# California Department of Education

**Report to the** **Legislature**

**California Serves Program:** **Strategies to Expand High-Quality and Accessible Service-Learning Programs in California High Schools**



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**California Department of Education**

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**California Serves Program: Strategies to Expand High-Quality and Accessible Service-Learning Programs in California High Schools**

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**California Serves Program: Strategies to Expand High-Quality and Accessible Service-Learning Programs in California High Schools**

## Executive Summary

This report is required by California *Education Code* Section 51475(b)(1). This statute was added by Assembly Bill (AB) 181 (Section 71, Statutes of 2022), which established the annual California Serves grant program. The statute requires the California Department of Education (CDE), in partnership with California Volunteers, to review the available evidence on ways to incorporate effective service-learning for pupils in grades nine through twelve (9–12), and to provide recommendations to the Legislature, consistent with the recommended criteria and guidance for the State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE), on evidence-based strategies to expand access to high-quality service-learning programs. This report summarizes a variety of evidence-based best practices in service-learning and provides guidance on how these best practices may be equitably incorporated into high school programs in a way that encourages and supports equitable access to the SSCE.

This report contains a summary of existing, current research into service-learning, as well as civic engagement and learning as it relates to and supports high-quality service-learning programs. The report provides information on best practices and useful resources for California local educational agencies (LEAs) that serve grades 9–12. These recommendations are geared at supporting LEAs with existing SSCE programs, as well as those in the process of developing new SSCE programs. The recommendations are based on general research into service-learning and direct experience launching the SSCE program in September 2020.

Additionally, this report is related to the annual California Serves grant, also established by AB 181. This annual grant appropriates $5 million to eligible LEAs to support the establishment or expansion of local programs for grades 9–12 that award the SSCE specifically through service-learning. The first cycle of 12 grant recipients was posted on May 12, 2023. A separate report to the Legislature, due November 5, 2024, and annually thereafter, will be prepared to report on the grant activities.

You may access this report from the CDE California Serves web page at [https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/hs/californiaserves.asp](https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/hs/californiaserves.asp" \o "CDE California Serves web page). If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Sarah Smith, Education Programs Consultant, Professional Learning Support Division, by phone at 916-323-5818 or [SSmith@cde.ca.gov](mailto:SSmith@cde.ca.gov).

### Assembly Bill 181 and Legislative Reporting Requirements

Assembly Bill (AB) 181 (Statutes of 2022), the Education Omnibus Budget Trailer Bill, established the annual California Serves program, administered by the California Department of Education (CDE) in collaboration with California Volunteers.

The purpose of the California Serves program is to promote access to effective service-learning for pupils in grade twelve who are enrolled at participating local educational agencies (LEAs), with the goal of expanding access for high school graduates in obtaining a State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) through service-learning.

The legislation requires the CDE and California Volunteers to collaborate in facilitating an annual $5 million grant program, in which eligible LEAs apply for grants of up to $500,000 to establish or expand programs that award the SSCE through service-learning.

Additionally, the legislation requires the CDE and California Volunteers to develop two reports to the Legislature:

1. Recommendations on evidence-based strategies to expand access to high-quality service-learning programs in California high schools, and promote equitable access to these programs, on or before January 1, 2024.
2. A report on the program to the appropriate fiscal and policy committees of the Legislature, on or before November 5, 2024, and annually thereafter, which includes an evaluation of the program using the model uniform metrics established by the Department in partnership with California Volunteers and includes at least:
   1. The number of participating pupils, schools, and LEAs, and the grant awards for each grantee.
   2. The demographics of pupils engaged in service-learning as a result of the grant.
   3. The impact of the service performed by pupils and school staff as a result of the grant.
   4. Pupil outcomes in the academic, civic engagement, and other learning objectives measured by the model uniform metrics identified by the Department in partnership with California Volunteers pursuant to paragraph (3) of subdivision (b), including, but not limited to, obtaining the SSCE.

This report fulfills requirement 1, providing recommendations for evidence-based strategies to expand access to high-quality service-learning programs in California high schools.

## Introduction and Background: Civic Engagement and Learning in California

### Civic Education Initiative

For more than a decade, the CDE has supported a variety of projects that promote civic learning and engagement for students in kindergarten through grade twelve (K–12). This most recent work on civic engagement and learning began in 2013, when then-Chief Justice Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye and then-State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI) Tom Torlakson joined together to establish the California Task Force on K–12 Civic Learning. The task force sought to define the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that students need to be informed and involved citizens and community members, as well as made recommendations for how to achieve those outcomes for all students in California. The result was *Revitalizing K–12 Civic Learning in California: A Blueprint for Action*, a report that may be found on the California Educators Together web page (note: logon required).[[1]](#footnote-2) The report outlines a plan of action for students, teachers, administrators, business and community leaders, courts, local government and elected officials to improve civic learning in all California schools and communities.

