

Date of Hearing: July 2, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Al Muratsuchi, Chair
SB 745 (Ochoa Bogh) – As Amended May 7, 2025

SENATE VOTE: 38-0

SUBJECT: American government and civics: curriculum guide: State Seal of Civic Engagement

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to enter into a contract to develop a curriculum guide for a one-year course in American government and civics, and requires school districts participating in the State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) program to deem a student's successful completion of a one-year course in American government and civics as satisfying a specified criterion for earning that recognition. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires, upon an appropriation for this purpose, the CDE, in collaboration with, and subject to the approval of, the executive director of the State Board of Education (SBE), to enter into a contract with a county office of education (COE) or a consortium of COEs for the purpose of developing a curriculum guide for the one-year course in American government and civics.
- 2) Requires the curriculum guide to include, but not be limited to, all of the following:
 - a) Fundamentals on the responsibilities of federal departments and agencies;
 - b) Fundamentals on California state government institutions, including the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, along with state agencies and departments;
 - c) Fundamentals on local government institutions, including city councils, county boards of supervisors, and other local bodies;
 - d) Fundamentals on special districts in California, including their purpose and membership;
 - e) Fundamentals on Tribal governments in California, including their purpose and membership;
 - f) Fundamentals on direct democracy in California, including ballot initiatives, referenda, and the recall process;
 - g) How to participate in the decision making of federal, state, local, and special district institutions, including, but not limited to, how to contact representatives, how to attend state and local public meetings, and understanding pathways of influence;
 - h) The role of advocacy and interest groups in government decision making;
 - i) All of the following related to voting:

- i) Eligibility for, and requirements relating to, registering to vote;
 - ii) The various methods for registering to vote, including the ability to preregister to vote;
 - iii) Acquiring official, nonpartisan election and voter information from county and state elections officials, including, but not limited to, accessing county and state elections websites;
 - iv) Understanding the electoral systems used at the federal, state, and local levels;
 - v) How to complete and submit a ballot through various methods, including vote by mail and in person at a polling place or vote center; and
 - vi) An individual's rights as a voter.
- j) Tools for constructive political dialogue, including methods and techniques such as Socratic seminars and structured classroom debates, to teach students how to engage in respectful disagreements.
- 3) Requires school districts participating in the SSCE program to deem a student's successful completion of a one-year course in American government and civics as satisfying a specified criterion among the SBE's adopted criteria.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires that, to earn a diploma of graduation from high school, students complete a one-semester course in American government and civics. (Education Code (EC) 51225.3)
- 2) Authorizes local educational agencies (LEAs) to add other coursework adopted by the governing board of a school district to the state requirements for graduation from high school. (EC 51225.3)
- 3) Requires the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) to develop and recommend to the SBE, a curriculum guide and resources for a separate, stand-alone one-semester course in personal finance that is not combined with any other course. (EC 51225.32)
- 4) States the intent of the Legislature to create a SSCE 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. (EC 51470)
- 5) Requires the SPI, on or before January 1, 2020, to recommend to the SBE criteria for awarding a SSCE 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 SSCE, 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)
- 7) Requires the SPI to ensure, to the greatest extent feasible, that the criteria:
- a) Provide all students with an opportunity to earn the SSCE;
 - 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)
- 8) Requires, on or before January 31, 2021, the SBE to adopt, reject, or modify the criteria.
- 9) 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 SSCE by the SPI; and
 - b) Provide other information he or she deems necessary for school districts to successfully participate in the program. (EC 51472)
- 10) Requires a participating school district to:
- a) Maintain appropriate records in order to identify students who have earned a SSCE; and
 - b) Affix the appropriate insignia to the diploma or transcript of each student who earns a SSCE. (EC 51473)

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, the CDE estimates one-time General Fund costs of \$300,000 over a two-year period to contract with a COE to develop the curriculum guide, and additional ongoing General Fund costs of \$355,000 for staffing and operating expenses. The development of the curriculum guide would be contingent upon an appropriation.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, “Senate Bill 745 directs the California Department of Education to work with county offices to develop a curriculum guide and resources for a one-year course in American government and civics. Additionally, this bill requires school districts

participating in the State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) to deem the completion of a one-year course in American government and civics as satisfying a specified criteria for receiving the SSCE.

