



CALIFORNIA  
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# State Seal of Civic Engagement Environmental Literacy Implementation Guide

CREATED BY THE  
California Environmental Literacy Initiative's  
County Office of Education Innovation Hub



Cover:  
Golden Charter Academy's 2nd grade  
students partnered with Tree Fresno, as part  
of their culminating project studying the role  
trees play in many of nature's cycles.  
PHOTO CREDIT | DUSTIN VERZOSA

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# INTRODUCTION

## TO THE STATE SEAL AND THE IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

According to California's [Blueprint for Environmental Literacy](#), "An environmentally literate person has the capacity to act individually and with others to support ecologically sound, economically prosperous, and equitable communities for present and future generations." Now, California students can earn a [State Seal of Civic Engagement](#) on their transcripts, diplomas, and certificates of completion. By supporting both environmental literacy and civic engagement, California is encouraging educators to empower their students to take informed action on important issues in their communities.

As districts and schools prepare to support students on their journey to the State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE), environmental and sustainability topics provide an excellent context for students' learning activities. We know many students are passionate about environmental issues such as climate change and public health. Helping students address these issues can inspire them to apply learning from science, social studies, the arts, and other classes and help them develop environmental literacy and leadership skills that will make them college and career-ready.

Students can earn the State Seal of Civic Engagement during high school based on their completion of local criteria aligned with the state's five criteria detailed in this document. As stated on the [California Department of Education \(CDE\)](#) web page, "A hallmark of the SSCE is its accessibility to all students, regardless of their backgrounds, communities, and experiences. This includes taking into consideration how local educational agencies can support California's most underserved students in earning the seal in ways that may not always mirror traditional student paths to civic engagement and learning."

This guide is designed to support districts, schools, and teachers in using the lens of environmental literacy to implement the State Seal of Civic Engagement. Use the links below to jump to an individual State Seal of Civic Engagement criteria or scroll through the document to get a comprehensive view of the connection between environmental literacy and civic engagement. We have included numerous free online resources for each criteria.

# STUDENT SNAPSHOTS

## Expanding Engagement from the Local to the Global

These snapshots illustrate civic activities that California students have engaged in with an environmental literacy lens. The scale of civic engagement is represented in grade-appropriate levels, beginning with school-based civics in kindergarten and connecting to global action in high school.

**K-2nd Grade**  
**Home or**  
**School Campus**



PHOTO CREDIT | MANDY BREUER

Kindergarteners at Golden Charter Academy in Fresno show family members how to plant milkweed to support monarch butterflies. Many families took extra seedlings home to their gardens as well.

**3-5th Grade**  
**Neighborhood or**  
**Community**



PHOTO CREDIT | SALLY JAMES

As a way for 3rd graders to inform their school about litter and waste on campus, a librarian from the Hillsborough School District worked with students to choose from either one of two solutionary steps: 1) make an anti-litter video or 2) conduct a school-wide litter collection campaign.

**6-8th Grade**  
**Local or**  
**Regional**



PHOTO CREDIT | SOLANA BEACH CITY COUNCIL

7th and 8th graders at Earl Warren Middle School presented to the Solana Beach City Council a plan for strengthening the community's commitment to reducing the use of plastic. After researching the problems associated with the use of plastic net wattles to retain eroded soil, the students recommended that the city switch to the use of biodegradable natural netting.

**9-12th Grade**  
**State, National, or**  
**Global**



PHOTO CREDIT | SARA BROWNLEE

Bella Santos, president of Advocates for a Better Environment, led a youth climate strike. "We wanted to bring attention to the climate movement and the need for urgency," Santos said.

In her speech, Santos requested that San Diego County create a zero-carbon regional plan by 2030 and pushed for free bus passes for people under 18.



# CRITERIA 1: ACADEMICS

## Be engaged in academic work in a productive way

### CDE General SSCE Implementation Guidance

### Environmental Literacy Examples and Resources for SSCE Implementation

Students can be enrolled in and attending classes, and on track to graduate or earn a Certificate of Completion

- Complete coursework that includes [California's Environmental Principles & Concepts](#) and environmental topics across content areas
- Complete CTE courses and pathways addressing environmental topics as identified in the [Green Economy Overview by Industry Sector](#)
- Complete coursework with strong environmental content, such as [AP Environmental Science](#), or [AP Human Geography](#)

Schools can demonstrate academic improvement for all students, including English Learners, homeless youth, those in foster care, incarcerated, and/or in alternative school settings

- [California's curriculum frameworks](#) provide guidance for implementing the state's standards in ways that are accessible to every student. These appendices support civic engagement and environmental literacy:
  - [History- Social Studies Framework Appendix E: Educating for Democracy: Civic Education in the History–Social Science Curriculum](#)
  - [History-Social Studies Framework Appendix G: Connections to Environmental Literacy](#)
  - [History-Social Studies Appendix H: Practicing Civic Engagement: Service-Learning in the History–Social Science Framework](#)
  - [Science Framework Appendix 2: Connection to the Environmental Principles & Concepts](#)

Students can build constructive relationships with the school community

- Support students in completing one of the [55 Environmental Service Learning Projects](#) included in the Youth Service America guide
- Students can participate in associated student body, site governance teams, or other school decision-making bodies which can influence sustainability at school
- Teachers might use [The Role of Leaders in Enabling Student Voice](#) to support students to lead at their school

Local educational agencies (LEAs) may also consider using student Individualized Education Programs to specify levels needed for students to be on track to receive a Certificate of Completion or otherwise productively engage in academic work

- Advocate for inclusion of environmental topics in coursework.
- Advocate for [instructional strategies](#) that support various learning needs