### State Seal of Civic Engagement

In 2017, AB 24, Chapter 604 (California *Education Code* [*EC*] sections 51470–51474) directed the SSPI to develop, and the State Board of Education (SBE) to adopt, a set of criteria for LEAs choosing to offer an SSCE locally. The SBE adopted statewide criteria and guidance for awarding an SSCE on September 10, 2020. 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.[[2]](#footnote-3)

### California Serves

The 2022 Education Omnibus Budget Trailer Bill (AB 181, Section 71) added *EC*Section 51475, which establishes the California Serves program, administered by the CDE in collaboration with California Volunteers. The purpose of the California Serves program is to promote access to effective service-learning for pupils in grade twelve who are enrolled at participating LEAs, with the goal of expanding access for high school graduates in obtaining an SSCE through service-learning. Additional information about the California Serves program is available on the CDE California Serves web page.[[3]](#footnote-4)

## Overview: California Serves

The California Serves program includes two components: (1) an annual grant program and related annual reporting, and (2) an initial, one-time research into existing evidence-based service-learning strategies that culminates in a set of recommendations and model uniform metrics.

### Annual Grant Program

The $5 million annual grant program was first available during the 2022–23 school year and is intended to support expanding access to the SSCE through high-quality service-learning programs.

During the 2022–23 school year, the CDE developed and administered this pilot year of the grant program, including formulating initial criteria for the awarding of grants, developing an application process, requesting data from participating LEAs, and awarding grants. Eligible LEAs applied for grants of up to $500,000, which may be used for:

1. Paid planning time for teachers to increase the use of service-learning in instruction.
2. Professional development on service-learning for administrators and teachers.
3. Purchase of instructional materials to help integrate service-learning in instruction.
4. Participation costs, including materials or travel expenses related to service-learning activities.
5. Personnel costs for coordinating service-learning at the LEA or a school site.
6. Participation costs associated with grant program evaluation.

Emphasis was on programs that demonstrated rich civic engagement and learning in pursuit of an SSCE through service-learning.

Per *EC* Section 51475(a), applicant eligibility was limited to LEAs, defined as a school district, county office of education (COE), or direct funded charter school, within the State of California that serves students in grade twelve. Additionally, per *EC* Section 51475(d), at least 55 percent of the pupils enrolled in the applicant LEA were unduplicated pupils as defined in Section 2574 or 42238.02, as applicable.

### Research, Recommendations, and Metrics

In addition to facilitating an annual grant program, *EC* Section 51475 also 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 9–12.
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.
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.
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 grant program.

This report fulfills requirements 1 and 2 listed above. Following the submission of this report, the CDE will post a web page that includes information on and recommendations for evidence-based strategies for expanding access to high-quality service-learning programs that support the SSCE.

## Connection to the State Seal of Civic Engagement

The SSCE has been available to eligible California students in participating LEAs since the 2020–21 school year. To earn an SSCE insignia, students must be in grade eleven or twelve, attend school in a participating LEA, and fulfill the five statewide criteria adopted by the SBE in September 2020:[[4]](#footnote-5)

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

Additionally, each LEA determines any additional local requirements and procedures students undergo to earn the SSCE, including optional and additional local criteria.

The five statewide SSCE criteria emphasize deep, authentic civic learning on behalf of the student, demonstrated through extensive content mastery and rigorous, rich civic engagement projects. Service-learning programs established and supported through the California Serves program must be rigorous enough to support students meeting the statewide SSCE criteria, which may include additional emphasis on demonstrating civic learning and engagement through the service-learning project. Resources mentioned in this report typically support civic engagement projects and can generally be modified in ways that support rigorous service-learning projects that lead to earning the SSCE.

The CDE has administered the process of distributing SSCE insignias to participating LEAs since the 2020–21 school year. The table below provides statewide insignia request data for the three school years during which the SSCE has been available:

**Table 1: Statewide State Seal of Civic Engagement Insignia Request Data**

| **Document Insignia was Affixed Onto** | **2022–23** | **2021–22** | **2020–21** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Diplomas | 9,876 | 8,354 | 4,794 |
| General Education Development Certificates | 2 | 0 | 6 |
| Certificates of Completion | 14 | 59 | 7 |
| Grade Eleven Transcripts | 136 | 61 | 552 (total for grades eleven and twelve) |
| Grade Twelve Transcripts | 2,531 | 1,630 | \* |
| **Total** | **12,559** (86 districts) | **10,104** (65 districts) | **5,359** (28 districts) |

Statewide SSCE request data is available from the CDE SSCE web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/hs/hssstateseal.asp>.

