

Date of Hearing: March 15, 2017

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Patrick O'Donnell, Chair
AB 24 (Eggman) – As Introduced December 5, 2016

SUBJECT: Instructional programs: State Seal of Civic Engagement

SUMMARY: 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. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) States legislative intent to establish a State Seal of Civic Engagement to encourage, and create pathways for, students in elementary and secondary schools to become civically engaged in democratic governmental institutions at the local, state, and national level.
- 2) Requires that, by January 1, 2019, the State Board of Education (SBE) establish 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.
- 3) Requires that, in establishing criteria for the State Seal of Civic Engagement, the SBE incorporate the Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning, developed by the Education Commission of the States, and any and all other best practices for civic learning and engagement.
- 4) Requires the SBE 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 any other related requirements as it deems appropriate
- 5) States that school district participation in this program is voluntary.
- 6) Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to:
 - a) prepare and deliver to participating school districts an appropriate insignia to be affixed to the diploma or transcript of the pupil indicating that the pupil has been awarded a State Seal of Civic Engagement by the SPI
 - b) provide other information he or she deems necessary for school districts to successfully participate in the program
- 7) Requires school districts participating in the program to:
 - a) maintain appropriate records in order to identify pupils who have earned a State Seal of Civic Engagement.

- b) affix the appropriate insignia to the diploma or transcript of each pupil who earns a State Seal of Civic Engagement
- 8) States that no fee shall be charged to a pupil to receive a State Seal of Civic Engagement.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the State Seal of Biliteracy (SSB), which provides recognition to high school students who have demonstrated proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages in addition to English. Requires each school district, county office of education, or direct-funded charter school that confers the SSB to maintain appropriate records in order to identify students who have met the established criteria for the award and to affix the SSB insignia to the diploma or transcript of each qualifying student.
- 2) Requires high school graduates to meet all of the following criteria to be eligible for the SSB:
 - a) complete all English language arts requirements for graduation with an overall grade point average of 2.0 or above in those classes
 - b) pass the California Standards Test in English language arts administered in grade 11 at the proficient level or above
 - c) demonstrate proficiency in one or more languages in addition to English, through one of four methods
- 3) Establishes the Golden State Seal Merit Diploma (GSSMD), which provides recognition to public high school graduates who have demonstrated mastery of high school curriculum in six designated subject areas, four of which must be mathematics, English language arts, science, and United States history. Eligibility requirements for the GSSMD include a combination of course grades, results from assessments produced by private providers or local education agencies (LEAs), and/or qualifying Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment of California Standards Tests scores for use by LEAs to award the GSSMD to graduating students.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author's office, "Civic education and participation in the United States has declined. The United States ranks 139th out of 172 democracies around the world in voter participation, and less than half of eligible young people ages 18-24 voted in the 2012 elections. In California, less than 50% of high school seniors surveyed viewed being actively involved in state and local issues as their responsibility.

Such findings were also corroborated during hearings in 2015 conducted by the Assembly Select Committee on Civic Engagement. Data highlighted severe racial disparities to civic participation across the Asian Pacific Islander, African American, and Latino communities, measured in several ways including but not limited to, contacting public officials, attending political meetings, and engaging in forms of political activism. These findings emphasized the need to better engage California's diverse student population.

A 2014 report authored by the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning outlined several policy recommendations to revitalize civic learning and participation in California, including badging programs which incentivize students to develop a deeper understanding of civics through active engagement in their communities.

The State Seal of Civic Engagement would provide additional incentives for students to become civically engaged over the course of their K-12 education.”

Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning. This bill requires the SBE, in establishing criteria for the State Seal of Civic Engagement, to incorporate the Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning, developed by the Education Commission of the States. These Six Practices are:

1. Provide instruction in government, history, law, and democracy
2. Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events in the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives
3. Design and implement programs that provide students with opportunities to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction
4. Offer extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities
5. Encourage student participation in school governance
6. Encourage students’ participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures

What is the point of diploma seals? In recent years the Legislature has reviewed three proposals for state diploma seals, in biliteracy, STEM, and civic engagement. In addition, the Golden State Seal Merit diplomas are still issued. Based on authors’ statements of intent, it appears that there are several motivations for establishing these seals:

- To leverage increased instruction or programs in a given subject or by a certain instructional method, by creating demand from students and parents
- To recognize a student’s extraordinary academic achievement
- To recognize, and signal to employers, proficiency in a key, marketable skill
- To confer an advantage in postsecondary admissions or employment

Benefit to students. Diploma seals can be powerful incentives for students. They can influence students’ course taking patterns, assessments taken, and extracurricular choices. All such choices involve trade-off and opportunity costs. So what is the effect on students if a diploma seal is designed so that it confers no to students beyond high school?

It may be instructive to consider the Golden State Seal Merit Diploma in this context. When originally authorized in the 1990’s, Governor Wilson argued that this diploma would serve as an ambitious goal that would both shape teaching and inspire students. It was envisioned as California version of the New York’s Regent’s Diploma, conferring advantages in UC and CSU admission. The state created a series of assessments, called the Golden State Merit Examinations, which were taken by hundreds of thousands of students, who spent time and resources preparing to take the exams. These examinations were eliminated in 2009, and now the GSSMDs are awarded based on grades, SBAC scores, and, in some cases, local assessments.

Staff is unaware of any benefit the GSSMD now provides to students in postsecondary admissions or employment, yet each year over 50,000 students work toward achieving the special diploma, taking the time to prepare for and take assessments. *The Committee may wish to consider* whether it is fair to encourage students to work toward a diploma seal which confers no clear benefit to them.

Equal opportunity. Last year this Committee heard AB 2072 (Chang), which would have established a State Seal of STEM. The author's intent was to recognize outstanding achievement in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). That bill, as initially proposed, would have established criteria for the diploma seal to include scores on Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate examinations in STEM fields, out-of-school STEM activities such as robotics clubs, internships in STEM fields, participation in STEM research, and completion of college level courses in STEM fields.

Evidence from multiple sources has demonstrated serious inequities in the availability of these high quality STEM courses and programs. According to the College Board, for example, "in many cases, schools serving large numbers of traditionally underrepresented minority students do not yet provide AP course work in STEM disciplines." With respect to the equal opportunity to participate in out-of-school STEM programs, 2014 study commissioned by the Association of Children's Museums Committee found that "there are still significant challenges to ensuring youth in low socioeconomic communities have equitable access to out-of-school STEM learning opportunities, most of which revolve around issues of finances and funding."

As a result, the opportunity to earn the proposed diploma seal in STEM would have been highly uneven, and would have made many students from low income communities disadvantaged. This contrasts with the State Seal of Biliteracy, which uses criteria which are accessible to the vast majority of students in the state. *The Committee may wish to consider* whether it is appropriate to establish criteria for a seal which some students, through no fault of their own, will not have the opportunity to earn.

Achievement thresholds. Forms of special recognition in high school, such as the honor roll, valedictorian awards, or an International Baccalaureate diploma, recognize outstanding achievement. Because the threshold for achieving this recognition is set high, it's widely understood that these forms of recognition represent outstanding achievement.

But if the bar is set too low – for example, recognizing that a student has taken a required course and received a passing grade – a diploma seal ceases to carry any significance. In addition, schools already provide recognition, in the form of grades or test scores, for proficiency in a given subject. *The Committee may wish to consider* the importance of using diploma seals to recognize outstanding achievement, particularly achievement not already recognized by schools in other ways.

Guiding questions for this Committee's review of diploma seal bills. Staff recommends that this Committee consider the following questions when evaluating any measure seeking to establish a diploma seal meet the following criteria:

- Does the diploma seal confer a benefit to the student through recognition by postsecondary institutions, employers, or other institutions outside of high school?
- Is the diploma seal designed so that all students have an opportunity to earn it?

- Does the diploma seal recognize excellence or outstanding achievement, not simply proficiency in a required or widely studied subject?
- Is eligibility for the diploma seal based primarily on achievement which is already recognized through grades or other standard measure of student achievement?

