycle, to develop and implement, to the extent feasible, a teacher training and implementation plan that guides the phased implementation of the unified education strategy in elementary, middle, and high school programs, for the education of pupils, faculty, and administrators on the importance of integrating environmental concepts and programs in schools. (PRC § 71300)

- 4) Requires the OEE, as part of the unified education strategy, to develop education principles for the environment for elementary and secondary school pupils, in cooperation with the Secretary for Environmental Protection, the Natural Resources Agency, the CDE, and the SBE. (PRC § 71301)
- 5) Requires that the environmental principles and concepts be aligned to the academic content standards adopted by the SBE in the subjects of English language arts, science, history-social science, health, and, to the extent practicable, mathematics, and shall not conflict with any academic content standards. Requires that the environmental principles and concepts be used to do all of the following:
 - a) To direct state agencies that include environmental education components for elementary and secondary education in regulatory decisions or enforcement actions.
 - b) To align state agency environmental education programs and materials that are developed for elementary and secondary education.
 - c) For provision, by the office, of technical assistance to state agencies involved in the integration of the environmental principles and concepts in programs they operate, and in the integration of the environmental principles and concepts into state curriculum standards, frameworks, and instructional materials, as specified. (PRC § 71301)
- 6) Establishes the voluntary State Seal of Civic Engagement (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)
- 7) Requires the SPI, in developing criteria for the SSCE, 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)
- 8) 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)

- 9) Requires the SBE, on or before January 31, 2021, to adopt, reject, or modify the SSCE criteria recommended by the SPI. (EC § 51471)
- 10) Establishes the State Seal of Biliteracy (SSB), affixed to the diploma or transcript of an eligible student, to recognize high school graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages in addition to English. Establishes criteria that graduates must meet in order to be eligible for the SSB. (EC § 51461)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Establishes the SSCL for the purpose of giving high school pupils personal agency to help them and their communities understand and adapt to the effects of climate change.
 - a) States that an LEA's participation in awarding the SSCL is voluntary.
- 2) Requires the SPI, on or before March 15, 2027, to recommend to the SBE criteria for awarding the SSCL to pupils who have demonstrated mastery in climate literacy disciplines, green skills or technical green skills, and any and all other best practices for climate literacy. Requires the SPI to consider, in the development of criteria, the following:
 - a) Successful completion of at least two approved courses in the area of climate literacy, including but not limited to:
 - i) High-school-level or advanced placement courses that cover physical science, life science, or earth science.
 - ii) Dual or concurrent enrollment, career technical education, or high-school-level courses that integrate climate literacy.
 - iii) Courses that integrate the state's environmental principles and concepts, as specified.
 - b) Successful completion and presentation of a climate literacy final experiential learning project focused on the causes and effects of climate change in the pupil's local community and demonstrates an academic understanding of climate literacy through the practical application of climate literacy that addresses local climate issues present in the pupil's community. Final projects may include, but are not limited to:
 - i) A capstone project centered on the pupil's community and the community's effect on climate change.
 - ii) Field experiences or practica related to specified climate literacy coursework.

- iii) Internships, externships, or employment with climate literacy or green career experiential learning providers.
 - iv) One or more community projects with a climate literacy experiential learning provider.
 - v) Hands-on laboratory experiments.
 - vi) Original artwork or writing.
 - vii) Pupil-led and designed programming that has an effect on the pupil's community and other pupils.
- 3) Requires the SPI to also recommend the criteria necessary for a participating LEA to additionally award to a pupil who meets the requirements for the SSCL, one or both of the following distinctions:
- a) A SSCL with Industry Distinction to recognize a pupil who demonstrates proficiency in technical green skills through coursework or the pupil's final experiential learning project.
 - b) A SSCL with Higher Education Distinction to recognize a pupil who earns college credit in attaining the SSCL.
- 4) Requires the SPI to ensure, to the greatest extent feasible, that the criteria developed pursuant to #2 and #3 above adhere to all of the following:
- a) Provides all pupils with an opportunity to earn the SSCL.
 - b) Recognizes pupil excellence and outstanding achievement.
 - c) Is not based primarily on pupil achievement that is already recognized through grades or other standard measures of pupil achievement.
 - d) Results in a seal that confers a benefit to pupils beyond high school.
- 5) Requires the SBE, on or before May 1, 2027, to adopt, or adopt with modifications, the SSCL criteria recommended by the SPI.
- 6) Requires the SPI to do all of the following:
- a) Prepare and deliver to participating LEAs, an appropriate insignia to be affixed to the diploma or transcript of the pupil indicating that the pupil has been awarded an SSCL by the SPI.
 - b) Provide other information the SPI deems necessary for LEAs to successfully participate in awarding the SSCL to pupils.
- 1) Authorizes the SPI to partner with nonprofit organizations to provide such information, which may include any of the following: guidance or

