

Date of Hearing: July 1, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Darshana R. Patel, Chair
SB 1048 (Becker) – As Amended June 17, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 37-0

SUBJECT: State Seal of Climate Literacy

SUMMARY: Establishes the State Seal of Climate Literacy (SSCL), a voluntary program to create pathway towards climate literacy disciplines and reward students who have demonstrated mastery. Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) and State Board of Education (SBE) to develop and adopt criteria for awarding the SSCL based on student coursework and experiential learning projects. Specifically, **this bill**:

- 1) Establishes the SSCL for the purpose of giving high school students personal agency to help them and their communities understand and adapt to the effects of climate change.
- 2) States that an LEA's participation in awarding the SSCL is voluntary.
- 3) Requires the SPI, on or before July 1, 2027, to recommend to the SBE criteria for awarding the SSCL to students who have demonstrated mastery in climate literacy disciplines, green skills, or technical green skills, and other best practices for climate literacy. Requires the SPI to consider including the following in the SSCL award criteria:
 - a) Successful completion of at least two approved courses in the area of climate literacy, including but not limited to:
 - i) High-school-level or advanced placement courses that cover physical science, life science, or earth science;
 - ii) Dual or concurrent enrollment, career technical education, or high-school-level courses that integrate climate literacy;
 - iii) Courses that integrate the state's environmental principles and concepts or the state's Seeds to Solutions Curriculum; and
 - iv) Courses that integrate the state's Native American Studies model curriculum.
 - b) Successful completion and presentation of a climate literacy final experiential learning project on the causes and effects of climate change in the student's local community, which demonstrates academic understanding and practical application of climate literacy by addressing local climate issues. Final projects may include, but are not limited to:
 - i) A capstone project centered on the pupil's community, including the community's effect on and vulnerability to climate change;
 - ii) Field experiences or practica related to the student's climate literacy coursework;

- iii) Internships, externships, or employment with climate literacy or green career experiential learning providers;
 - iv) Community projects with a climate literacy experiential learning provider;
 - v) Hands-on laboratory experiments;
 - vi) Original artwork or writing; and
 - vii) Student-led and designed programming that has an effect on the student's community and students.
- 4) Requires the SPI to recommend criteria for participating LEAs to additionally award one or both of the following distinctions to a student who meets the requirements for the SSCL:
- a) SSCL with Industry Distinction to recognize a student who demonstrates proficiency in technical green skills through coursework or their experiential learning project; and
 - b) SSCL with Higher Education Distinction to recognize a student who earns college credit in attaining the SSCL.
- 5) Requires the SPI to ensure, to the greatest extent feasible, that the criteria developed for the SSCL and its Distinctions adhere to the following:
- a) Provide all students in participating LEAs with an opportunity to earn the SSCL;
 - b) Recognize student excellence and 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) Result in a seal that confers a benefit to students beyond high school, signaling to employers and higher education institutions the student's readiness to contribute to a sustainable and resilient future.
- 6) Requires the SBE, on or before November 15, 2027, to adopt, or adopt with modifications, the SSCL criteria recommended by the SPI.
- 7) Requires the SPI to do the following:
- a) Prepare and deliver appropriate insignia to participating LEAs, which shall be affixed to the diploma or transcript of students awarded with the SSCL. The SPI may partner with nonprofit organizations to determine the best design for the insignia and fulfill its attachment to student diplomas or transcripts;
 - b) Provide other information the SPI deems necessary for LEAs to successfully participate in awarding the SSCL to students. The SPI may partner with nonprofit organizations to provide this information, which may include:

- i) Guidance or criteria to support implementation;
 - ii) Sample project frameworks;
 - iii) Professional development resources;
 - iv) Guidance for developing partnerships with community-based organizations, industry leaders, or institutions of higher education; and
 - v) Resources for determining if a student has met the SSCL criteria.
- c) Provide SSCL students with information about post-secondary opportunities and career pathways that leverage the knowledge and skills that pupils develop through earning the SSCL. The SPI may partner with nonprofit, labor, or private sector organizations to provide such information.
- 8) Requires a participating LEA to do the following:
- a) Maintain appropriate records in order to identify pupils who have earned an SSCL.
 - b) Affix the insignia to the diploma or transcript of each student who earns an SSCL.
 - c) Provide information to students about available options and supports, including but not limited to approved courses, experiential learning, or final projects that may enable students to meet the SSCL criteria.
 - d) Establish a process for determining if a student has met the criteria to earn an SSCL.
 - e) On or before September 15, 2027, and annually thereafter, provide CDE with the following data:
 - i) The names of schools that awarded the SSCL.
 - ii) The number of students from each school that received a SSCL.
 - iii) Evidence of how students who received a SSCL met the adopted criteria, including, but not limited to, any final projects, coursework, or providers that the student worked with.
- 9) Defines the following:
- a) Climate literacy: an understanding of the essential principles of Earth’s climate system, assessing scientifically credible information, learning to communicate about the climate in a meaningful manner, and making informed and responsible decisions regarding actions that may affect the climate;
 - b) Climate literacy experiential learning provider: a provider that facilitates a student’s final project, including, but not limited to, a school organization or club, local media outlet, business, nonprofit organization, or industry focused on technical green skills;

