

Date of Hearing: June 15, 2022

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Patrick O'Donnell, Chair
HR 113 (Mia Bonta) – As Introduced May 31, 2022

SUBJECT: Civics Education

SUMMARY: Urges the State Board of Education (SBE) to consider the value of civics education and to ensure the inclusion of civics education instruction and modules as a requirement to graduate from California high schools. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Makes the following findings:
 - a) The SBE adopted the History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve in July, 2016 as an important step forward in the state's ongoing commitment to ensure that all California students are prepared for college, 21st-century careers, and citizenship;
 - b) The History-Social Science Framework was designed to provide guidance on how teachers of history-social science and other subject areas should work together to ensure that students are able to develop reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills as they dive deeper into the content and skills of the disciplines of history, geography, economics, and civics;
 - c) Current law requires a one-semester course in American government and civics for high school graduation;
 - d) The SBE does not require students to be afforded an opportunity for experience-based learning in civics education or government instruction, and no assessment of civic learning exists to determine students' understanding of and ability to apply history-social science content and skills;
 - e) Opportunities for high-quality civic education or civic engagement are not equally or consistently available to all California students, and vary widely by race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status;
 - f) Civic engagement is critical for the effective functioning of our government;
 - g) Only one in four Americans can name the three branches of our government and 33% of Americans cannot name any one of our three branches of government;
 - h) The SBE revises the History-Social Science Framework every eight years and will review and adopt revised Framework guidance in 2024; and
 - i) California's History-Social Science content standards are now over 23 years old.

- 2) Resolves that the Legislature urges the SBE to consider the value of civics education and ensure the inclusion of civics education instruction and modules as a requirement to graduate from California high schools; and
- 3) Resolves that the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires that students complete a one-semester course in American government and civics to be awarded a diploma of graduation from high school. (Education Code (EC) 51225.3)
- 2) 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. (EC 51470)
- 3) Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), on or before January 1, 2020, to recommend to the SBE criteria for awarding a State Seal of Civic Engagement to pupils 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. Requires the SBE, on or before January 31, 2021, to adopt, reject, or modify the criteria recommended by the SPI.
- 4) Requires the SPI, in developing these criteria, to 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; and requires the SPI to consult with specified stakeholders.
- 5) Requires the SPI to 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.
- 6) In developing these criteria, requires the SPI to ensure, to the greatest extent feasible, that the criteria:
 - a) Provide all pupils with an opportunity to earn the State Seal of Civic Engagement;
 - b) Recognize pupil excellence or outstanding achievement;
 - c) Are not based primarily on pupil achievement that is already recognized through grades or other standard measures of pupil achievement; and
 - d) To the extent possible, result in a seal that confers some benefit to pupils beyond secondary school.

- 7) States that school district participation in this program is voluntary.
- 8) Establishes the Cesar Chavez Day of Service and Learning Program awards grants to local and state operated Americorps, National Senior Service Corps, Learn and Serve, or Conservation Corps programs that submit proposals to engage students through their schools and school districts in community service that qualifies as instructional time on Cesar Chavez Day. (EC 37220.6)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Need for the resolution. The author states, “Civic learning is critical in helping young people develop the knowledge, skills, and commitments to interact effectively with fellow community members to address shared problems and become civically engaged.

A range of research has demonstrated the benefits of civic learning opportunities. A variety of civic learning opportunities, delivered both in and out of school, can foster greater and more informed civic and political engagement.

While civic engagement is critical for the effective functioning of our government, many students are not receiving the civic education necessary to support informed and active participation in civic and political life. Research shows that low-income students of color are impacted by a lack of equitable access to civic learning opportunities.

In the spirit of ensuring that all students have equitable access to civic learning opportunities, HR 113 urges the State Board of Education to consider the value of civics education and ensure the inclusion of civics education instruction and modules as a requirement to graduate from California high schools.”

Inadequate and unequal access to civic education. According to materials provided by the author, research indicates that many students, particularly those attending schools serving low-income communities, communities of color, and immigrant communities, are not receiving the civic education necessary to support informed and active participation in civic and political life. . Nationally, white students, middle-income students, and students in higher-track classes experience more classroom-based, after-school, and informal civic learning opportunities, and they are much more likely to be engaged in extracurricular activities that support civic development. A study of more than 2,300 high school students in California found that Black and Latinx students were less likely than White students to report exposure to civic learning opportunities such as current event discussions, civic simulations, and an open classroom climate. (Kahne, 2008; Rogers, 2014) This is reflected in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 8th grade civics scores: 24% percent of all 8th graders score at or above the proficient level on the civics assessment in 2018, and the proportion of Black and Latinx students achieving proficiency is lower still (Hodgkin, 2020).

A recent study, noted by the author’s office, which reviewed mission statements in Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) found that 1) civic and democratic goals are marginal to districts’ missions; 2) civic and democratic commitments are absent from districts’

accountability plans; 3) there is little staffing and infrastructure that supports this civic agenda (Rogers, 2020).

Civic education in the History-Social Science Curriculum Framework. This resolution urges the SBE to consider the value of civics education and ensure the inclusion of civics education instruction and modules as a requirement to graduate from California high schools.

California’s History-Social Science Framework, adopted by the SBE in July, 2016, addresses civic engagement throughout the document. According to the CDE, the History-Social Science 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 English Language Arts and English Language Development 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; and
- 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 visiting city council meetings, conducting

projects to identify, analyze and address a community problem, competing in civic-writing activities, and participating in service-learning.

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; 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 and the Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning.

Current law 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. On September 10, 2020, the SBE adopted criteria and guidance to award a State Seal of Civic Engagement to California students who demonstrate excellence in civics education and participation, and an understanding of the United States Constitution, the California Constitution, and the democratic system of government.

Current law requires the SBE, when establishing the 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 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.

Related legislation. 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 2116 (McCarty) of the 2021-22 Session would require the CDE, in partnership with California Volunteers, to establish the California Serves Pilot Program, subject to an appropriation, for promoting access to service learning for pupils in grade 12 at participating local educational agencies (LEAs).

ACR 87 (Quirk Silva) of the 2019-20 Session would have endorsed civic engagement activities in public schools and encourages publicly elected officials to prioritize the equity, excellence, public accountability, and transparency of public schools. This resolution was held in the Senate Education Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

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