
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SB 1378 **Hearing Date:** April 8, 2026
Author: Ochoa Bogh
Version: February 20, 2026
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Therresa Austin

Subject: California Excellence in Service Learning Designation Program.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to establish the California Excellence in Service Learning (CESL) Designation Program to publicly recognize and designate schoolsites and local educational agencies (LEA) that demonstrate excellence in service learning.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the California Serves Program under the CDE in collaboration with CaliforniaVolunteers, 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. (Education Code (EC) § 51475)
- 2) Establishes the California Serves Program for the purposes of awarding grants to promote access to effective service learning for students in grade 12, with the goal of expanding access for high school graduates in obtaining an SSCE through service learning. Allowable uses for grants include:
 - a) Paid planning time for teachers to increase the use of service learning in instruction.
 - b) Professional development on service learning for administrators and teachers.
 - c) Purchase of instructional materials to help integrate service learning in instruction.
 - d) Participation costs, including materials or travel expenses related to service learning activities.
 - e) Personnel costs for coordinating service learning at the LEA or a school site.

- f) Participation costs associated with grant program evaluation. (EC § 51475)
- 3) 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. (EC § 51475)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Requires the CDE to establish the CESL Designation Program to recognize and designate schoolsites and LEAs that meet specified criteria related to service learning.
- 2) Requires the CDE to adopt application criteria for the schoolsites and LEAs seeking the CESL designation. Requires the CDE to consider, in the development of said criteria, requirements that the applicants do all the following:
 - a) Demonstrate an active status designation, as identified by the CDE on the CDE's internet website.
 - b) Designate a staff member to serve as a point of contact for service learning.
 - c) Provide professional development opportunities to train staff on service learning.
 - d) Develop a dedicated web page on the applicant's internet website with easily accessible information and resources on service learning.
- 3) Requires LEAs that have applied and been awarded the designation, to display its active status designation on its internet website.
- 4) States that the CESL designation shall be valid for three years, after which an applicant seeking to renew its designation shall reapply pursuant to the application criteria developed by CDE pursuant to #2 above.
- 5) Authorizes CDE to request additional information to verify if an applicant that has earned the CESL designation continues to adhere to the CESL designation criteria it develops.
- 6) States that if the CDE finds that an LEA that has previously earned a CESL designation ceases to comply with the CDE adopted criteria during the three-year period, the applicant shall lose the CESL designation.
- 7) Authorizes an LEA that loses its designation as a result of falling out of compliance with the criteria adopted by CDE to reapply.

- 8) Defines the following terms:
- a) “Applicant” means a schoolsite or a local educational agency.
 - b) “Local educational agency” means a school district, county office of education, or charter school.
 - c) “Schoolsite” means a publicly funded school serving pupils in kindergarten, or any grades 1 to 12, inclusive.
 - d) “Service Learning” means an educational approach that intentionally combines meaningful community service activities with instruction and reflection to support pupil progress toward academic and civic engagement learning objectives while meeting social needs.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, “Senate Bill 1378 would establish the California Excellence in Service Learning Designation Program to recognize Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and schools that demonstrate excellence in implementing service learning programs.

“Service learning integrates community service with academic instruction, allowing students to apply classroom knowledge to real-world issues while developing civic responsibility and leadership skills. California already recognizes schools for excellence in other areas through programs such as the California Green Ribbon Schools Award and the Purple Star School Designation, which highlight achievements in environmental sustainability and support for military-connected students.

“California currently lacks a statewide recognition program that highlights schools and LEAs excelling in service learning. SB 1378 addresses this gap by creating a designation that recognizes outstanding programs across the state. By recognizing these efforts, the program will promote student engagement while strengthening connections between schools and their communities.”

- 2) ***California Serves Program.*** The California Serves Program was established through the 2022 State Budget Act as a collaboration between the CDE and CaliforniaVolunteers to promote access to effective service learning for high school students and support them in obtaining an SSCE through service learning.

At the outset of the program, CDE and CaliforniaVolunteers were tasked with reviewing the available evidence on ways to incorporate effective service learning for pupils in grades 9 through 12, and to provide recommendations to the Legislature consistent with the recommended criteria and guidance for the SSCE, on evidence-based strategies to expand access to high-quality service

learning programs. The final report, published in January 2024, issued the following recommendations:

- a) Establish effective standards and indicators to guide the development of equitable, high-quality service learning programs;
- b) Incorporate curriculum and strategies that encourage deep civic learning;
- c) Ensure teacher access to ongoing professional development and learning;
- d) Prioritize efforts to track who earns the SSCE; and
- e) Design meaningful infrastructure that promotes service learning at all levels.