Given these questions, *staff recommends* that this bill be amended to require that in establishing criteria for the diploma seal, the SBE ensure, to the greatest extent feasible, that the criteria:

- 1) To the extent possible, result in a seal that confers some benefit to students beyond secondary school
- 2) Provide all students an opportunity to earn the diploma seal
- 3) Recognize excellence or outstanding achievement
- 4) Are not based primarily on achievement which is already recognized through grades or other standard measures of student achievement

Civic education in new History-Social Science Curriculum Framework. California's new History – Social Science Framework, adopted by the SBE in July, 2016, addresses civic engagement throughout the document.

The framework includes two appendices devoted to civic engagement and service-learning:

- Appendix D: Educating for Democracy: Civic Education in the History–Social Science Curriculum, which includes the Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning
- Appendix H: Practicing Civic Engagement: Service Learning in the History-Social Science Framework, which provides definitions, examples, and reasons for encouraging service-learning in the curriculum.

According to the CDE, the framework includes more than thirty detailed classroom examples from a wide range of grade levels that show teachers how they can tailor instruction to address not only the history–social science standards, but also the ELA/Literacy and ELD standards. The classroom examples include a number with a civic focus, such as:

- Kindergarten: Being a Good Citizen
- Grade Three: Classroom Constitution
- Grade Five: The Preamble
- Grade Eight: The Civic Purpose of Public Education
- Grade Twelve: Judicial Review

In addition to the classroom examples, CDE reports that there are many places in the framework's course descriptions where there are suggestions for activities that engage students in civic learning. Some examples include:

- Studying key American symbols and heroes through grade-appropriate literature, songs, and images in kindergarten through grade three
- Simulations of government activities (e.g., a congressional hearing debating the bill of rights in grade five, planning and participating in a mock election in grade eight, or conducting mock trials of landmark Supreme Court cases in grade eleven)
- Suggestions for engaging in service-learning projects such as voter education and registration activities

- Suggestions for inquiry-based projects that include student interviews of legislators and other public officials, civil rights activists, or members of the military
- Suggestions for ways that students can get involved in campaigns to address local issues at the school or community level (e.g., recycling, campus safety)

The 12th grade curriculum in the 12th grade “Principles of American Democracy” section includes a focus on the questions, “What does it mean to be a citizen?” and “How can citizens improve democracy?” The course description states: “Students learn that democracies depend upon an actively engaged citizenry – individuals who fully participate in the responsibilities of citizenship (such as voting, serving in the military, or regular public service) – for their long-term survival.”

This 12th grade course description also suggests the use of structured group discussion techniques, simulations, classroom debates, and civics-based serving learning activities, designed to provide students with concrete answers to the question. Other suggested activities include participating in classroom mock trials, visiting court rooms, serving as poll workers, participating in voter registration, simulating or visit city council meetings, conducting projects to identify, analyze and address a community problem, competing in civic-writing activities, and participate in service-learning

Proliferation of diploma seals. Since 2011 this Committee has reviewed three bills proposing diploma seal, in biliteracy, STEM, and civic engagement. It is likely that this Committee will see similar measures to establish diploma seals in other subject. ***The committee may wish to consider*** the policy implications of establishing numerous diploma seal options, including the effect multiple seals would have on students and families.

Related and prior legislation. AB 1142 (Medina) of this Session would update the English language arts and English language development assessments used to determine recipients of the State Seal of Biliteracy. AB 1145 is pending in this Committee.

AB 2072 (Chang) of the 2015-16 Session would have established the State Seal of STEM to recognize high school graduates who have attained proficiency in STEM content. This bill was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 815 (Brownley), Chapter 618, Statutes of 2011 established the State Seal of Biliteracy to recognize high school graduates who what attained a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages in addition to English.

SB 253 (Wyland) of the 2009-10 Session would have authorized school districts and county offices of education to offer pupils a CTE certificate upon meeting specified requirements. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

American Academy of Pediatrics
California Council for the Social Studies
California Secretary of State, Alex Padilla

California State PTA
Mi Familia Vota

Opposition

California Right to Life Committee, Inc.

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