criteria to support implementation; sample project frameworks; professional development resources; and guidance for developing partnerships with community-based organizations, industry leaders, or institutions of higher education.

- c) Provide information to pupils who earn a SSCL about post secondary opportunities and career pathways that leverage the knowledge and skills that pupils develop through earning the SSCL.
 - 1) Authorizes the SPI to partner with nonprofit, labor, or private sector organizations to provide such information.
- 7) Requires a participating LEA, after the SBE adopts criteria for the SSCL, to do the following:
 - a) Maintain appropriate records in order to identify pupils who have earned an SSCL.
 - b) Affix the appropriate insignia to the diploma or transcript of each pupil who earns an SSCL.
 - c) Provide information to pupils about available options and supports, including, but not limited to, approved courses, experiential learning, or final projects that pupils may complete to meet the criteria to earn an SSCL.
 - d) Establish a process for determining if a pupil has met the criteria necessary to earn an SSCL.
 - e) On or before September 15, 2027, and on or before September 15 of each year thereafter, provide CDE with the following data:
 - 1) The names of schools that awarded the SSCL.
 - 2) The number of pupils from each school of an LEA that received a SSCL.
 - 3) Evidence of how pupils who received a SSCL met the adopted criteria, including, but not limited to, any final projects, coursework, or providers that the pupils worked with.
- 8) Establishes the following definitions:
 - a) “Climate literacy” means an understanding of the essential principles of Earth’s climate system, assessing scientifically credible information, learning to communicate about the climate in a meaningful manner, and making informed and responsible decisions regarding actions that may affect the climate.
 - b) “Climate literacy experiential learning provider” means a provider that facilitates a pupil’s final project, including, but not limited to, a school

organization or club, local media outlet, business, nonprofit organization, or industry focused on green skills or technical green skills.

- c) “Green jobs” or “green career” means occupations or employment positions that reduce harmful effects on the climate, adapt processes to minimize their effect on the climate, recognize and mitigate the disproportionate social effects of climate change, support the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of communities, or contribute to the well-being and resilience of present and future generations.
- d) “Green skills” means the knowledge, abilities, values, and attitudes to live in, develop, and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society.
- e) “Local Education agency” means a school district, county office of education, or charter school.
- f) “Technical green skills” means skills that fulfill the requirement of green jobs and that support the transition to a low-carbon sustainable economy.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, “California has long led the nation in climate action. SB 1048 ensures we are also leading in climate education by preparing the next generation with the knowledge and real-world experience they need to meet the challenges of a changing climate.”
- 2) ***California’s Environmental Principles and Concepts.*** In 2003 and 2005, the Legislature passed AB 1548 (Pavley, Chapter 665, Statutes of 2003) and AB 1721 (Pavley, Chapter 581, Statutes of 2005), which ultimately established the OEE under CalRecycle to develop education principles for the environment for elementary and secondary school pupils. The resulting [California Environmental Principles and Concepts](#) (EP&Cs) are comprised of five environmental principles and 15 supporting concepts that highlight the deep relationship between humans and the natural world and serve as “big ideas” intended to inform standards-based instruction and fuel student inquiry. These EP&Cs have been integrated into several state curriculum frameworks for California public schools serving kindergarten through grade twelve, including the 2016 History and Social Science Framework, the 2016 Science Framework, and the 2019 Health Education Framework.
- 3) ***California Environmental Literacy Task Force (ELTF).*** In 2014, the SPI assembled the ELTF to create a blueprint for achieving environmental literacy for all California students. The Blueprint, titled *A Blueprint for Environmental Literacy: Educating Every Student In, About, and For the Environment*, was published in 2015. The Blueprint highlights the need for expanded environmental literacy education by referencing a recent survey of 520 California school principals. This survey showed that 13% of schools have integrated environmental education into their curricula, and 77% spend less than \$5,000 on field trips, professional development, and curricular materials for environmental education. In addition, the Blueprint states, “A false perception persists from the

No Child Left Behind accountability era that environmental and outdoor programs are non-academic and not connected to the core curriculum. Research shows, however, that in schools where environmental content is integrated as a primary part of instruction, student achievement has improved.”