The corresponding California Serves Grant Program was also established in the 2022 Budget Act with an annual ongoing allocation of \$5 million to provide 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 a SSCE. To apply for this grant, applicant LEAs must (1) have at least 55% of their student enrollment be unduplicated pupils as defined in statute and (2) serve students in grade 12. While promoting access to effective service learning for students in grade 12 is the focus and eligibility criteria, the grant program provides LEAs with the flexibility to also support such programming for students as early as grade 9. Allowable uses for grant funds are as follows:

- a) Paid planning time for teachers to increase the use of service learning in instruction.
- b) Professional development on service learning for administrators and teachers.
- c) Purchase of instructional materials to help integrate service learning in instruction.
- d) Participation costs, including materials or travel expenses related to service learning activities.
- e) Personnel costs for coordinating service learning at the LEA or a school site.
- f) Participation costs associated with grant program evaluation.

Since its pilot year in the 2022-23 school year, the California Serves Grant Program has awarded 35 LEAs with award amounts ranging from \$24,000 to \$500,000—the maximum allowable under statute. The grant program is currently in its fourth cycle of funding.

- 3) **State Seal of Civic Engagement.** On September 10, 2020, the State Board of Education (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 CDE's 2024-25 school year data, 23,040 seals have been awarded to students across 492 schools that participate in the SSCE.

- 4) **California School Recognition Program (CSRP).** The CDE operates several recognition programs known collectively as the CSRP. According to the CDE, "the CSRP gives exceptional schools and school leaders the opportunity to gather and share their Model Programs and Practices and their special skills which have contributed to their success. There are many details that go into the eligibility and selection of these awardees. All of the award programs recognize sustained student achievement, excellence in environmental program design, or superior job performance, and community involvement. CSRP Awardees are recognized at a CSRP Awards Ceremony held during the spring." Qualifications and standards are set by the CDE to ensure the quality of candidates selected to receive these recognitions. Since its inception in 1986, the CSRP recognizes numerous types of schools, including the following:
- a) The Purple Star School Designation
 - b) California Distinguished Schools Program
 - c) California Exemplary Arts Education Award

- d) California Exemplary Dual Enrollment Award
- e) California Green Ribbon Schools
- f) California Teachers of the Year
- g) Classified School Employees of the Year
- h) Model Community Day School Recognition Program
- i) Model Continuation High School Recognition Program
- j) National Blue Ribbon Schools

Most relevant in this discussion is the Civic Learning Award for CA Public Schools, which recognizes and celebrates public kindergarten through grade 12 schools that demonstrate a commitment to providing rich civic learning opportunities for students through instruction, programs, activities, and/or events. Among the criteria for the Civic Learning Award is a measure of how well the school executes the [Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning](#), including service learning linked to civic learning curriculum.

The Civic Learning Awards were first presented in 2012 and have recognized more than 350 public schools of all grade levels across California. The Civic Learning Award program has four levels: Awards of Excellence, Distinction, Merit, and Honorable Mentions.

The Civic Learning Award, like most CSRPs awards, was established by the CDE and the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) using their existing authority to develop programs that advance statewide priorities.

5) ***Author's amendments to be taken as Committee Amendments.***

- a) Strikes the provision requiring the SPI to consider, during the application criteria development process, including criteria that requires an LEA or school to demonstrate an active status designation prior to a designation being awarded.
- b) Requires the SPI to adopt criteria for schools and LEAs to renew their designations upon expiration.

6) ***Related legislation.***

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 in the Senate Appropriations Committee.*

AB 422 (Jackson, Chapter 692, Statutes of 2025) would require the SPI, by January 1, 2027, to recommend revised criteria to the SBE for awarding the SSCE, including a demonstrated understanding of the importance of preserving democracy and its vital institutions.

SB 920 (Seyarto, Chapter 923, Statutes of 2024) codified the existing Purple Star School Designation Program, which was established by the CDE in 2022 to recognize and designate schools that meet certain requirements and signal which schools are the most committed and best equipped to meet military-connected pupils and their families' unique needs.

ACR 53 (Ward, Chapter 57, Statutes of 2021) requests the CDE to establish and manage a program designating schools as Purple Star Schools when schools support military-connected students in specified ways, and requests the CDE to use the Military Child Education Coalition for resources and information regarding establishing and managing a Purple Star School Program in California.

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

SUPPORT

Generation Up (co-sponsor)
Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties (co-sponsor)
California Association of Student Councils
California Charter Schools Association
Center for Volunteer & Nonprofit Leadership
National Youth Leadership Council
Youth Service America

OPPOSITION

None received

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