Currently, California only requires a one-semester course in American government and civics for high school graduation. This does not allow sufficient time to study state and local government processes. Inadequate civics education leads to a lower voter turnout, lack of advocacy, and diminished ability to discern incorrect information.

Research from the U.S Chamber of Commerce Foundation showed that ‘more than 70% of Americans fail a basic civics literacy test, including basic facts such as the three branches of government. According to Pew Research, nearly half of young Americans ages 18-29 primarily receive news regarding politics and elections through social media outlets. Voter turnout among 18-24 year olds in California was roughly 10%, lower than the national average of 23%. With increased political polarization and lack of civil discourse, California’s education system needs to adjust to mitigate these current statistics and trends.

SB 745 aims to establish a strong foundation of government and civics education for students, enabling them to understand key issues, engage in informed discussions, and recognize the importance of their vote.

The curriculum will focus on local, state, and federal government processes, as well as the importance of voting. Allowing the county offices of education to develop a curriculum guide, subject to approval from the California Department of Education, will give local officials the opportunity to be directly involved in the creation and implementation of the curriculum.

Greater knowledge and understanding of government processes increases the likelihood of civic engagement and may help reverse current trends and statistics among young voters. Ultimately, a comprehensive course in American government and civics will empower our next generation of voters to be better informed and more politically active citizens.”

LEAs may offer or require a one-year course in government under existing law. This bill requires the development of a curriculum guide for a one-year course in American government and civics.

Current law requires that students take a one-semester course in American government and civics to graduate from high school. Current law also authorizes LEAs to add other coursework adopted by the governing board of a school district to the state requirements for graduation from high school. These are known as local graduation requirements.

While all students take a one-semester course in American government and civics to graduate from high school, it is unclear how many offer or require a full-year course in this subject, and how many LEAs would do so should a curriculum for the course be available.

State Seal of Civic Engagement. This bill requires school districts participating in the SSCE program to deem a student’s successful completion of a one-year course in American government and civics as satisfying a specified criterion among the SBE’s adopted criteria.

AB 24 (Eggman), Chapter 604, Statutes of 2017, required the SBE to establish five criteria for the awarding of the SSCE. 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 SSCE based on their local contexts. The criteria were written to ensure that no student is excluded from an opportunity to earn the SSCE 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.

Many LEAs deem successful completion of the required one semester course in American government and civics as meeting one of these criteria for earning the SSCE. ***The Committee may wish to consider that***, by stating that a one-year course in American government and civics fulfills this criterion, this provision might be construed to mean that a one-semester course is insufficient. ***Staff recommends that this bill be amended*** to state that it shall not be construed to mean that a one-semester course is insufficient for this purpose.

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; and
- In the 2023-24 school year, 345 schools participated in 110 school districts, and 15,627 Seals were issued.

Arguments in support. The California Council for the Social Studies writes, “We are always only one generation away from losing our fragile democracy. It is therefore incumbent upon our compulsory education system to equip the next generation with the skills and understanding to engage in and sustain that democracy — particularly in a state that has direct democracy via ballot initiatives. A single semester of Civics is insufficient to pass along those timeless dispositions and knowledge, and therefore we applaud the authors for this creative means of encouraging districts to offer more extensive civics instruction to help form the bedrock upon which our Republic is sustained from generation to generation.”

Related legislation. AB 422 (Jackson) of the 2025-26 Session would require the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), when the State Board of Education (SBE) next revises the criteria for awarding the SSCE, to recommend revised criteria including a demonstrated understanding of the importance of preserving democracy and its vital institutions.

SB 584 (Limon) 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 and required LEAs to implement a Civic Engagement Pathways Program for students in grades 1 through 8. Would have required the 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.

SB 1094 (Limon) of the 2023-24 Session would have added civic engagement experiences with governmental institutions, principles of democracy, and the State and Federal Constitutions to the courses of study for grades 1 through 6 and 7 through 12. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 1520 (Bonta) of the 2023-24 Session would have established the SSCE Resource Lead, composed of a partnership between a 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 SSCE. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

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

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

America Undivided
American Association of University Women - California
California Council for the Social Studies
Legal Eagles
Los Angeles County Office of Education
Northern California Youth Policy Coalition
United Nations Association of the USA - San Diego Chapter
Voters of Tomorrow
Youth Power Project

Opposition

None on file

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