

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Darshana R. Patel, Chair
SB 1378 (Ochoa Bogh) – As Amended April 9, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 33-0

SUBJECT: California Excellence in Service Learning Designation Program

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to establish the California Excellence in Service Learning (CESL) Designation Program to recognize and designate schoolsites and local educational agencies (LEAs) that meet specified criteria related to service learning. Specifically, **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 the 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; and
 - c) Develop a dedicated webpage on the applicant's 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 website.
- 4) States that the CESL designation shall be valid for three years, after which an applicant seeking to renew its designation must reapply pursuant to a renewal process and criteria determined by the CDE.
- 5) 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.
- 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 loses 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 an LEA;

- b) “Local educational agency” means a school district, county office of education (COE), or charter school;
- c) “Schoolsite” means a publicly funded school serving pupils in kindergarten through grade 12; and
- 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.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Serves Program, to be administered by the CDE in collaboration with the California Volunteers to promote access for effective service learning for students in 12th grade to expand access for high school graduates in obtaining a State Seal of Civic Engagement. Requires the CDE, in partnership with California Volunteers, by January 1, 2024, to review evidence and provide recommendations on ways to incorporate effective service learning for students in 9-12th grades and promote equitable access to these programs. (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 a State Seal of Civic Engagement 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; and
 - f) Participation costs associated with grant program evaluation. (EC 51475)
- 3) Establishes the 21st Century High School After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETS) program to award grants for after-school enrichment programs for high school students. A program consists of an academic assistance element and an enrichment element that may include community service or service learning. (EC 8421).
- 4) Establishes a State Seal of Civic Engagement, to be affixed to the diploma of qualifying high school graduates, based on a demonstration of excellence in civics education and participation. (EC 51470)

- 5) Requires the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), on or before January 1, 2020, to recommend to the State Board of Education (SBE) criteria for awarding a State Seal of Civic Engagement 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)
- 6) Requires the SPI, in developing criteria for the State Seal of Civic Engagement, 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 it deems appropriate.
- 7) Requires the SPI to ensure, to the greatest extent feasible, that the criteria:
 - a) Provide all students with an opportunity to earn the State Seal of Civic Engagement;
 - b) Recognize student excellence or outstanding achievement;
 - c) Are not based primarily on student achievement that is already recognized through grades or other standard measures of student achievement; and
 - d) To the extent possible, result in a seal that confers some benefit to students beyond secondary school. (EC 51471)
- 8) States that school district participation in this program is voluntary. (EC 51471)

FISCAL EFFECT: 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.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. The author states, “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.”

California School Recognition Program. The CDE currently administers a number of recognition programs known collectively as the California School Recognition Program (CSRP).

Begun in 1986, these programs have been developed voluntarily by the SPI over time, with only one established through statute (Purple Star Schools designation), and have been supported by private funds. The CSRP includes the following recognitions:

- California Exemplary Arts Education;
- California Exemplary Physical Activity and Nutrition Education;
- California Exemplary Career Technical Education;
- California Exemplary Districts;
- California Green Ribbon Schools;
- California Purple Star School Designation;
- California Teachers of the Year;
- Civic Learning Award;
- Classified School Employees of the Year;
- Model Continuation High School Recognition Program;
- National Blue Ribbon Schools;
- California Purple Star Schools Program; and
- National Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Distinguished Schools

According to the CDE, the award programs recognize sustained student achievement, excellence in environmental program design, superior job performance, and community involvement.

The Committee may wish to consider that nothing in current law precludes the current SPI from developing a school recognition program, including one to recognize excellence in service learning.