Until the California Serves program was authorized, no statewide funding had been appropriated to the SSCE. The $5 million in annual grant funds allocated through the California Serves grant program, beginning with the 2022–23 school year, is the first example of statewide funding to support the SSCE. This funding is intended to encourage LEAs to create and expand high-quality and equitable service-learning programs that lead to students earning the SSCE.

## Historic Context

It is relatively common today for American public schools to include a community service, volunteer, and service-learning requirement that students must fulfill to graduate. This movement began as part of educational reforms of the 1990s, which encouraged schools to harness the power of service to further academic goals for students. For example, in 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed into law the National and Community Service Act, which was followed in 1993 by the National and Community Service Trust Act (which created AmeriCorps as well as the Learn and Serve America programs), signed into law by President Bill Clinton. In 1990, Maryland became the first state to require community service for high school graduates.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Specific to California, the CalServe Initiative was established within the CDE in 1990, using federal funding provided through the National and Community Service Act.[[6]](#footnote-7) From 1990 through 2012, CalServe funded California’s COEs, districts, and schools to support statewide implementation of service-learning. Federal funding for Learn and Serve America was eliminated from the 2011–12 budget, which eliminated funding for CalServe.

Relatedly, in 2000, Governor Gray Davis signed into law Senate Bill 984, which established César Chávez Day, as well as the César Chávez Day of Service and Learning Program, authorizing public schools to incorporate activities that encourage service and volunteerism by promoting the life of César Chávez.[[7]](#footnote-8)

## Defining Service-Learning

Key terms used in this report are defined in appendix B. However, it is important to establish a clear conception of service-learning before making recommendations on effective implementation, especially given the tendency to equate service-learning with community service, volunteer work, or civic engagement in general.

The 1993 National and Community Service Trust Act defined service-learning as “an innovative instructional strategy that actively involves youth in the curriculum through service to their community.” This differs from community service, volunteer work, and even civic engagement by purposefully integrating academic content, skills, and civic learning into service for one’s community. Furthermore, students are provided structured time and methods for reflecting on their academic and service experiences in the community. Service-learning is interdisciplinary and can be applied across the content areas.

*EC* Section 51475, the statute authorizing the California Serves program, defines service-learning as “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 also meeting societal needs.”[[8]](#footnote-9) While this is related to civic engagement in general, it is still a separate concept.

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.”[[9]](#footnote-10)

Service-learning is different from civic engagement, community service, and volunteerism. According to Youth.gov, in service-learning:

1. the service activity is directly integrated with the academic curriculum and content; and
2. students engage in reflection activities after their service experience and apply their learning in real-life activities.[[10]](#footnote-11)

The 2017 California *History–Social Science* (HSS) *Framework* expands on this definition, explaining that:

Service-learning is an instructional strategy that engages students in real-world problem solving. Students work on community issues/problems that matter to them, applying critical thinking skills as they analyze causes and effects, discuss possible ways to address the issue/problem, and plan and execute service activities. To implement service-learning effectively, there must be an intentional link between academic content and skills and the students’ service activities, which can provide opportunities to make what is learned in class even more relevant to students.

Service-learning is applicable for all of the core disciplines (science, mathematics, English language arts), but for social studies, service-learning has particular significance as one of the six Civic Mission of Schools proven practices:

Service-learning is far more than community service alone; high-quality service-learning experiences incorporate intentional opportunities for students to analyze and solve community problems through the application of knowledge and skills.

Service-learning helps to make education real, connecting academic skills and knowledge to issues that matter to young people. When students have opportunities to use the knowledge and skills they are acquiring in school to address meaningful issues in their community, the content of their learning becomes more relevant to their lives, and they better understand the importance of civic participation.[[11]](#footnote-12)

The National Youth Leadership Council further adds that through the process of service-learning, young people answer questions such as:

1. What are the true needs in my community?
2. What are the root causes of these needs?
3. How, where, and from whom can I learn more?
4. How can I contribute to a solution?[[12]](#footnote-13)

For example, a student enrolled in a biology course may engage in volunteer work by picking up trash on a riverbank. If this experience is directly tied to a student’s biology course, a teacher-led lesson on studying water samples under a microscope could be expanded on with a root cause analysis of the garbage situation, who is affected by shoreline garbage, and then present water test results with the expanded information to a local pollution control agency.[[13]](#footnote-14)

## Summary of Available Evidence on Service-Learning for Students, Grades Nine Through Twelve

### Benefits of Equitable, Accessible Service-Learning

The *Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning* was first established in 2003 as a set of research-based promising approaches that, taken together, constitute well-rounded civic learning.[[14]](#footnote-15) Proven practice three is to design and implement high-quality service-learning programs.

