

Date of Hearing: April 9, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Al Muratsuchi, Chair
AB 422 (Jackson) – As Amended March 10, 2025

SUBJECT: State Seal of Civic Engagement

SUMMARY: Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), by January 1, 2027, to recommend revised criteria to the State Board of Education (SBE) for awarding the State Seal of Civic Engagement, including a demonstrated understanding of the importance of preserving democracy and its vital institutions. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires, on or before January 1, 2027, the SPI to recommend revised criteria to the SBE for awarding the State Seal of Civic Engagement, requiring, along with meeting all other eligibility criteria for the award, a demonstrated understanding of the importance of preserving democracy and its vital institutions, including, but not limited to, the free press, free access to libraries, compulsory education, and the federalist system.
- 2) Requires the SBE, or before January 1, 2028, to adopt, reject, or modify the SPI's recommended criteria.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) States the intent of the Legislature to create 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 levels. (Education Code (EC) 51470)
- 2) Requires the SPI, on or before January 1, 2020, to recommend to the 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)
- 3) 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. (EC 51470)
- 4) 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 51470)
- 5) Requires, on or before January 31, 2021, the SBE to adopt, reject, or modify the criteria.
- 6) States that school district participation in this program is voluntary. (EC 51471)
- 7) Requires the SPI to do both of the following:
- a) Prepare and deliver to participating school districts an appropriate insignia to be affixed to the diploma or transcript of the student indicating that the student has been awarded a State Seal of Civic Engagement by the SPI; and
 - b) Provide other information he or she deems necessary for school districts to successfully participate in the program. (EC 51472)
- 8) Requires a participating school district to:
- a) Maintain appropriate records in order to identify students who have earned a State Seal of Civic Engagement; and
 - b) Affix the appropriate insignia to the diploma or transcript of each student who earns a State Seal of Civic Engagement. (EC 51473)
- 9) Prohibits a student from being charged to receive a State Seal of Civic Engagement. (EC 51474)
- 10) Establishes the State Seal of Biliteracy (SSB), which certifies attainment of a high level of proficiency by a graduating high school student in one or more languages, in addition to English. (EC 51461)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, “Expanding the democracy criteria for the state seal of civic engagement is crucial for fostering informed, active, and responsible citizens. Comprehensive democracy education empowers students with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society and combat misinformation. It promotes critical thinking, encourages participation in civic activities, and helps students appreciate the principles of justice, equality, and freedom.”

Bill requires content already required to earn the State Seal of Civic Engagement. This bill requires the SPI to recommend revised criteria to the SBE for awarding the State Seal of Civic Engagement, requiring a demonstrated understanding of the importance of:

- Preserving democracy and its vital institutions;
- The free press;
- Free access to libraries;
- Compulsory education; and
- The federalist system

The criteria established by the SBE for the award of the State Seal of Civic Engagement require that students demonstrate a competent understanding of:

- 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.

The SBE's implementation guidance states:

Students must **complete grade-level history-social science (HSS) course requirements, or their equivalent, in World History, U.S. History, and American Government with a passing grade.** Interdisciplinary coursework may also include civic aspects of government, law, history, geography, culture, ethnic studies, international governments, economics, and current events, as well as how to apply such knowledge in different settings and circumstances. LEAs may determine, through local board of education policy, their local definitions of a passing grade. LEAs may choose to measure fulfillment of HSS course requirements with a district-specific content benchmark or civic assessment. LEA encouragement of student participation in local meetings related to all three branches of government may also be considered. LEAs may encourage the integration of experiential learning opportunities into these courses, including civic discussions and simulations. LEAs may also consider encouraging grade eleven student fulfillment of the criteria in order for a seal to be affixed to a transcript for use in post-secondary college applications. [emphasis added]

As noted below, the California history-social science curriculum addresses civic engagement and the importance of democratic institutions in each of the grades, culminating in a 12th grade Government course required for graduation. Compulsory education, one of the topics addressed by this bill, is also covered in the 8th grade curriculum.

Current history-social science curriculum addresses the importance of democratic institutions through the grades. California's history-social science framework, adopted by the SBE in July 2016, addresses civic engagement and democratic institutions throughout the document.

According to the CDE, the framework includes more than thirty detailed classroom examples from a wide range of grade levels that demonstrate how teachers can tailor instruction to address not only the history-social science standards, but also the English Language Arts (ELA)/English Language Development (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; and
- Grade Twelve: Judicial Review

In addition to the classroom examples, the 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 3rd grade;
- Simulations of government activities (e.g., a Congressional hearing debating the Bill of Rights in 5th grade, planning and participating in a mock election in 8th grade, or conducting mock trials of landmark Supreme Court cases in 11th grade);
- 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; and
- Suggestions for ways 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, “Principles of American Democracy,” 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 service learning activities designed to provide students with concrete answers to the question. Other suggested activities include participating in classroom mock trials, visiting courtrooms, serving as poll workers, participating in voter registration, simulating or visiting city council meetings, conducting projects to identify, analyze and address a community problem, competing in civic-writing activities, and participate in service-learning.

The Framework also 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; and
- 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.

State Seal of Civic Engagement. This bill is intended to change the criteria for the awarding of the 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 in 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 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 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.

State Seal of Civic Engagement data. Participation in this program has been small but growing. According to the California Department of Education:

- In the 2020-21 school year, 103 schools participated in 28 school districts, and 5,359 Seals were issued.
- In the 2023-24 school year, 345 schools participated in 110 school districts, and 15,627 Seals were issued.

This includes a very small number which were added to Certificates of Completion for students with disabilities and to General Educational Development (GED) certificates.

Seal of Civic Engagement Implementation Roadmap. The State Seal of Civic Engagement Implementation Roadmap, published by the Promoting Authentic College, Career, and Civic Readiness Assessments (PACCCRAS) Working Group, emphasizes the instructional shifts needed to facilitate student civic engagement, involving a cycle of inquiry, investigation, civil dialogue, and informed action. The Roadmap emphasizes four guiding principles in the development of these programs: ensuring equitable and universal access, valuing and honoring students and their community as positive assets, promoting student-centered learning to support the whole child to effect positive change, and providing enabling conditions and structures of support. Unlike the State Seal of Biliteracy, schools often need to establish new programs and community partnerships to create the conditions for their students to qualify for the State Seal of Civic Engagement.

Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning. Existing law required 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; and
- 6) Encourage students' participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.

Recommended Committee amendments. *Staff recommends that this bill be amended* to add that the requirements of the bill take effect when the SBE next revises its criteria for the State Seal of Civic Engagement, and require that the recommendations of the SPI address content not already included in the existing criteria.

Related legislation. AB 1520 (Bonta) of the 2023-24 Session would have established the State Seal of Civic Engagement Resource Lead, composed of a partnership between a county office of education (COE) and a community organization, for the purpose of providing support and technical assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and charter schools to improve equitable statewide access to the State Seal of Civic Engagement. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 24 (Eggman), Chapter 604, Statutes of 2017, establishes the 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.

AB 370 (Addis), Chapter 326, Statutes of 2023, revised the criteria for awarding of the State Seal of Biliteracy.

AB 1142 (Medina), Chapter 208, Statutes of 2017, updates the ELA and ELD assessments used to determine recipients of the State Seal of Biliteracy.

AB 2072 (Chang) of the 2015-16 Session would have established the State Seal of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (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 SSB to recognize high school graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages in addition to English.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

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