

Date of Hearing: March 15, 2017

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Patrick O'Donnell, Chair
AB 189 (Low) – As Introduced January 19, 2017

SUBJECT: School curriculum: coursework for high school graduation: service learning

SUMMARY: Requires, beginning with the high school class of 2022-23, that at least one of the courses required to be completed by a student prior to graduation include a service-learning component, and requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to develop curriculum standards for service-learning. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Makes findings and declarations relative to the importance of service-learning as a means of improving educational performance, developing character, values, self-esteem, civic responsibility, and knowledge of local community issues and concerns.
- 2) Requires the SPI to develop curriculum standards for courses that incorporate a service-learning component.
- 3) Requires that, in developing the curriculum standards, the SPI consult with specified individuals, including leaders of community organizations, students, parents, classroom teachers, school administrators, postsecondary educators, representatives of business and industry. Requires that this consultation process reflect, to the extent feasible, the diverse regions and socioeconomic communities of the state.
- 4) Requires the SPI to submit the standards to the State Board of Education (SBE) by March 1, 2019.
- 5) Requires the SBE to adopt or reject the standards by July 1, 2019.
- 6) Requires that districts implement the SBE-adopted standards by the 2019-20 school year.
- 7) Requires that, if the SBE rejects the standards, the SBE submit a written explanation of the reasons why the standards were rejected to the SPI, the Legislature, and the Governor.
- 8) Requires that, commencing with the high school class of 2022-23, at least one of the courses completed by a student to meet graduation requirements has a service-learning component.
- 9) Defines service-learning as method through which pupils or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in, and meets the needs of, a community, is coordinated with a secondary school and with the community; and helps foster civic responsibility.
- 10) States that service-learning is a method that is integrated into, and enhances, the standards-based academic curriculum of the pupils, and provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes requirements for graduation from high school, including: three courses in English; two courses in mathematics; two courses in science; three courses in social studies; one course in visual or performing arts, foreign language, or career technical education; and two courses in physical education.
- 2) Requires that, of the three courses in social studies, two must be year-long courses in United States history and geography, and in world history, culture, and geography, and that the remaining two are a one-semester courses in American government and civics, and a one-semester course in economics.
- 3) Establishes the Instructional Quality Commission as an advisory body to the SBE on matters related to curriculum, instructional materials, and content standards.

FISCAL EFFECT: The Office of Legislative Counsel has keyed this bill as a state-mandated local program.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. The author's office states, "Service-learning is a powerful instructional strategy for improving the educational performance of pupils, while contributing to the development of character, values, self-esteem, civic responsibility, and knowledge of local community issues and concerns. Like community service, service-learning requires students to serve their communities. Service-learning, however, takes community service one step further by incorporating the service experiences of students directly into their school work.

While some school districts in California incorporate community service or service-learning into the high school curriculum and require it for graduation, there is a missed opportunity for students in other districts that do not integrate service-learning into their educational experience.

According to a 1998 report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), senior pupils who are engaged in volunteer work, whether through school or on their own, are likely to have significantly higher civic assessment scale scores than pupils who did not participate in volunteer work. The date of the study is significant in that it was the last time NAEP tested students' progress in civics.

Recognizing the need for civic and service-learning in our state, Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye and Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson formed the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning in 2013 to assess civic education in schools. It found that too often the emphasis in the classroom is on memorization rather than participatory skills and experiential learning. Many classes did not assess whether students are prepared for their roles and responsibilities as citizens or the degree to which schools provide students with learning opportunities that achieve civic outcomes.

Young people who recall their civic learning experiences are more likely to vote, know about the U.S. political system, and continue to be engaged in their community. AB 189 will revitalize quality civic and service-learning experiences in the classroom and shape our students to become active and informed citizens of our state."

Service-learning vs. community service/volunteering. Service-learning is often confused with volunteering or community service. 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.” This bill defines service-learning consistent with the definition used in the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009.

Service-learning supports academic achievement, narrows achievement gap. A 2011 meta-analysis of 62 studies involving 11,837 students found that, compared to controls, students who participated in service-learning programs demonstrate 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—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.”