To improve environmental literacy among California’s students, the Blueprint identified the following six strategies:

- a) Systematically integrate environmental literacy concepts into statewide educational priorities.
- b) Strengthen collaboration across the state between key stakeholders.
- c) Leverage the SPI’s influence and create a public awareness campaign to build broad support for the importance of environmental literacy, and encourage and support increased allocation of state and locally controlled funding to environmental literacy programs.
- d) Implement changes to relevant state law and policy and ensure that relevant existing laws are funded and effectively implemented.
- e) Create an Environmental Literacy Steering Committee (ELSC) to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Blueprint.
- f) Develop a coherent strategy for funding environmental literacy across the state.

In 2016, SPI appointed the ELSC to create an implementation plan for environmental literacy. The ELSC is comprised of 30 educational leaders and nonprofit stakeholders, and includes representatives from the CDE, CalRecycle, University of California (UC), and the SBE.

- 4) ***Existing California State Seal Programs.*** The state has established three State Seals—the Golden State Seal Merit Diploma (GGSMD), the State Seal of Biliteracy (SSB), and the State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE):

The GGSMD was established in 1997 to provide recognition to public high school graduates who have demonstrated mastery of the high school curriculum in six subject areas four of which are English, history, mathematics and science the remaining two are selected by the student. When originally authorized in the 1990’s, Governor Wilson argued that this diploma would serve as an ambitious goal that would both shape teaching and inspire students. It was envisioned as California version of the New York’s Regent’s Diploma, conferring advantages in University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) admission. The state created a series of assessments, called the Golden State Merit Examinations, which were taken by hundreds of thousands of students, who spent time and resources preparing to take the exams. These examinations were eliminated in 2009, and now the GSSMDs are awarded based on grades, Smart Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) scores, and, in some cases, local assessments.

The SSB was established in 2011 with the goal of recognizing high school graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing one or more languages in addition to English. In his 2021 letter to LEAs on the Importance of the SSB, Superintendent Tony Thurmond noted that fluency in more than one language has always been an admirable skill and biliteracy is increasingly important to employment in an international and global context to prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow. In its first year, more than 10,000 graduating high school students across California earned recognition for achieving proficiency in multiple languages. Most recently, the CDE reports for the 2024-25 school year, 75,911 SSBs have been awarded to graduating seniors across 515 participating school districts.

The SSCE was established in 2017 with the goal of recognizing students who have demonstrated excellence in civics education and participation, and an understanding of the United States Constitution, the California Constitution, and the democratic system of government. In furtherance of this recognition, statute required the SPI to recommend criteria to the SBE, with specific consideration of a student's successful completion of history, government, and civics courses, including courses that incorporate character education and voluntary participation in community service or extracurricular activities. The final criteria adopted statewide are meant to provide LEAs with a framework for making determinations of student qualifications required to earn the SSCE, based on their own local contexts. These include requirements for students to do the following:

- 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.

According to the CDE, the criteria are written to ensure that no student is excluded from an opportunity to earn an SSCE based on academic ability, alternative school setting, or unique or unconventional expressions of civic engagement. As civic engagement may look different from community to community, the CDE encourages LEAs to work with local and statewide organizations to develop local criteria and to design and implement impactful

civic engagement programs and pathways that reflect community interests, needs, and resources.

The CDE reports that for the 2024-25 school year, 23,040 seals have been awarded across 492 participating schools.

- 5) ***Equity in Access to Climate Literacy Opportunities.*** This bill borrows the model of SSCE to create the SSCL. Specifically, it requires the SPI to recommend to the SBE criteria that would allow LEAs to recognize students who have demonstrated mastery in climate literacy disciplines, green skills or technical green skills, and any and all other best practices for climate literacy. In the development of criteria, the bill requires the SPI to consider factors such as the completion of courses in the area of climate literacy and the completion and presentation of a climate literacy final experiential learning project, as specified.