Research into service-learning has shown that all youth can benefit from high-quality service-learning programs. Service-learning connects classroom learning to the community, engaging students in the world around them and helping the content of their classrooms become more relevant to their daily lives. The following general list of benefits for students is adapted from research into service-learning and is also summarized at Youth.gov:[[15]](#footnote-16) [[16]](#footnote-17)

* Improve character values and promote responsible behavior, learn about cultural diversity, and demonstrate greater respect for ethnic diversity.
* Improve academic outcomes for students (including engagement and motivation), especially civic knowledge, skills, dispositions, and engagement.
* Promote a sense of connectedness to the school and community, which can lead to a tendency to take action for the benefit of the community.
* Promote social–emotional skills, including improved social skills, better cooperation skills in the classroom, improved psychological well-being, and a better ability to set and achieve goals.
* Promote civic participation by supporting civic knowledge and commitment to the community.

In addition to helping students, quality service-learning programs provide additional benefits to community-based organizations, service recipients, communities, and society, also outlined by Youth.gov:[[17]](#footnote-18)

* Community-based organizations benefit through new ideas, specialized skills, motivation, increased public support and visibility, and cultivation of a new generation of volunteers.
* Young people can bring energy, increased capacity, and creative ideas that help support identification of real needs and clear priorities.
* Communities can begin to see youth as a resource, rather than a problem or complication.
* A new generation of volunteers can be cultivated.

## Policies and Practices to Support Access to Equitable and High-Quality Service-Learning Programs

Expanding access to high-quality service-learning programs first requires an understanding of the characteristics of high-quality service-learning programs that can culminate in a student earning an SSCE.

As stated in the *Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning*, service-learning “is neither a packaged curriculum nor a cut-and-dried program, and no two service-learning projects are completely alike.”[[18]](#footnote-19) However, high-quality evidence-based service-learning programs have some commonalities. The following recommendations are geared toward LEAs seeking to implement service-learning programs that culminate in the awarding of an SSCE but are also applicable for any organization seeking to implement an accessible, high-quality service-learning program for students in grades 9–12. County, district, and site administrators, as well as school educators, may find the most value in these guidelines and recommendations.

### Recommendation 1: Establish Effective Standards and Indicators

The National Youth Leadership Council K–12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice developed the below framework of critical elements that educators can use to develop high-quality, rigorous, relevant projects.[[19]](#footnote-20)

Adopted in 2008, these six standards and indicators can effectively guide development of equitable, high-quality service-learning programs that can also support student attainment of the SSCE.

1. **Meaningful Service**

*Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities.*

**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.
6. **Link to Curriculum**

*Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and content standards.*

**Indicators:**

1. Service-learning has clearly articulated learning goals.
2. Service-learning is aligned with the academic and 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.
5. **Reflection**

*Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one’s relationship to society.*

**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 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.
6. **Diversity**

*Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.*

**Indicators:**

1. Service-learning helps participants identify and analyze different points of view to gain an 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.
5. **Youth Voice**

*Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.*

**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 the 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.

*Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.*

**Indicators:**

1. Service-learning involves a variety of partners, including youth, educators, families, community members, community-based organizations, and businesses.
2. Service-learning partnerships are characterized by frequent and regular communication to keep all partners well-informed about activities and progress.
3. Service-learning partners collaborate to establish a shared vision and set common goals to address community needs.
4. Service-learning partners collaboratively develop and implement action plans to meet specified goals.
5. Service-learning partners share knowledge and understanding of school and community assets and needs and view each other as valued resources.

### Recommendation 2: Incorporate Curriculum and Strategies That Encourage Deep Civic Learning

LEAs seeking to develop and promote access to service-learning programs should ensure that these programs include curricula and strategies that encourage deep civic learning. Examples of instructional strategies and curriculum resources that can support this recommendation are provided below.

