

THIRD READING

Bill No: SB 1378
Author: Ochoa Bogh (R)
Amended: 4/9/26
Vote: 21

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 7-0, 4/8/26
AYES: Pérez, Ochoa Bogh, Cabaldon, Choi, Cortese, Gonzalez, Reyes

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 5/14/26
AYES: Cervantes, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

SUBJECT: California Excellence in Service Learning Designation Program

SOURCE: Center for Children and Youth
Generation Up
Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the
Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties

DIGEST: 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.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) 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. (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. (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)

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) Designate a staff member to serve as a point of contact for service learning.
 - b) Provide professional development opportunities to train staff on service learning.
 - c) 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 a renewal process and criteria determined by the CDE.
- 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 due to noncompliance 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.

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 California Volunteers 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 California Volunteers 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) *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.

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 CSRP awards, was established by the CDE and the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) using their existing authority to develop programs that advance statewide priorities.

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

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.

SUPPORT: (Verified 5/14/26)

Center for Children and Youth (co-source)

Generation Up (co-source)

Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties (co-source)

Beverly Hills Synagogue

California Association of Christian Colleges and Universities

California Association of Student Councils

California Charter Schools Association

Center for Volunteer & Nonprofit Leadership

Democrats for Israel Los Angeles

Hadassah, the Women's Zionist of America

Hillel of San Diego

Holocaust Museum LA

JCC/Federation of San Luis Obispo

JCRC Bay Area

JCRC Santa Barbara County

JCRC, Jewish Long Beach

Jewish California

Jewish Center for Justice

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Jewish Democratic Club of Marin

Jewish Family Service of the Desert

Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley

Jewish Federation Bay Area

Jewish Federation of Greater Santa Barbara

Jewish Federation of Orange County
Jewish Federation of the Desert
Jewish Federation of the Greater San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys
Jewish Free Loan Association
Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation
JFCS East Bay
JFCS Long Beach and Orange County
National Council of Jewish Women -San Francisco
National Youth Leadership Council
Simon Wiesenthal Center
Youth Service America

OPPOSITION: (Verified 5/14/26)

None received

Prepared by: Therresa Austin / ED. / (916) 651-4105
5/16/26 11:23:20

**** **END** ****