

SSCE Implementation Guidance

Considerations to structure local State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) implementation.

The following guidance for each SSCE criterion offers ideas and considerations to structure local implementation. Each local educational agency (LEA) can determine how to implement the criteria in its own local context to ensure maximum accessibility for all students, at all grade levels, including those in alternative school settings. Local governing boards are encouraged to approve or adopt their own policies regarding implementation of the SSCE criteria.

Criteria 1

Be engaged in academic work in a productive way.

Criteria 2

Demonstrate a competent understanding of U.S. 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.

Criteria 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.

Criteria 4

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

Criteria 5

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

Criteria 1

Be engaged in academic work in a productive way.

Districts may establish their own requirements for a student to be considered engaged in work in a productive way. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Being enrolled in and attending classes, and/or on track to graduate or earn a Certificate of Completion—using district or state requirements
 - Demonstrating academic improvement for all youth (challenges faced by students who are English Learners [EL], homeless, in foster care, incarcerated, and/or in alternative school settings, should be considered)
 - Building constructive relationship(s) with the school community, (e.g., prosocial behaviors)
 - LEAs may also consider using student Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to specify levels needed for students to be on track to receive a Certificate of Completion or otherwise productively engaged in academic work.
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Criteria 2

Demonstrate a competent understanding of U.S. 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.

Students must complete grade-level history-social science (HSS) course requirements, or their equivalent, in World History, U.S. History, and American Government with a passing grade. Interdisciplinary coursework may also include civic aspects of government, law, history, geography, culture, ethnic studies, international governments, economics, and current events, as well as how to apply such knowledge in different settings and circumstances. LEAs may determine, through the local board of education policy, their local definitions of a passing grade. LEAs may choose to measure fulfillment of HSS course requirements with a district-specific content benchmark or civic assessment. LEA encouragement of student participation in local meetings related to all three branches of government may also be considered. LEAs may encourage the integration of experiential learning opportunities into these courses, including civic discussions and simulations. LEAs may also consider encouraging grade eleven student fulfillment of the criteria in order for a seal to be affixed to a transcript for use in post-secondary college applications.

Criteria 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.

When taking informed action, students may be encouraged to choose and define problems in their own communities, investigate root causes and possible solutions, develop and implement plans to address those problems, and reflect on their actions to help them develop identities as citizens with rights and responsibilities. This type of civic engagement augments service learning by encouraging students to consider influencing institutional policies along with other options for addressing problems. Students' informed action should be significant as evidenced by the duration, depth, and/or impact of their engagement in the school and/or community. Efforts may be undertaken individually, with classmates, or in partnership with community members and organizations.

Participation in informed civic engagement activities may take many forms. Students may choose to spearhead new initiatives or projects; alternatively, students may also choose to participate in projects that improve upon a pre-existing opportunity. In order to promote student use of inquiry, educators are encouraged to use the [Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning](#) (PDF) document, which is available on the [Education Commission of the States](#) web page. This document can help educators support students as they build civic skills during class and on the school campus as a whole, and in the community. In addition, to support students as they gain civic skills, educators may want to consider several complementary streams of practice such as digital media literacy education, social-emotional learning, and school climate reform, as noted in [The Republic is \(Still\) at Risk—and Civics is Part of the Solution](#) (PDF) document, which is available on the [CivXNow](#) web page. Both of these documents provide information to support students' civic knowledge and skill development as they endeavor to earn the SSCE.

Additional information on civic engagement activities can be found in the [Revitalizing K–12 Civic Learning in California: A Blueprint for Action](#) (PDF) document, which is available on the [California Department of Education \(CDE\) Civics, Government, and Service Learning Resources](#) web page. Students are encouraged to pursue projects that relate to issues that matter to them and their communities and that incorporate social action and policy change that could range from local to global. Civic engagement projects may integrate skills and knowledge across content areas.

The [Resources to Support Civic Engagement](#) web page provides a variety of resources to help guide student civic engagement and satisfy Criteria 3 for the SSCE. Civic engagement

may look different in different LEA contexts, and the wide variety of resources available may be considered a starting point for local decision making. The goal is for all students to have opportunities for experiential learning to advance democratic ideals.

Note that volunteering may be considered an act of civic engagement; however, volunteering alone does not constitute a project to address a real-world problem. Additionally, some acts of civil disobedience, such as walk-outs or sit-ins, may be considered acts of civic engagement, when taken in context of the student's community.