#### College, Career, and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards Inquiry Arc

The *College, Career, and Civic Life* (*C3*) *Framework* provides guidance to states on concepts, skills, and disciplinary tools that can prepare students for college, career, and civic life.[[20]](#footnote-21) The C3 Inquiry Arc highlights four dimensions of inquiry, which support the pursuit of knowledge through questions, and can be used to guide the development of high-quality service-learning programs.

* Dimension 1: Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries
* Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Tools and Concepts (in Civics, Economics, Geography, and History)
* Dimension 3: Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence
* Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action

Designing service-learning programs that incorporate these four dimensions can help LEAs ensure that students who are working towards the SSCE are engaging in rigorous civic engagement and learning.

#### A Teacher’s Guide to Service-Learning

The CDE César E. Chávez Model Curriculum teacher resources include the essay, “A Teacher’s Guide to Service-learning.”[[21]](#footnote-22) [[22]](#footnote-23) In addition to defining and providing context related to service-learning, this essay also provides five concrete elements that should be addressed in all service-learning programs to ensure rigor and fidelity to service-learning principles:

1. Meeting a Real Community Need.
2. Integrated to, and enhances, the Curriculum.
3. Coordinated with a Community Agency, Another School, or the Community-at-Large.
4. Helps Foster Civic Responsibility, Civic Pride, and Connection to Community.
5. Provides Structured Time for Reflection.

The essay also cites examples of each element and includes guidance for conceptualizing a service-learning project that is connected to California content standards.

#### Teach Democracy

Teach Democracy (formerly Constitutional Rights Foundation) provides academic, nonpartisan programs and curricula that increase civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions using research-based methodologies including content about government and policy, student-directed discussion, and authentic civic engagement.[[23]](#footnote-24) Its Civic Action Project is a free project-based learning program for civics and government, in which students identify an issue or problem that matters to them, connect it to public policy, and then take action related to their selected issue or problem. The Civic Action Project can be integrated into a service-learning program by ensuring that student projects meet the needs of the community, are coordinated within the school environment, help foster civic responsibility, are integrated into the curriculum, and provide structured time for students to reflect on the service experience.

#### University of California, Berkeley Programs and Resources

The University of California (UC), Berkeley has provided a series of programs that support high-quality service-learning programs in pursuit of the SSCE. In addition to using the C3 Inquiry Arc as a general framework to develop service-learning programs, LEAs may also wish to consider the following models to guide student service-learning projects.

**Integrated Action Civics Project**

The UC Berkeley Integrated Action Civics Project (IACP) provides a framework for students to embark on civic engagement projects that promote a student sense of self, focused on identity, justice, and worldview.[[24]](#footnote-25) This approach weaves civic action and change analysis throughout course content, with the goal of providing the disposition, skills, and strategies that empower all students as change-makers within K–12 HSS courses.

This framework specifically focuses on a thematic exploration of the past as a means to support informed civic action projects. When incorporated with the principles of the C3 framework, as well as principles of service-learning projects, the IACP can help guide educators and students through high-quality service-learning programs in HSS courses. This may be especially appropriate to students working towards an SSCE, given the content requirements embedded in SSCE statewide criterion 2.

**Youth Participatory Action Research**

The Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Hub, created and administered by UC Berkeley, approaches youth community development projects through social justice principles.[[25]](#footnote-26) YPAR provides a framework, including reflection questions, specific guidance and resources, and sample projects to guide youth through community development projects that incorporate a process of action-oriented research.

While the IACP incorporates extensive analysis of history as a method of preparing students for informed action, YPAR is a cyclical process of learning and action. This program focuses on providing social-justice-oriented research, including providing skills in inquiry, analysis, and presentation, generating insights into issues faced by youth, promoting sociopolitical development, and helping evaluate programs and policies that affect young people.

**Youth-Plan, Learn, Act Now**

The Youth-Plan, Learn, Act Now (Y-PLAN) program is a long-standing civic learning methodology developed by the UC Berkeley Center for Cities + Schools that incorporates youth into city planning projects.[[26]](#footnote-27)

Y-PLAN seeks to bypass the silos that traditionally separate city planning from K–12 and higher education, creating a community of practice with diverse perspectives. The program supports young people accessing civic leaders and city institutions and provides guidance to navigate these complex structures. The methodology includes a five-step roadmap modeled on the scientific method and participatory planning techniques used by civic professionals that guide students from project planning to getting started, researching the city, developing action steps, going public with those steps, and evaluating their progress and next steps.