California Serves Grant Program. AB 181 (Committee on Budget) Chapter 52, Statutes of 2022, establishes the California Serves Grant Program and appropriates \$5 million in annual funding, beginning with the 2022-23 fiscal year, to the CDE to award grants to LEAs to promote access to effective service learning for students in 12th grade with the goal of expanding access for high school graduates to obtain a State Seal of Civic Engagement. The maximum grant amount is \$500,000 and eligible activities include:

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

Recommendations to expand service learning. The Legislature, in establishing the California Serves Grant Program, required the CDE in partnership with California Volunteers to provide recommendations to the Legislature on evidence-based strategies to expand access to high-quality service-learning programs in California high schools and promote equitable access to these programs. In their January 2024 report to the Legislature, the CDE provided five recommendations:

- Establish effective standards and indicators of service-learning;
- Incorporate curriculum and strategies that encourage deep civic learning;
- Ensure teacher access to ongoing professional development and learning;
- Prioritize efforts to track who earns the State Seal of Civic Engagement; and
- Design meaningful infrastructure that promotes service-learning at all levels.

Service-learning vs. community service or volunteering. Service-learning is distinguished from volunteering or community service in that it connects service with structured opportunities to learn from the experience. The federal Learn and Serve program of the Corporation for National and Community Service defined service-learning as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.”

Service-learning supports academic achievement, narrows achievement gaps. A 2011 meta-analysis in the Journal of Experiential Education, *A Meta-analysis of the Impact of Service-Learning on Students*, of 62 studies involving 11,837 students found that, compared to controls, students who participated in service-learning programs demonstrated significant gains in five outcome areas: attitudes toward self, attitudes toward school and learning, civic engagement, social skills, and academic performance. The analysis also found that following certain

recommended practices—such as linking to curriculum, community involvement, and reflection—were associated with better outcomes. A 2005 analysis of 217,000 student surveys found that “service [service-learning was not measured] of only one hour per week among lower-income students was related to significant reduction of the gap in achievement-related assets between higher and lower-income students.”

State Seal of Civic Engagement. AB 24 (Eggman), Chapter 604, Statutes of 2017, required the SBE to establish five criteria for the awarding of the State Seal of Civic Engagement. The SBE established these five criteria on September 10, 2020.

The five criteria are meant to provide LEAs with a Framework for making determinations of student qualifications required to earn the State Seal of Civic Engagement, based on their own local contexts. The criteria were written to ensure that no student is excluded from an opportunity to earn the State Seal of Civic Engagement based on academic ability, alternative school settings, or unique or unconventional expressions of civic engagement. The student must:

- 1) Be engaged in academic work in a productive way;
- 2) 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;
- 3) 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;
- 4) Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection; and
- 5) Exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact the classroom, school, community and/or society.

Growing number of State Seals of Civic Engagement earned. Participation in the State Seal of Civic Engagement program has been small but growing. According to the CDE, in the 2024-25 school year, 33 counties, 161 LEAs, and 492 schools were participating in the program. A total of 21,284 seals were attached to high school diplomas, as well as a small number to alternative diplomas, general education development certificates, and certificates of completion.

Recommended Committee amendments. Staff recommends that the bill be amended to 1) limit the program to recognizing schools (not LEAs), as is current practice, and 2) clarify in the definition of service learning that it is an educational approach used in all grades.

Arguments in support. Generation Up writes, “Service learning addresses an urgent need, as noted in California’s History-Social Science Framework, by enabling ‘classes to be more interesting, learning to be more meaningful, and academics to be connected to the real world.’ Service learning components can be integrated into courses across a variety of subjects, and while applicable in all core subjects, it is particularly relevant in social studies.

In 2020, a survey of Gen Z individuals showed that while 53% wanted to get more involved in their communities following the pandemic, they stated that they need the opportunities to do so. As the first study authors noted, to capitalize on Gen Z's higher rates of civic engagement than older generations, organizations must plan for how they will utilize this post-pandemic wave of engagement.

Young people clearly state that they are looking for more service opportunities and ways to learn about the systemic factors shaping the communities where they study and live. Nonprofits are in need of talented human capital but are often short on funds to hire permanent staff. And our society desperately needs to build bridges and increase understanding between people with different life experiences.”

Related legislation. SB 920 (Seyarto), Chapter 923, Statutes of 2024, codifies the existing Purple Star School Designation Program, which was established by the CDE in 2022.