- c) Green jobs or career: occupations that reduce harmful effects on the climate, adapt processes to minimize their effect on the climate, recognize and mitigate the disproportionate social effects of climate change, support the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of communities, or contribute to the well-being and resilience of present and future generations;
- d) Green skills: the knowledge, abilities, values, and attitudes to live in, develop, and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society; and
- e) Technical green skills: skills that fulfill the requirement of green jobs and that support the transition to a low-carbon sustainable economy.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the Office of Education and the Environment (OEE) in the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) and requires the OEE to implement a statewide environmental education program. (Public Resources Code (PRC) 71300)
- 2) Requires the OEE, under the direction of CalRecycle and in cooperation with the CDE and SBE, to develop and implement a unified education environmental strategy for elementary and secondary schools, including coordinating instructional resources and strategies for providing student participating in conservation efforts and promoting service-learning opportunities between schools and local communities. (PRC 71300)
- 3) Establishes the voluntary State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) to encourage, and create pathways for, students to become civically engaged in democratic governmental institutions. Requires the SPI, in consultation with a diverse group of educators, to develop criteria for the SSCE which incorporate the Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning and consider the following criteria:
 - 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 deemed appropriate. (Education Code (EC) 51470)
- 4) Establishes the State Seal of Biliteracy (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. Establishes criteria that graduates must meet in order to be eligible for the SSB. (EC 51461)

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8, negligible state costs.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author’s office, “California has long led the nation in climate action. SB 1048 ensures we are also leading in climate education by preparing the next generation with the knowledge and real-world experience they need to meet the challenges of a changing climate”

Existing California State Seal Programs. The state has established three State Seals – the Golden State Seal Merit Diploma (GGSMD), the State Seal of Biliteracy (SSB), and the State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE). Each Seal is awarded to tens of thousands of graduates each year. The establishment of the SSCL most closely resembles the framework of the SSCE.

The GGSMD was established in 1997 to recognize high school graduates who demonstrate mastery of the high school curriculum in six subject areas, including English, history, mathematics, science, and two subjects selected by the student. When originally authorized, 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 University of California (UC) and California State University (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 GGSMDs are awarded based on grades, Smart Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) scores, and, in some cases, local assessments. The CDE estimates that approximately 100,000 students receive the GGSMD each year.

The SSB was established in 2011 to recognize high school graduates who attain a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing one or more languages in addition to English. The importance of this initiative was recently highlighted in the CDE’s Global California 2030 report, which noted:

California’s K–12 education system has made great strides in teaching world languages to students, providing more opportunities for fluency and the benefits fluency brings. But we can and should go further. To better prepare students to succeed in the changing economy and to strengthen California’s own rich mixture of cultures and languages, California needs to vastly expand opportunities for students to learn a second and possibly even a third language.

By 2030, we want half of all K–12 students to participate in programs leading to proficiency in two or more languages, either through a class, a program, or an experience. By 2040, we want three out of four students to be proficient in two or more languages, earning them a State Seal of Biliteracy.

In its first year, more than 10,000 graduating high school students earned the SSB. The CDE reports that for the 2024-25 school year, 75,911 SSBs were awarded to graduating seniors across 515 participating school districts.

The SSCE was established in 2017 to recognize high school graduates who demonstrate excellence in civics education and participation, and an understanding of the U.S and California Constitutions and the democratic system of government. The development of the SSCE is most

similar to the proposed framework of the SSCL under SB 1048. In developing the SSCE, statute required the SPI to recommend criteria to the SBE, with consideration of a student's completion of relevant coursework and voluntary participation in community service or extracurricular activities. The CDE reports that in the 2024-25 school year, 23,040 seals were awarded across 492 participating schools.

The adopted SSCE criteria are meant to provide LEAs with a framework for determining student qualifications required to earn the SSCE, based on their local contexts, and require students to do the following:

- a) Be engaged in academic work in a productive way;
- b) Demonstrate a competent understanding of the US and California constitutions; functions and governance of local governments; tribal government structures and organizations; the citizen's role in a constitutional democracy; and democratic principles, concepts, and processes;
- c) 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;
- d) Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection; and
- e) Exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact the classroom, school, community and/or society.

According to the CDE, the criteria are written to ensure that no student is excluded from an opportunity to earn an SSCE based on academic ability, alternative school setting, or unique or unconventional expressions of civic engagement. As civic engagement may look different from community to community, the CDE encourages LEAs to work with local and statewide organizations to develop local criteria and to design and implement impactful civic engagement programs and pathways that reflect community interests, needs, and resources.