### Recommendation 3: Ensure Teacher Access to Ongoing Professional Development and Learning

The weight of day-to-day implementation, maintenance, and growth of a local SSCE program is often carried by educators, whose participation in high-quality, ongoing professional learning and development is crucial to student access to equitable SSCE and service-learning programs.

#### The Quality Professional Learning Standards

Recognizing the critical connection between educator effectiveness and student outcomes, in 2012, the CDE and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing convened the California Educator Excellence Task Force, which published *Greatness by Design: Supporting Outstanding Teaching to Sustain a Golden State* (*GbD* Report).[[27]](#footnote-28)

Fulfilling the recommendations outlined in the *GbD* Report led to the Quality Professional Learning Standards (QPLS), developed in 2013 by a group of educators from across the state and approved by the SBE in 2015.[[28]](#footnote-29) The authors of the QPLS note that, “quality professional learning focuses on equitable access, opportunities, and outcomes for all students, with an emphasis on addressing achievement and opportunity disparities between student groups.”[[29]](#footnote-30)

The QPLS serves as a foundation for the content, processes, and conditions essential to all educator professional learning over time, which leads to improved educator knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Seven interdependent standards promote professional learning that is:

1. Rooted in student and educator needs, demonstrated through data;
2. Focused on content and pedagogy;
3. Designed to ensure equitable outcomes;
4. Designed and structured to be ongoing, intensive, and embedded in practice;
5. Collaborative with an emphasis on shared accountability;
6. Supported by adequate resources; and
7. Coherent and aligned with other standards, policies, and programs.

The following organizations provide professional development and learning to educators, administrators, and other groups that align with the QPLS, and include programs focused on service-learning, civic learning, and civic engagement. In order to ensure educator access to these programs and opportunities, LEAs should prioritize providing educators with ample, dedicated time and resources, such as protected development time and stipends, as well as implement systemic methods of encouragement to pursue professional development and learning opportunities.

#### National Council for the Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) is the largest professional association in the United States devoted to social studies education.[[30]](#footnote-31) Members include educators, administrators, curriculum designers, and other education leaders. The NCSS provides advocacy, professional learning and development, publications, and other resources dedicated to supporting social studies education. The NCSS annual conference spotlights many of these resources and opportunities. Its Civic Life Project is dedicated to helping students develop informed, diverse perspectives on social issues, and may be a resource to consider incorporating into a service-learning program that supports the SSCE.[[31]](#footnote-32)

#### California Council for the Social Studies

The California Council for the Social Studies is a membership-based nonprofit professional organization dedicated to supporting California educators, administrators, and other education leaders.[[32]](#footnote-33) It provides resources, instructional support, and advocacy at the local, state, and national levels. Its annual conference offers a series of professional development sessions that educators and administrators may find useful in developing high-quality service-learning programs that support the SSCE.

#### California History–Social Science Project

Part of a large network of discipline-specific programs known as the California Subject Matter Projects, the California History–Social Science Project specializes in supporting K–12 educators to provide the highest-quality HSS instruction.[[33]](#footnote-34) It focuses on meeting the needs of English learners, native speakers with low literacy, and students from economically disadvantaged communities. The statewide office supports six regional sites across the state. Each regional site features teachers and scholars collaborating to provide high-quality classroom instruction that may be incorporated into a service-learning program that also supports the acquisition of the SSCE.

#### Teacher Credential Programs

The time that educators spend in their teacher credential programs, including those seeking Multiple-Subject Teaching Credentials, Single-Subject Teaching Credentials, and Education Specialist Instruction Credentials, can be deeply meaningful and formative in a teacher’s career. Instructional strategies and resources used in credential programs may have a lasting effect on the choices an educator makes for years, if not decades, following the attainment of a credential. Teacher credential programs can support high-quality service-learning programs by formally integrating into their training service-learning and other related civic engagement and learning resources and instructional strategies.

### Recommendation 4: Prioritize Efforts to Track Who Earns the State Seal of Civic Engagement

Identifying characteristics of high-quality service-learning programs and providing resources and professional development to support these programs will not ensure that all students have access to these programs. To ensure access to high-quality service-learning LEAs should also prioritize efforts to track and analyze who earns an SSCE insignia. This can help identify potential barriers students are facing to accessing the SSCE locally.

The 2023 Leveraging Equity & Access in Democratic Education (LEADE) report, *California’s Commitment to K–12 Civic Learning: A 2022 Assessment*, includes three suggestions for LEAs seeking to ensure equity and access to the SSCE:[[34]](#footnote-35)

1. Define civic excellence as a goal for all students (rather than just the highest-achieving students).
2. Integrate equity into all civic learning opportunities (as opposed to seeing equity as an afterthought).
3. Examine traditional eligibility measures, such as grade point average, to determine if these are serving as unnecessary barriers to participation in civic and service-learning.

