# California Department of Education

**California Serves Program: Model Uniform Metrics for Administration of the California Serves Grant**

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## Overview

The 2022 California State Budget established the California Serves Program (California *Education Code [*EC*]* Section 51475), a collaboration between the California Department of Education (CDE) and California Volunteers. The California Serves Program promotes access to effective service-learning for students in grade twelve, with the goal of expanding access for high school graduates in obtaining a State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) through service-learning. Additional information is available from the CDE California Serves web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/californiaserves.asp>.

In administering the California Serves Program, *EC* Section 51575(b)(3–4) instructs the CDE and California Volunteers to:

*(3) Develop model uniform metrics, based on the recommended criteria for the State Seal of Civic Engagement, for the measurement of pupil progress toward academic, civic engagement, and other learning objectives. Civic learning objectives shall include the final goal of awarding of the State Seal of Civic Engagement pursuant to this article.*

*(4) Use the evidence, recommendations, and metrics identified pursuant to paragraphs (1) to (3), inclusive, in the administration of the California Serves Program.*

This document provides the model uniform metrics developed pursuant to *EC* Section 51575(b)3–4.

## Background

### State Seal of Civic Engagement

In 2017, Assembly Bill 24, Chapter 604 (*EC* sections 51470–51474) directed the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop, and the State Board of Education (SBE) to adopt, a set of criteria for local educational agencies (LEAs) choosing to offer the SSCE locally. The SBE adopted statewide criteria and guidance for awarding an SSCE on September 10, 2020, and the SSCE was first offered during the 2020–21 school year.

More information about the development of the SSCE, including the adopted statewide criteria and guidance, is available from the “Criteria and Guidance” tab on the CDE SSCE web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/hs/hssstateseal.asp>.

### California Serves Program

*EC* Section51475 requires the CDE, in partnership with California Volunteers, to:

1. Review the available evidence on ways to incorporate effective service-learning for students in grades nine through twelve.
2. Provide recommendations to the Legislature on evidence-based strategies to expand access to high-quality service-learning programs in California high schools and promote equitable access to these programs. The *California Serves: Strategies to Expand High-Quality and Accessible Service-Learning Programs in California High Schools Report* is available at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/caserveslegreport.asp>.
3. Develop and post information on evidence-based strategies for expanding access to high-quality service-learning programs that may be used by teachers and LEAs. Strategies and additional recommendations are available from the CDE California Serves web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/californiaserves.asp>.
4. Develop model uniform metrics, based on the recommended criteria for the SSCE, for the measurement of student progress toward academic, civic engagement, and other learning objectives, including awarding the SSCE.
5. Use the evidence, recommendations, and metrics identified to administer the California Serves Grants Program.

#### California Serves Grants

The California Serves Grant Program began in the 2022–23 fiscal year. Each year, the CDE and California Volunteers administers this $5 million grant program. Eligible LEAs may receive grants up to $500,000 to support local programming that expands access to the SSCE through service-learning.

Additional information, including past and current grant recipients, is available from the CDE California Serves web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/californiaserves.asp>.

## About the Metrics

These metrics were developed for CDE and California Volunteers for use in administering the annual California Serves Grant Program. LEAs may also integrate these metrics locally to assess and support student progress toward the SSCE, ensuring that service-learning experiences are impactful, equitable, rigorous, and aligned with best practices.

Each of the five SSCE criteria is aligned with one measurable, actionable metric, along with an example of what that metric may look like in practice. Additionally, each metric integrates a corresponding National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) service-learning standard and related indicators.

The NYLC is a national, non-profit organization that promotes service-learning in schools and communities. Their kindergarten through grade twelve (K–12) service-learning standards highlight best practices in service-learning, ensuring that student experiences are meaningful, curriculum-linked, and promote civic responsibility. The full NYLC K–12 Service-Learning standards and indicators can be accessed from <https://nylc.org/k-12-standards/>.

The appendix provides a sample worksheet to support use of the metrics and accompanying standards/indicators in a local setting.

## Model Uniform Metrics

### State Seal of Civic Engagement Criterion 1

Be engaged in academic work in a productive way.

