

SENATE THIRD READING
SB 1048 (Becker)
As Amended August 12, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Establishes the State Seal of Climate Literacy (SSCL), a voluntary program through which local educational agencies (LEAs) create pathways towards climate literacy disciplines and reward students who have demonstrated mastery. Requires the *Education Commissioner* and State Board of Education (SBE) to develop and adopt criteria for awarding the SSCL based on student coursework and experiential learning projects.

Major Provisions

- 1) Requires the *Commissioner*, on or before *December 31, 2027*, to recommend to the SBE criteria for awarding the SSCL to students who have demonstrated mastery in climate literacy disciplines, green skills, or technical green skills, and other best practices for climate literacy. Requires the *Commissioner* to consider including the following in the SSCL award criteria:
 - a) Successful completion of at least two approved courses in the area of climate literacy, which may include but not be 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 or the state's Seeds to Solutions Curriculum; and
 - iv) Courses that integrate the state's Native American Studies model curriculum.
 - b) Successful completion and presentation of a climate literacy final experiential learning project on the causes and effects of climate change in the student's local community, which demonstrates academic understanding and practical application of climate literacy. Final projects may include, but are not limited to:
 - i) A capstone project centered on the pupil's community, including the community's effect on and/or vulnerability to climate change;
 - ii) Field experiences or practica;
 - iii) Internships, externships, or employment with climate literacy or green career experiential learning providers;
 - iv) Community projects with a climate literacy experiential learning provider;
 - v) Hands-on laboratory experiments;

- vi) Original artwork or writing; and
 - vii) Student-led and designed programming that has an effect on their community.
- 2) Requires the *Commissioner* to ensure, to the extent possible, that SSCL criteria adhere to the following:
- a) Provide all students in participating LEAs with an opportunity to earn the SSCL;
 - b) Recognize student excellence and outstanding achievement;
 - c) Are not based primarily on student achievement already recognized through grades or other standard measures of student achievement; and
 - d) Result in a seal that confers a benefit to students beyond high school, signaling to employers and higher education institutions the student's readiness to contribute to a sustainable and resilient future.
- 3) Requires the SBE, on or before January 31, 2029, to adopt, with or without modifications, the SSCL criteria recommended by the *Commissioner*.
- 4) Requires the *Commissioner* to do the following, in partnership with nonprofit organizations if desired:
- a) Prepare and deliver appropriate diploma or transcript insignia to participating LEAs;
 - b) Provide information the *Commissioner* deems necessary for LEAs to successfully *and equitably* participate in the SSCL, which may include guidance or criteria to support *equitable* implementation *and access for priority pupil groups in alignment with the California School Dashboard*; sample project frameworks; professional development resources; guidance for developing partnerships with community-based organizations, industry leaders, or institutions of higher education; and resources for determining if a student has met the SSCL criteria.
 - c) Provide SSCL students with information about post-secondary opportunities and career pathways that leverage the knowledge and skills that pupils develop through earning the SSCL. The SPI may partner with nonprofit, labor, or private sector organizations to provide such information.
- 5) *Authorizes the CDE to partner with nonprofit organizations to conduct outreach and provide technical assistance to LEAs in awarding the SSCL to ensure broad participation from diverse communities throughout the state.*
- 6) Requires a participating LEA, *on or after the date that the SBE adopts SSCL criteria*, to do the following:
- a) Maintain appropriate records in order to identify pupils who have earned an SSCL.
 - b) Affix the insignia to the diploma or transcript of each student who earns an SSCL.

- c) Provide information to students about available options and supports, including but not limited to approved courses, experiential learning, or final projects that may enable students to meet the SSCL criteria.
 - d) Establish a process for determining if a student has met the criteria to earn an SSCL.
- 7) Provides several definitions related to climate literacy and green skills pursuant to this bill.

COMMENTS

Most recent amendments. The most recent amendments replace Superintendent of Public Instruction with Education Commissioner, extend the implementation timeline, and emphasize equitable implementation wherever possible to ensure participation from diverse communities throughout the state.

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). Each Seal is awarded to tens of thousands of graduates each year. The establishment of the SSCL most closely resembles the framework of the SSCE.

Equity concerns in access to climate literacy opportunities. 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.

State commitments to environmental literacy. California's education system has made numerous investments in environmental literacy, of which climate literacy is a subset. These include SB 720 (Allen), Chapter 374, Statutes of 2018, which updated the state's Environmental Principles and Concepts (EP&Cs) to incorporate contemporary challenges, including climate change and environmental justice. SB 720 further required the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) integrate these principles into K12 content standards and curriculum frameworks in science, history-social science, health, and English language arts, when those frameworks were next revised. In 2014, SPI Torlakson assembled the California Environmental Literacy Task Force (ELTF) to create a blueprint for achieving environmental literacy for all California students. The Blueprint identified six educational strategies to improve environmental literacy, which include strengthening collaboration between key stakeholders and leveraging the SPI's influence to build support for the importance of environmental literacy. In 2003, the Legislature required the Secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency to develop environmental principles and concepts for elementary and secondary school students, and use those principles and concepts to develop model environmental curricula. The result is the Education and the Environment Initiative (EEI), which is designed to increase environmental literacy, now housed within CalRecycle. The EEI Curriculum is available to educators in print and online at no cost.

The creation of the SSCL appears well-aligned with the goals and programs of these previous investments.

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."

Arguments in Support

According to the organization Children Now, "Young people are asking for a comprehensive, interdisciplinary climate education that will help prepare them for the future they face. 80% of California youth between ages of 14 and 24 report experiencing climate distress, the antidote to which is a solutions-oriented climate education that provides them with an outlet to channel this anxiety into empowering, community-based, career-ready action. By establishing a formal diploma distinction, the bill envisions the state recognizing coursework, hands-on learning, and real-world projects, and provides a framework to increase access to climate learning across the state. Final criteria for earning the Seal will be established by the State Board of Education, ensuring the framework reflects the needs of California students and communities."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) Minor, ongoing Proposition 98 General Fund costs to high schools to verify whether a student has demonstrated climate literacy as prescribed by the criteria to be set forth by the SBE pursuant to this bill.
- 2) Ongoing General Fund costs, likely minor, for the California Department of Education (CDE) to send out additional seals authorized under this new designation.

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 37-0-3

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ABS, ABST OR NV: Jones, Niello, Strickland

ASM EDUCATION: 8-0-1

YES: Patel, Hoover, Alvarez, Bonta, Castillo, Lowenthal, Pellerin, Zbur

ABS, ABST OR NV: Garcia

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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