Nationally, community service increasing but service-learning declining. A 2008 national study published by the Corporation for National and Community Service found that “while school-based community service remains robust, the substantial growth in service-learning documented by federally funded studies conducted in 1979 and 1999 has not continued. In fact, the 2008 survey reveals a reversal of that trend, with the percentage of schools with service-learning declining from 32 percent in 1999 to 24 percent in 2008.” The study attributed that trend, in part, to the higher value placed on service as a means to promote civic behaviors than academic engagement. The study concluded, “When faced with budget constraints and state curriculum requirements, many schools are likely to place service activities outside of the curriculum and use methods other than service-learning in the classroom.”

CalServe program eliminated. From 1990 to 2012, the California Department of Education (CDE) operated the CalServe program, using federal funds from the Learn and Serve program of the Corporation for National and Community Service. CalServe provided funding to California’s county offices of education, districts, and schools to support the statewide implementation of service-learning. Federal funding for Learn and Serve America was eliminated from the 2011–12 budget, which eliminated CalServe’s partnerships. Some participating school districts have continued to use service-learning as an instructional method.

Some districts have a volunteer or service-learning graduation requirement. While the state does not collect data on service-learning courses or community service graduation requirements, many school districts have local service-learning or community service graduation requirements. These vary in terms of time requirements and integration with coursework. As of 2015 (requirements may since have changed), some districts with such requirements included:

- Los Angeles Unified School District requires a service-learning experience of all high school students, measured by an approved project, not a number of hours served.
- Culver City Unified School District requires 60 hours of service-learning for graduation.

- Paramount Unified School District requires 30 hours of community service for graduation, starting with this year’s graduating class.
- Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District requires 40 hours of community service for graduation.
- San Jose Unified School District requires certification of a minimum of 40 hours of community service for graduation.

Service-learning in other states. According to the Education Commission of the States, Maryland is the only state with a service-learning graduation requirement. The District of Columbia also has such a requirement. Maryland’s service-learning requirement was instituted in 1992, and requires students to either complete seventy-five hours of student service that includes preparation, action, and reflection components, or a locally-designed program in student service that has been approved by the State Superintendent of Schools.

Twenty-two other states offer credit toward graduation for service-learning or community service. Some states have created service-learning elective courses, and others offer a half or full credits for service that meets certain criteria. A few states encourage or explicitly permit districts to offer service-learning as part of required coursework or as a graduation requirement.

Service learning in new History-Social Science curriculum framework: California’s new History – Social Science Framework, adopted by the SBE in July, 2016, contains several recommendations that schools incorporate service-learning into their coursework.

The framework contains an appendix titled “Practicing Civic Engagement: Service Learning in the History-Social Science Framework,” which provides definitions, examples, and reasons for encouraging service learning in the curriculum.

In the 12th grade “Principles of American Democracy” section, the framework suggests “...service-learning projects with civic outcomes provide students with hands-on experiences with the political process and government,” as well as a “service-learning project in which students identify local problems or issues of concern; research and analyze them in terms of causes and effects and multiple points of view; identify, discuss, and evaluate public policies relating to the issues, including interacting with public officials; and construct a project to address it or a multimedia presentation to educate about it.”

Is service-learning on this scale feasible now? In order to create meaningful opportunities for students to serve and learn from the experience, teachers must engage in thoughtful curriculum and service placement design. Doing this for the 400,000 annual graduates of California schools is a significant task, especially at a time when schools are managing many complex changes to curriculum, instruction, accountability, and school finance. ***The Committee may wish to consider if*** school districts can reasonably meet the requirements of this bill given the many other changes occurring at the state and local level.

Recommended amendments: ***Staff recommends*** the following amendments to adjust the timelines and requirements of the bill:

- 1) Change the date by which the standards must be submitted to the SBE to March 1, 2020, and the date by which they must be adopted to July 1, 2020.
- 2) Require that the standards be developed in consultation with the IQC.

- 3) Delete the requirement that LEAs implement the standards by the 2019-20 school year.
- 4) Change the graduating class to which the bill applies to the class of 2023-24.
- 5) Add a requirement that, if the SBE adopts the service-learning standards, the service-learning component of the courses which are to be required be aligned to those standards.

Related and prior legislation. AB 24 (Eggman) of this Session would establish 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, a bill identical to this one, 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, a bill nearly identical to this one, 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 1911 (Wesson and Hertzberg) of the 1999-2000 Session, as heard by this Committee, 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

California Commission on Aging
California Council for the Social Studies
California School Boards Association (if amended)
California Secretary of State Alex Padilla
California State PTA

Opposition

None on file

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