* **Metric:** Maintain a passing grade (as defined locally) or higher in core history–social science (HSS) courses, and demonstrate cross-curricular connections to civic issues, where applicable.
* **Implementation:** Design service-learning experiences that require students to explore and address civic issues, while also leading to a deeper understanding of governmental structures and civic responsibilities, in core HSS courses along with courses in other content areas.
* **Corresponding NYLC Standard:** *Meaningful Service*—Engage students in meaningful and personally-relevant activities.
* **Relevant NYLC Indicators:**
  1. Service-learning experiences are appropriate to participant ages and developmental abilities.
  2. Service-learning addresses issues that are personally relevant to the participants.
  3. Service-learning provides participants with interesting and engaging service activities.
  4. Service-learning encourages participants to understand their service experiences in the context of the underlying societal issues being addressed.
  5. Service-learning leads to attainable and visible outcomes that are valued by those being served.

### State Seal of Civic Engagement Criterion 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.

* **Metric:** Demonstrate proficiency in understanding governmental structures and democratic principles through assessments and reflective civic learning activities.
* **Implementation:** Integrate service-learning projects into academic curricula, requiring students to apply classroom knowledge to real-world civic issues.
* **Corresponding NYLC Standard:** *Link to Curriculum—*Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.
* **Relevant NYLC Indicators:**
  1. Service-learning has clearly articulated learning goals.
  2. Service-learning is aligned with the academic and/or programmatic curriculum.
  3. Service-learning helps participants learn how to transfer knowledge and skills from one setting to another.
  4. Service-learning that takes place in schools is formally recognized in school board policies and student records.

### State Seal of Civic Engagement Criterion 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.

* **Metric:** Completion of a student-led civic engagement project that addresses a community issue, including documented research, planning, action, and reflection.
* **Implementation:** Encourage students to identify community needs, develop action plans, and collaborate with stakeholders to implement solutions, thereby fostering leadership and agency.
* **Corresponding NYLC Standard:** *Youth Voice*—Provide students with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.
* **Relevant NYLC Indicators:**
  1. Service-learning engages youth in generating ideas during the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes.
  2. Service-learning involves youth in the decision-making process throughout the service-learning experiences.
  3. Service-learning involves youth and adults in creating an environment that supports trust and open expression of ideas.
  4. Service-learning promotes acquisition of knowledge and skills to enhance youth leadership and decision-making.
  5. Service-learning involves youth in evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the service-learning experience.

### State Seal of Civic Engagement Criterion 4

Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection.

* **Metric:** Reflective writing or multimedia projects that assess personal growth in civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions resulting from service-learning activities.
* **Implementation:** Reflective activities that connect service experiences to civic learning objectives, fostering a deeper understanding of civic responsibilities.
* **Corresponding NYLC Standard:** *Reflection*—Incorporate multiple challenging reflection activities that prompt deep thinking about oneself and one’s relationship to society.
* **Relevant NYLC Indicators:** 
  1. Service-learning reflection includes a variety of verbal, written, artistic, and nonverbal activities to demonstrate understanding and changes in participants’ knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes.
  2. Service-learning reflection occurs before, during, and after the service experience.
  3. Service-learning reflection prompts participants to think deeply about complex community problems and alternative solutions.
  4. Service-learning reflection encourages participants to examine their preconceptions and assumptions in order to explore and understand their roles and responsibilities as citizens.
  5. Service-learning reflection encourages participants to examine a variety of social and civic issues related to their service-learning experience so that participants understand connections to public policy and civic life.

### State Seal of Civic Engagement Criterion 5

Exhibit character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to positively impact the classroom, school, community and/or society.

* **Metric:** Demonstration of traits such as responsibility, respect, and commitment through teacher evaluations, peer reviews, or community partner feedback.
* **Implementation:** Foster inclusive service-learning environments that respect diverse perspectives and encourage students to engage empathetically with various community members.
* **Corresponding NYLC Standard:** *Diversity*—Promote understanding and mutual respect among all participants.
* **Relevant NYLC Indicators:**
  1. Service-learning helps participants identify and analyze different points of view to gain understanding of multiple perspectives.
  2. Service-learning helps participants develop interpersonal skills in conflict resolution and group decision-making.
  3. Service-learning helps participants actively seek to understand and value the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of those offering and receiving service.
  4. Service-learning encourages participants to recognize and overcome stereotypes.