Since the 2020–21 school year, the CDE has collected county, district, and school site-level data on students who earn the SSCE, and publishes this data annually in a spreadsheet.

Beginning in the 2023–24 school year, the CDE will collect data on the individual students who earn the SSCE for determining its use in the College/Career Indicator on the California School Dashboard.[[35]](#footnote-36) LEAs participating in the program will be requested to submit, to this new data collection tool, the individual students who earned the SSCE in the 2023−24 school year. This new data collection is based on the SBE request to the CDE to consider the inclusion of civic engagement in the College/Career Indicator. Additional information on this work is available on the CDE SBE Items Related to the SSCE web page.[[36]](#footnote-37)

### Recommendation 5: Design Meaningful Infrastructure That Promotes Service-Learning at All Levels

Implementing high-quality service-learning programs is not an easy lift, nor is implementing the SSCE locally while ensuring it is accessible to all students. Doing so requires LEAs to either develop new ongoing structures to support these goals, or deepen existing structures to include the SSCE and service-learning.

At a minimum, LEAs seeking to offer the SSCE through service-learning should consider the following questions:

1. Who, at the county, district, and school-site level, will be responsible for developing, implementing, and monitoring student progress in service-learning projects that lead to the SSCE?
2. How will these monitoring and tracking practices be evaluated and modified over time?
3. How will the LEA ensure the continuity of these monitoring and tracking practices over the long term, taking into account inevitable staff turnover, shifting initiatives and priorities, and changes to funding?

Ensuring access to high-quality, equitable service-learning programs that lead to the SSCE requires significant and ongoing development and administration time, at the site, district, county, and statewide level. It is impossible to add these responsibilities to the plates of teachers and administrators and expect long-term positive outcomes for students. LEAs must also consider strategies for dedicated and ongoing funding for service-learning-based SSCE programs locally.

Moreover, to ensure equitable access to the SSCE and service-learning programs, the California state budget should include dedicated and ongoing funding for statewide administration of the California Serves and SSCE programs, in addition to funding for LEAs to participate in the California Serves and SSCE programs.

The 2023 LEADE Report on civic learning includes recommendations to ensure that an LEA’s infrastructure truly encourages quality civic learning. These recommendations can also be applied to high-quality service-learning programs:

1. Adopt the SSCE alongside a broader, LEA-wide commitment to democratic education.
2. Provide staffing and support for civic learning programs, such as the SSCE.
3. Integrate many voices (including student voices) through democratic processes.

Finally, LEAs may wish to utilize the Civic Engagement Research Group Educating4Democracy resources, including an *SSCE* *Planning Packet*, to support the development of thoughtful infrastructure to support the SSCE.[[37]](#footnote-38) [[38]](#footnote-39) The packet includes guidance and templates to support the development of an accessible service-learning-based SSCE program from the ground up, starting with taking LEA inventory, developing an action plan, and undergoing data analysis and reflection.

## Conclusion

Schools that provide comprehensive, accessible, high-quality service-learning programs to all students are vital to encouraging the development of knowledgeable, civically engaged citizens who strive to improve their communities. Statewide programs that encourage service-learning, civic learning, and engagement, like California Serves and the SSCE, have the potential to provide deep, long-lasting benefits to students. However, much more work is needed in order to ensure students have equitable access to the SSCE and rich, rigorous service-learning opportunities. Indeed, while the SSCE has grown in popularity each year since 2021, only 2.5 percent of California graduates earned a seal in 2023. The California Serves program has the potential to expand access to the SSCE and service-learning throughout the state.

## 

## Appendix A: California *Education Code* Section 51475

(a) The California Serves Program is hereby established under the administration of the department, in collaboration with CaliforniaVolunteers, for purposes of promoting access to effective service-learning for pupils in grade 12 who are enrolled at participating local educational agencies, with the goal of expanding access for high school graduates in obtaining a State Seal of Civic Engagement through service-learning.

(b) The department, in partnership with CaliforniaVolunteers, shall do all of the following:

(1) Review the available evidence on ways to incorporate effective service-learning for pupils in grades 9 to 12, inclusive, and, on or before January 1, 2024, provide recommendations to the Legislature, consistent with Section 9795 of the Government Code and consistent with the recommended criteria and implementation guidance for the State Seal of Civic Engagement pursuant to this article, on evidence-based strategies to expand access to high-quality service-learning programs in California high schools and promote equitable access to these programs.

