
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 1378 (Ochoa Bogh) - California Excellence in Service Learning Designation Program

Version: April 9, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: April 20, 2026

Policy Vote: ED. 7 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Lenin Del Castillo

Bill 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 school sites and local educational agencies (LEA) that demonstrate excellence in service learning.

Fiscal Impact: The CDE estimates ongoing General Fund costs of approximately \$402,000 each year and 2.0 positions to implement the new designation program. This estimate includes the development of the application process and criteria, review of applications, handling renewals, and the ongoing monitoring of participating school sites and LEAs. The CDE indicates that it would likely need to contract with service-learning experts to help develop strong, practical criteria and guidance, and to ensure applications are evaluated against recognized best practices, resulting in additional one-time General Fund costs in the first year of implementation.

Background: Existing law establishes the California Serves Program under the CDE in collaboration with California Volunteers 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. The program awards grants to LEAs to promote access to effective service-learning for students in grade twelve, with the goal of expanding access for high school graduates in obtaining an SSCE through service-learning. Allowable uses for grants include paid planning time for teachers to increase the use of service-learning in instruction, professional development on service-learning for administrators and teachers, and the purchase of instructional materials to help integrate service-learning in instruction.

Existing law 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.

Existing law requires the adopted course of study for grades 1 to 6, inclusive, and grades 7 to 12, inclusive, to include among other things, social sciences. The instruction shall include anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, psychology, and sociology and designed to fit the maturity of the pupils. California's History-Social Science Framework was adopted by the State Board of Education in July of 2016 and addresses civic engagement throughout the document. Existing law requires the IQC to consider, during the next revision of the history-social science

framework, how civics and history instruction, at all appropriate grade levels, includes, in addition to the acquisition of content knowledge, the application of that content to develop the competence and skills needed for civic engagement.

Proposed Law: This bill requires the CDE to establish the CESL Designation Program to recognize and designate school sites and LEAs that meet specified criteria related to service learning.

This bill requires the CDE to adopt application criteria for school sites and LEAs seeking the CESL designation and to consider the following requirements for applicants:

1. Designate a staff member to serve as a point of contact for service learning.
2. Provide professional development opportunities to train staff in service learning.
3. Develop a dedicated web page on the applicant's internet website with easily accessible information and resources on service learning.

This bill requires LEAs that have applied and been awarded the designation, to display its active status designation on its internet website.

The bill states that the CESL designation shall be valid for three years, after which an applicant seeking to renew its designation shall reapply pursuant to a renewal process and criteria determined by CDE. The bill also authorizes the 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.

The bill provides that if the CDE finds that an LEA that 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. It also authorizes an LEA that loses its designation may reapply, as specified.

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 and required LEAs to implement a Civic Engagement Pathways Program. The bill was held on the Suspense File in this committee.

SB 920 (Seyarto, Chapter 923, Statutes of 2024) codifies the existing Purple Star School Designation Program to recognize and designate schools that are committed and best equipped to meet military-connected pupils and their families' unique needs.

Staff Comments: This bill would establish a program that recognizes schools and LEAs that demonstrate excellence in implementing service learning programs. The bill defines service learning as a 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. According to the author, "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.”

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