State commitments to environmental literacy. California's education system has made numerous investments in environmental literacy, of which climate literacy is a subset. The creation of the SSCL appears well-aligned with the goals and programs of these previous investments.

SB 720 (Allen), Chapter 374 of the 2018 Session, formalized California's commitment to public environmental education by updating the state's Environmental Principles and Concepts (EP&Cs), first developed in 2008, and establishing a statutory definition of environmental literacy. SB 720 expanded the scope of the EP&Cs to incorporate contemporary challenges, including climate change and environmental justice. It further required the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) to integrate these principles into K12 content standards and curriculum frameworks in science, history-social science, health, and English language arts, when those frameworks were next revised. Additionally, the bill encouraged LEAs to embed environmental literacy goals into their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs); provide professional development related to environmental literacy to educators; build partnerships with community-based environmental organizations; and ensure that environmental literacy is equitably available

to all students. Finally, it required the SPI, SBE, California Environmental Protection Agency, and Natural Resources Agency to collaboratively review and update the EP&Cs every four years to reflect the most current scientific and technical knowledge.

In 2014, SPI Torlakson assembled the California Environmental Literacy Task Force (ELTF) to create a blueprint for achieving environmental literacy for all California students. The result, *A Blueprint for Environmental Literacy: Educating Every Student In, About, and For the Environment*, was published in 2015 and states:

A false perception persists from the No Child Left Behind accountability era that environmental and outdoor programs are non-academic and not connected to the core curriculum. Research shows, however, that in schools where environmental content is integrated as a primary part of instruction, student achievement has improved.

The Blueprint further identified six educational strategies to improve environmental literacy, which include strengthening collaboration between key stakeholders and leveraging the SPI's influence to build support for the importance of environmental literacy.

In 2003 and 2005, the Legislature passed AB 1548 (Pavley, Chapter 665, Statutes of 2003) and AB 1721 (Pavley, Chapter 581, Statutes of 2005), which ultimately established the OEE within CalRecycle to develop environmental education principles for elementary and secondary school pupils. The resulting EP&Cs were comprised of five environmental principles and 15 supporting concepts that highlight the deep relationship between humans and the natural world and serve as “big ideas” intended to inform standards-based instruction and fuel student inquiry. These EP&Cs, which were updated in 2018 and every four years thereafter (SB 720 (Allen), Chapter 374 of the 2018 Session), continue to be integrated into several state curriculum frameworks.

In 2003, the Legislature required the Secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency to develop environmental principles and concepts for elementary and secondary school students, and use those principles and concepts to develop model environmental curricula. The result is the Education and the Environment Initiative (EEI), which is designed to increase environmental literacy, now housed within CalRecycle. The EEI Curriculum is available to educators in print and online at no cost.

Equity in access to climate literacy opportunities. This bill borrows the model of SSCE to create the SSCL. Specifically, it requires the SPI to recommend to the SBE criteria that would allow LEAs to recognize students who have demonstrated mastery in climate literacy disciplines, green skills or technical green skills, and any and all other best practices for climate literacy. In the development of criteria, the bill requires the SPI to consider factors such as the completion of courses in the area of climate literacy and the completion and presentation of a climate literacy final experiential learning project, as specified.

While the SSCL is intended to serve as a voluntary program, its implementation relies heavily on an LEA's ability to leverage partnerships with state and local climate literacy nonprofits, as well as labor and private sector entities engaged in the green economy. There are certainly areas of the state that have an abundance of local entities that are engaged with LEAs and have the capacity to partner with schools to provide learning opportunities for students; however, without careful attention to expanded access, such opportunities cannot be guaranteed for all students across the state. As a result, the SSCL may have the unintended consequence of highlighting

LEAs that have the means to provide an environment where students can meet eligibility criteria, and leaving students at LEAs without such means behind.

Arguments in support. According to the organization Children Now, “Young people are asking for a comprehensive, interdisciplinary climate education that will help prepare them for the future they face. 80% of California youth between ages of 14 and 24 report experiencing climate distress, the antidote to which is a solutions-oriented climate education that provides them with an outlet to channel this anxiety into empowering, community-based, career-ready action. By establishing a formal diploma distinction, the bill envisions the state recognizing coursework, hands-on learning, and real-world projects, and provides a framework to increase access to climate learning across the state. Final criteria for earning the Seal will be established by the State Board of Education, ensuring the framework reflects the needs of California students and communities.”

Recommended Committee Amendments. *Staff recommend* the bill be amended to:

- 1) Specify that final experiential learning projects must be completed on a voluntary basis and be independent from student coursework.
- 2) Remove the Seal Distinctions to align with policies of the existing seals.
- 3) Update the implementation timeline such that the SBE adopts Seal criteria by January 1, 2028, and LEAs begin conferring the Seal in the 2028-29 school year.
- 4) Remove the LEA reporting requirements to align with policies of the existing seals.
- 5) Make technical and clarifying changes throughout.