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

AB 2354 (Gabriel) of the 2025-26 Session would expand the California Serves Program to serve students in grades 6 through 12 and requires the CDE, in partnership with the California Volunteers, to provide recommendations for effective service-learning strategies for grades 6 through 12.

SB 578 (Limón) of the 2025-26 Session 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 1520 (Bonta) of the 2023-24 Session would have required the SPI by July 1, 2024, to select a partnership consisting of a COE and a community organization to serve as the State Seal of Civic Engagement Resource Lead. Would have required the State Seal of Civic Engagement Resource Lead to engage in a wide range of duties, including the coordination of support, provision of technical assistance, and delivery of professional learning to improve equitable access for students, especially those in marginalized communities, to the State Seal of Civic Engagement. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 181 (Committee on Budget) Chapter 52, Statutes of 2022, establishes the California Serves Program to be administered by the CDE in collaboration with California Volunteers to promote access to effective service learning for students in 12th grade, with the goal of expanding access for high school graduates in obtaining a State Seal of Civic Engagement.

AB 2116 (McCarty) of the 2021-22 Session would have established the California Serves Pilot Program for purposes of engaging pupils in grade 12, and requires the CDE, in collaboration with California Volunteers, to conduct a study on ways to incorporate impactful service learning for pupils in grade 12. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 2678 (McCarty) of the 2019-20 Session would have required California Volunteers, in collaboration with the CDE and appropriate stakeholders, to conduct a study on ways to incorporate impactful service-learning for pupils in grade 12 and, on or before January 1, 2022, provide recommendations on how to integrate service learning. This bill was held in the Assembly Education Committee.

AB 189 (Low) of the 2017-18 Session would have required the IQC to develop a model curriculum on service-learning for pupils in ninth to 12th grade, for voluntary use by educators. This bill was vetoed by the Governor, who stated:

I believe this bill is unnecessary. The Instructional Quality Commission carefully considered the subject of service-learning when it was updating the History-Social Science Framework and embedded it throughout the curriculum framework that the State Board of Education subsequently adopted.

AB 24 (Eggman), Chapter 604, Statutes of 2017, establishes a State Seal of Civic Engagement, to be affixed to the diploma of qualifying high school graduates based on a demonstration of excellence in civic education and participation.

AB 1689 (Low) of the 2015-16 Session would have required, beginning with the high school class of 2022-23, that at least one of the courses required for graduation include a service-learning component. The bill would have defined service-learning and also required the SPI to develop curriculum standards for courses that incorporate a service-learning component. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 524 (Low) of the 2015-16 Session would have required, beginning with the high school class of 2020-21, that at least one of the courses required for graduation include a service-learning component. The bill would have defined service-learning and also required the SPI to develop curriculum standards for courses that incorporate a service-learning component. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 127 (Jeffries) of the 2009-10 Session would have established the California Volunteers Commission, which would serve as California's State Commission for purposes of the federal National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 and its implementing rules and regulations. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

SB 984 (Polanco), Chapter 213, Statutes of 2000, establishes the Cesar Chavez Day of Service and Learning program to promote service to the communities of California in honor of the life and work of Cesar Chavez and authorized the local and state operated Americorps and Conservation Corps to submit proposals for programs that will engage pupils through their schools and school districts in community service that honors the life and work of Cesar Chavez.

AB 1911 (Wesson and Hertzberg) of the 1999-2000 Session would have required school districts offering grades 9-12 to offer students the opportunity to enroll in courses that include service-learning activities for credit toward graduation. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Beverly Hills Synagogue
California Association of Christian Colleges and Universities
California Charter Schools Association
Center for Volunteer and Nonprofit Leadership
Democrats for Israel Los Angeles
Generation Up
Hadassah, the Women's Zionist of America, INC.
Hillel of San Diego
Holocaust Museum Los Angeles
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 and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties
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
Menlo-Atherton High School Service-Learning Students
National Council of Jewish Women - SF
National Youth Leadership Council
Simon Wiesenthal Center, Inc.

Opposition

None on file

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