(2) On or before January 1, 2024, develop and post on the department’s and CaliforniaVolunteers’ internet websites evidence-based strategies for expanding access to high-quality service-learning programs that may be used by teachers and local educational agencies.

(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.

(c) (1) Commencing with the 2022–23 fiscal year, the sum of five million dollars ($5,000,000) is hereby appropriated, each fiscal year, from the General Fund to the department for annual awards to local educational agencies for California Serves Program grants pursuant to this section.

(2) The department, in collaboration with CaliforniaVolunteers, shall establish the California Serves Program grant program, develop criteria for the awarding of grants and an application process, request necessary data from participating local educational agencies, and award grants consistent with this section.

(d) In order for a local educational agency to be eligible for a grant under this section, at least 55 percent of the pupils enrolled in the applicant local educational agency shall be unduplicated pupils as defined in Section 2574 or 42238.02, as applicable.

(e) Eligible local educational agencies who receive grants pursuant to this grant program shall receive an amount of up to five hundred thousand dollars ($500,000) annually.

(f) Allowable uses for funding allocated pursuant to this grant program include all of the following:

(1) Paid planning time for teachers to increase the use of service-learning in their instruction.

(2) Professional development for school and local educational agency administrators and classroom teachers on service-learning.

(3) Purchase of instructional materials to aid in the use of service-learning in instruction.

(4) Participation costs of pupils and school personnel, including any materials or travel expenses related to service-learning activities.

(5) Personnel costs for coordination of service-learning at a local educational agency or a school site of a local educational agency.

(6) Participation costs associated with grant program evaluation.

(g) Notwithstanding Section 10231.5 of the Government Code, on or before November 5, 2024, and annually thereafter, the department, in partnership with CaliforniaVolunteers, shall submit a report on the program to the appropriate fiscal and policy committees of the Legislature, consistent with Section 9795 of the Government Code. The report shall include an evaluation of the program using the model uniform metrics established by the department in partnership with CaliforniaVolunteers pursuant to paragraph (3) of subdivision (b), and shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following information:

(1) The number of participating pupils, schools, and local educational agencies, and the grant awards for each grantee.

(2) The demographics of pupils engaged in service-learning as a result of the grant.

(3) The impact of the service performed by pupils and school staff as a result of the grant.

(4) Pupil outcomes in the academic, civic engagement, and other learning objectives measured by the model uniform metrics identified by the department in partnership with CaliforniaVolunteers pursuant to paragraph (3) of subdivision (b), including, but not limited to, obtaining the State Seal of Civic Engagement.

(h) For purposes of this section, the following definitions apply:

(1) “CaliforniaVolunteers” means CaliforniaVolunteers as established by Executive Order No. S-24-06.

(2) “Local educational agency” means a school district, county office of education, or charter school.

(3) “Program” means the California Serves Program established pursuant to subdivision (a).

(4) “Service-learning” means 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.

(i) For purposes of making the computations required by Section 8 of Article XVI of the California Constitution, the appropriations made by subdivision (c) shall be deemed to be “General Fund revenues appropriated for school districts,” as defined in subdivision (c) of Section 41202, for the fiscal year in which the appropriation is made, and included within the “total allocations to school districts and community college districts from General Fund proceeds of taxes appropriated pursuant to Article XIII B,” as defined in subdivision (e) of Section 41202, for the fiscal year in which the appropriation is made.

*(Added by Stats. 2022, Ch. 52, Sec. 71. (AB 181) Effective June 30, 2022.)*

## Appendix B: Basic 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.” Civic engagement includes both paid and unpaid forms of political activism, environmentalism, and community and national service. Volunteering, national service, and service-learning are all forms of civic engagement.[[39]](#footnote-40) 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).[[40]](#footnote-41) 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.[[41]](#footnote-42) [[42]](#footnote-43)

**civics:** Civics is not limited to the study of politics and society; it also encompasses participation in classrooms and schools, neighborhoods, groups, and organizations. What defines civic virtue, which democratic principles apply in given situations, and when discussions are deliberative are not easy questions, but they are topics for inquiry and reflection. 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 not only to study how others participate but also to practice participating and taking informed action themselves.[[43]](#footnote-44)

**community service:** Non-paying work or services performed for the benefit of the community and its institutions; may not always be performed on a voluntary basis.[[44]](#footnote-45)

**volunteer work:** Non-paying work or services.

**service-learning:** 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.[[45]](#footnote-46)

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