Related legislation. AB 2158 (Hoover) of the 2025-26 Session would require the SPI to publish statewide guidance on outdoor learning. AB 2158 is currently in the Senate Education Committee.

AB 370 (Addis), Chapter 326, Statutes of 2023, modifies the criteria for earning the State Seal of Biliteracy, including increasing the English language arts GPA threshold, removing duplicative requirements for English learners, and allowing additional assessments to show language proficiency.

SB 720 (Allen), Chapter 374, Statutes of 2018, revised provisions relating to the education principles for the environment by, among other things, (1) renaming them the environmental principles and concepts; (2) revising the process for, and entities involved in, updating the environmental principles and concepts; and (3) requiring the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) to ensure that the environmental principles and concepts are integrated into content standards and curriculum frameworks whenever those standards and frameworks are revised. AB 24 (Eggman), Chapter 604, Statutes of 2017, established 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 1142 (Medina), Chapter 208, Statutes of 2017, updated the English language arts and English language development assessments used to determine recipients of the SSB.

AB 2072 (Chang), of the 2015-16 Session would have established the State Seal of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) to recognize high school graduates who have attained proficiency in STEM content. AB 2072 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.

AB 1721 (Pavley), Chapter 581, Statutes of 2005, placed decision-making authority regarding the incorporation of environmental principles into academic content standards and instructional materials with the SPI and the SBE.

AB 1548 (Pavley), Chapter 665, Statutes of 2003, established the OEE within the California Environmental Protection Agency and required it to develop environmental education principles and a model curriculum.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

350 Bay Area Action
7th Generation Advisors
Acterra: Action for a Healthy Planet
Adolfo Camarillo High School
American River Natural History Association
Arc Experience
Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education
Association of Nature Center Administrators
Bay Tree Design
Berkeley Unified School District
Bluesky Consulting
Burbank Eco Council
Cadman Cooking and Garden Education Program
California Academy of Sciences
California Department of Education
California Nurses for Environmental Health & Justice
California Outdoor Recreation Partnership
California State Parks Foundation
California State Parent Teacher Association
California Teachers Association
Camp Chrysalis
Camp Ocean Pines
Canopy
Center for Ecoliteracy
Center for Environmental Health
California Federation of Teachers
Children Now
Children's Environmental Literacy Foundation
Citizens' Climate Lobby

City of Mountain View
Climate Action Campaign of the Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Climate Action Pathways for Schools
Climate Justice Committee, Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley
Common Vision
Community for Natural Play Surfaces
Community Resources for Science
Craig Strang Consulting
Crystal Cove Conservancy
Dfusion INC
Earthday.org
Edtrust-west
Elders Climate Action Northern CA Chapter
Elders Climate Action Southern CA Chapter
Environmental Education Collaborative
Environmental Nature Center
Equity Meets Design
Escondido Creek Conservancy, the
Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools
Fremont Union High School District
Fresno Chaffee Zoo
Friends of the Los Angeles River
Friends of the Lost Coast
Genup
Grades of Green
Green Schoolyards America
Hed
Heirs to Our Oceans
Icrest Education Foundation
Inner City Bliss
Life Lab
Living Classroom
Los Angeles County Office of Education
Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts
Los Gatos Almaden Pollinator Garden
Master Gardener Association of San Diego County
Menlo Spark
Mothers Out Front Silicon Valley
Municipal Water District of Orange County
National Center for Science Education
National Marine Educators Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nurture Nature
Oakland Goes Outdoors
People, Food and Land Foundation
Petaluma City Schools
Pittsburg Unified School District
Plant-based Advocates
Rialto Unified School District

Richmond Outdoors Coalition
Roots to Branches Education
Sacramento Splash
Samuel Lawrence Foundation
San Diego Pediatricians for Clean Air
San Francisco Climate Literacy Advocates
San Jose Conservation Corps & Charter School
San Mateo County Office of Education
SanDiego350
Santa Clara County Medical Association
Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority
Santa Cruz Climate Action Network
Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action
Steam Learning Institute
Stopwaste
Strategic Energy Innovations
Sustainable Marin Schools
Sustainable Mill Valley
Sustainconsulting
Ten Strands
The Friends of Daley Ranch
Three Oaks Outdoor Science School
Tomorrow's Talent
Treepeople
Trubel&Co
UC Davis Center for Community and Citizen Science
Undauntedk12
United Teachers Los Angeles
Utmost Atmos
Water Energy Education Alliance
Water Replenishment District
Western Municipal Water District
Yes Nature to Neighborhoods
Youth V. Oil
Zerow.org
503 individuals

Opposition

None on file

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