While the SSCL is intended to serve as a voluntary program, its implementation relies heavily on an LEA's ability to leverage partnerships with state and local climate literacy nonprofits, as well as labor and private sector entities engaged in the green economy. There are certainly areas of the state that have an abundance of local entities that are engaged with LEAs and have the capacity to partner with schools to provide learning opportunities for students; however, without careful attention to expanded access, such opportunities cannot be guaranteed for all students across the state. As a result, the SSCL may have the unintended consequence of highlighting LEAs that have the means to provide an environment where students can meet eligibility criteria, and leaving students at LEAs without such means behind.

This bill requires the SPI, in the development of recommended criteria, to ensure that to the greatest extent feasible, the recommended criteria provides all pupils with an opportunity to earn the SSCL and results in a seal that confers a benefit to the pupil beyond high school. The bill also authorizes the SPI to work with nonprofit organizations in furtherance of these priorities and others.

- 6) ***Prior and related legislation.***

SB 720 (Allen, Chapter 374, Statutes of 2018) revised provisions relating to the education principles for the environment by, among other things, (1) renaming them the environmental principles and concepts; (2) revising the process for, and entities involved in, updating the environmental principles and concepts; and (3) requiring the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) to ensure that the environmental principles and concepts are integrated into content standards and curriculum frameworks whenever those standards and frameworks are revised.

AB 1142 (Medina, Chapter 208, Statutes of 2017) updated the English language arts and English language development assessments used to determine recipients of the SSB.

AB 2072 (Chang, 2016) would have established the State Seal of STEM to recognize high school graduates who have attained proficiency in STEM content. *AB 2072 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.*

AB 815 (Brownley, Chapter 618, Statutes of 2011) established the SSB to recognize high school graduates who what attained a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages in addition to English.

AB 1721 (Pavley, Chapter 581, Statutes of 2005) placed decision making authority, regarding the incorporation of environmental principles into academic content standards and instructional materials, with the SPI and the SBE.

AB 1548 (Pavley, Chapter 665, Statutes of 2003) established the OEE within the California Environmental Protection Agency and required it to develop environmental education principles and a model curriculum.

SUPPORT

California State PTA (co-sponsor)
Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action (co-sponsor)
Ten Strands (co-sponsor)
UndauntedK12 (co-sponsor)
State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond
350 Bay Area Action
7th Generation Advisors
Adolfo Camarillo High School
American River Natural History Association dba Effie Yeaw Nature Center
Arc
Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education
Bay Tree Design
Bluesky Consulting
Burbank Eco Council
Cadman Cooking and Garden Education Program
California Academy of Sciences
California Outdoor Recreation Partnership
California State Parks Foundation
Camp Chrysalis
Canopy
Center for Ecoliteracy
CFT
Children Now
Children's Environmental Literacy Foundation
Citizens' Climate Lobby San Mateo County Chapter
City and County of San Francisco
City of Mountain View
Climate Action Campaign of the Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Climate Action Pathways for Schools
Climate Justice Committee, Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley
Common Vision
Dfusion Inc.
EdTrust-West
Elder Climate Action Northern California Chapter

Elders Climate Action Southern California Chapter
Environmental Education Collaborative
Environmental Nature Center
Equity Meets Design
Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools
Fremont Union High School District
Fresno Chaffee Zoo
Friends of the LA River
Friends of the Lost Coast
Green Schoolyards America
HED
iCrest Education Foundation
Inner City Bliss
Life Lab
Living Classroom
Los Angeles County Office of Education
Los Gatos Almaden Pollinator Garden
Master Gardener Association of San Diego County
Menlo Spark
National Marine Educators Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nurture Nature
Oakland Goes Outdoors
People, Food and Land Foundation
Richmond Outdoors Coalition
Roots to Branches Education
Sacramento Splash
Samuel Lawrence Foundation
San Diego Pediatricians for Clean Air
San Francisco Climate Literacy Advocates
SanDiego350
Santa Clara County Medical Association
Steam Learning Institute
Strategic Energy Innovations
Sustainable Marin Schools
Sustainable Mill Valley
SustainConsulting, LLC
The Escondido Creek Conservancy
The Friends of Daley Ranch
Three Oaks Outdoor Science School, Inc.
Tomorrow's Talent
TreePeople
trubel&co
UC Davis Center for Community and Citizen Science
United Teachers Los Angeles
Western Municipal Water District
YES Nature to Neighborhoods
Youth v. Oil
Three individuals

OPPOSITION

None received

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