## Appendix A: Metric Alignment Worksheet

This worksheet may be used to map proposed service-learning activities to the five SSCE criteria and corresponding model uniform metrics. This tool is designed to support implementation planning and data collection.

| **SSCE Criteria** | **Metric(s) to be Used** | **Measurement Approach/Tools** | **Key Standard/Indicator** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1: Academic Work |  |  |  |
| 2: Understanding of Government |  |  |  |
| 3: Civic Engagement Project(s) |  |  |  |
| 4: Reflection on Civic Knowledge and Skills |  |  |  |
| 5: Civic-Minded Character Traits |  |  |  |

## Appendix B: Definitions

**Civic engagement:** Civic engagement involves “working to make a difference in the civic life of one’s community and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.”[[1]](#footnote-2) Civic engagement includes both paid and unpaid forms of political activism, environmentalism, and community and national service. Volunteering, national service, and service-learning can be forms of civic engagement.[[2]](#footnote-3) Research has identified four interrelated constructs that are necessary for civic engagement:

1. Civic action, or participation in activities such as volunteering or service-learning to help better the community.
2. Civic commitment or duty, or the willingness to make positive contributions to society.
3. Civic skills, or the ability to be involved in civil society, politics, and democracy.
4. Social cohesion, or a sense of reciprocity, trust, and bonding to others.

**Civic learning:** Civic learning is a process through which young people develop the knowledge, skills, and commitments to interact effectively with fellow community members to address shared problems. It includes preparation for both civic engagement (or practices seeking to promote the public good through nongovernmental organizations and informal community work) and political engagement (or activities aiming to influence state action through formal avenues such as voting, lobbying, or petitioning).[[3]](#footnote-4) There are many practices that directly improve the quality and effectiveness of civic learning in schools, including civic action projects; digital literacy education and engagement; classroom instruction in government, history, law, and democracy; discussion of current events; service-learning; extracurricular or co-curricular activities; student voice in school governance; and simulations of democratic processes.[[4]](#footnote-5) [[5]](#footnote-6)

**Civics:** Along with the study of politics and society, civics encompasses participation in classrooms and schools, neighborhoods, groups, and organizations. In civics, students learn to contribute appropriately to public processes and discussions of real issues. Their contributions to public discussions may take many forms, ranging from personal testimony to abstract arguments. They will also learn civic practices such as voting, volunteering, jury service, and joining with others to improve society. Civics enables students to study how others participate, and to practice participating and taking informed action themselves.[[6]](#footnote-7)

**Service-learning:** Service-learning is an educational approach that intentionally combines meaningful community service activities with instruction and reflection to support pupil progress toward academic and civic engagement learning objectives while meeting societal needs.[[7]](#footnote-8)

1. . Ehrlich, Thomas. 2000. *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education.* Westport, CT: Rowman & Littlefield. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. . The Policy Circle. 2025. Policy Circle Brief: Civic Engagement. <https://www.thepolicycircle.org/briefs/civic-engagement/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. . Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. . Gould, Jonathan, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Peter Levine, Ted McConnell, and David B. Smith, eds. 2011. *Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools*. Philadelphia, PA: Leonore Annenberg Institute for Civics of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. [https://www.carnegie.org/publications/guardian-of-democracy-the-civic-mission-of-schools](https://www.carnegie.org/publications/guardian-of-democracy-the-civic-mission-of-schools/). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. . Leveraging Equity & Access in Democratic Education. 2023. What Is Civic Learning? <https://centerx.gseis.ucla.edu/leade/civic-learning/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. 5. National Council for the Social Studies. 2013. *College, Career, and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History*. Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 31. <https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/2022/c3-framework-for-social-studies-rev0617.2.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. . California Legislative Information. Assembly Bill 181, Statutes of 2022.<https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB181#:~:text=SEC.%2071.,appropriation%20is%20made>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)