Historic examples of this include the 1960 Greensboro lunch sit-ins and the 1963 Birmingham Children's March, and fall under the category of what Congressman John Lewis referred to as "good trouble." LEAs may refer to guidance regarding civic mindedness in Criteria 5 when considering how to approach acts of civil disobedience as an acceptable form of civic engagement. LEAs may refer to chapter 17 of the [HSS Framework](#)(PDF) for additional information on the role of dissent and civil disobedience in the American democratic system.

Criteria 4

Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through self-reflection. Not only do the abilities to analyze and critique their own work, collaborate, take action, and self-reflect help students fulfill the SSCE criteria, but they also ensure that an eligible candidate for the SSCE is college, career, and civic ready.

Through self-reflection, the student will demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Some options for student self-reflection include, but are not limited to:

- How the student engaged with individuals, groups, and/or organizations to advance a common good (for the student's community and/or society as a whole) or a democratic ideal, such as equity and justice;
- What the student learned and how the student has personally grown through the civic engagement activity;
- The extent to which the efforts had their desired impact, and what might be done differently or additionally to create deeper or more lasting change; and
- How the student was involved in the project or engagement activity over an extended period of time.

Self-reflection may be exhibited in a variety of formats (written, oral, digital, audio, video, multimedia, etc.), and may include the project's impact on the student's learning and growth in civic skills. This may include working with others, the interdisciplinary skills applied, the

effectiveness of the action taken for the community the student endeavored to serve, and ideas for further or future work. Some examples include:

- A capstone project or portfolio with self-reflection on project activities, including successes and challenges;
- A public presentation regarding information on roadblocks, or issues that happened within the civic engagement activity;
- A public presentation such as (but not limited to) a video, slide show, speech, meeting with a policy maker;
- A written essay explaining why an activity was chosen; what activities were undertaken; what was learned; what civic skills, competencies, and knowledge were gained; how the efforts impacted the community; and how the activity may inspire future civic engagement activities for the student or others.

The reflection or presentation should reflect a student's choice of civic engagement activities. LEAs might consider an annual or bi-yearly civics showcase event for students to have a platform to present their civics engagement work.

Criteria 5

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

1. Civic mindedness may encompass:

- Concern for the rights and well-being of all and a desire to contribute to the common good, including members of groups historically disenfranchised by virtue of race, ethnicity, language background, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other social identity;
- A proactive commitment to equity, inclusivity, racial and ethnic diversity, fairness, and dismantling structures and practices that have previously excluded select groups from civic participation (e.g., connecting the Fifteenth Amendment's suffrage protections to address anti Black racism, racism and discrimination against other racial minorities and immigrants, including but not limited to Native Americans, Latinx, Asian Americans and other language minorities protected by the Voting Rights Act; and the Nineteenth Amendment's protection of women's right to vote);
- Appreciating and seeking out a variety of perspectives and valuing differences, including those voices that are underrepresented or marginalized;
- Having a sense of civic duty at local, state, national, and global levels;
- Being aware of the value of their own experiences, their knowledge of their community, and their power to change things for the better, as well as respect

for contributions of other members of the polity who do not share the same racial, cultural, or economic background.

2. Evidence of observed character traits that reflect civic-mindedness and a commitment to supporting the school, community, and/or society may include:

- Speaking and engaging others with respect, civility, and welcome, especially those who are different and/or have diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds or opposing views;
- Demonstrating empathy and understanding through inclusion and helping to elevate the voices of others; Standing up for oneself or another student who is experiencing bullying, harassment, discrimination, exclusion or unwanted attention; and leading a group to work toward providing a common good.

3. Evidence of ongoing civic engagement may include:

- Demonstrating civic engagement at various points throughout one's schooling experiences by engaging with one or more groups or organizations that attend to community or societal priorities in addition to forms of engagement that are part of a required classroom experience.

Additional information on civic values may be found in the [Revitalizing K–12 Civic Learning in California: A Blueprint for Action](#) (PDF) document, which is available on the [CDE Civic Education Initiative](#) web page.

Evidence on these points may be supported by one or more recommendations from a peer, educator, mentor, local, state, or national official, or non-familial community member.

Recommenders may choose the format of their recommendation. Formats may include:

- Written letters of recommendation
- Videos
- Audio clips
- Digital presentations

Students may submit recommendations from peers who hold an appointed or elected position in a school or civic related organization or from a coworker at a salary earning job or volunteer or paid internship, or a mentor who has earned the SSCE.

Students may submit recommendations from adults who are educators, coworkers/supervisors; civic leaders; local, state, or national officials; mentors; or coaches. LEAs may want to consider a letter of recommendation template or an endorsement form that is translated into multiple languages and could be easily completed and more accessible to a range of community members.