## CRITERIA 2: CIVICS

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

CDE General SSCE Implementation Guidance	Environmental Literacy Examples and Resources for SSCE Implementation
<p>Students must complete grade-level history-social science course requirements, or their equivalent, in World History, U.S. History, and/or American Government with a passing grade</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete history–social science courses that examine the environmental impact of agricultural and technological developments, nation- and empire-building projects, and consumerism and globalization, paying special attention to growing environmental consciousness movements and policy</li> <li>• Teachers might use the <a href="#">Environmental Literacy Compendium for the History-Social Studies Framework</a> or <a href="#">CA Education and the Environment Initiative</a> to support these courses</li> </ul>
<p>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</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in <a href="#">interdisciplinary projects</a> that include research from different lenses on one environmental topic</li> <li>• Participate in instruction that includes <a href="#">environmental justice</a> and <a href="#">environmental literacy</a></li> <li>• Hold an <a href="#">Upcycling or Repurposing Fashion or Trashion Show</a></li> <li>• The <a href="#">Future Imperfect</a> podcasts from the <a href="#">California Global Education Project</a> showcase interviews with students from different regions. Two episodes focus on how local governments work. Includes discussion questions for classrooms.</li> </ul>
<p>Schools can measure fulfillment of History-Social Science course requirements with a district-specific content benchmark or civic assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance assessments can include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Locally created assessments such as the <a href="#">Environmental Charter School Senior Thesis Projects</a></li> <li>◦ Projects like those described in <a href="#">Educators Consortium for Service Learning</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Schools can encourage student participation in local meetings related to all three branches of government</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For ideas on how to participate, see <a href="#">Youth Power</a> or <a href="#">YMCA Youth and Government</a></li> <li>• Participate in local meetings with an environmental lens, such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ City or County government</li> <li>◦ Public Works</li> <li>◦ Transportation Authority</li> <li>◦ School Boards</li> <li>◦ Tribal governing bodies and agencies</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



CDE General SSCE Implementation Guidance	Environmental Literacy Examples and Resources for SSCE Implementation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Community-Based Organizations</li> <li>◦ Public Agencies (water, power, waste, air quality boards)</li> <li>◦ State or Local Parks</li> <li>◦ Youth Advisory Councils</li> <li>◦ City Sustainability Meetings</li> </ul>
<p>Schools can integrate experiential learning opportunities into these courses, including civic discussions and simulations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in a learning opportunity, such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Youth advisory council</li> <li>◦ Conducting a <a href="#">Community Asset Mapping</a> workshop</li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Mock Trial</a> focused on an environmental issue</li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Model United Nations</a> using a platform of sustainability</li> </ul> </li> <li>• See <a href="#">Generation Citizen</a> for more ideas</li> </ul>



PHOTO CREDIT | ENVIRONMENTAL CHARTER SCHOOLS

# CRITERIA 3:

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROJECTS

Participate in one or more informed civic engagement projects 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

CDE General SSCE Implementation Guidance	Environmental Literacy Examples and Resources for SSCE Implementation
<p>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</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with community-based partners to identify and investigate local environmental issues</li> <li>• Research historical environmental events in the community, their current impact, and possible solutions (example topics: transportation corridors, air quality, power plants, industrial pollution, water quality)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Facing History: From Reflection to Action</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop a civic action project related to environmental racism               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Earthforce – Community Action and Problem Solving Process</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Community Futures, Community Lore</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Participate in citizen science projects focused on local environmental issues               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Bioblitz Guide – iNaturalist</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Complete an analysis of local environmental justice issues, such as the urban-heat island effect in a local community and its relationship to historic housing segregation using:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Cal EnviroScreen</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Environmental Justice Screen</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">The California Hub for Environmental Literacy and Action</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Check out the <a href="#">Environmental Protection Agency’s Community Service Environmental Project Ideas for Students and Educators</a> for more ideas</li> </ul>
<p>Students can influence institutional policies along with other options for addressing problems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for the inclusion of environmental literacy and sustainability in the school and district               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Call to Action for Educational Leaders</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Using the LCAP Guide to Mitigate Science Loss</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Present about a local environmental issue and possible solutions to the school principal, district board, or city government</li> <li>• Help pass a school board resolution with the help of <a href="#">Schools</a></li> </ul>



CDE General SSCE Implementation Guidance	Environmental Literacy Examples and Resources for SSCE Implementation
	<p><a href="#">for Climate Action</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for the school to apply for the <a href="#">CA Green Ribbon Schools Award</a> as a vehicle for reflection on current practices and cultural change towards sustainability, health, and wellness</li> <li>• Participate in activities related to influencing national policies related to the environment</li> </ul>
<p>LEAs are encouraged to form ongoing partnerships with community organizations that may help guide students to acts of civic engagement unique to their own community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite community-based partners to get involved on the school site. Examples might include partners as guest speakers, mentors for student research, judges for student projects, professional learning providers, organizing family field trips</li> <li>• Partner with a local environmental group or community partner to identify and learn about local environmental issues:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Community-Based Partner Network Toolkit</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">CAELI Community-Based Partner Hub</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">CA Regional Environmental Education Community (CREEC)</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Participate on the city or county government to understand local policies and environmental issues</li> </ul>
<p>LEAs may encourage students to develop ongoing civic engagement projects that develop over time as their communities' needs also change</p> <p>By forming long-term community partnerships, this could present LEAs with an opportunity to incentivize ongoing civic engagement for students beginning at preschool and kindergarten</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in developing adaptation and mitigation plans for climate change by local municipalities:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">ERWC – Human Impact on Climate Module</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Advocate for the development of community garden spaces that address local concerns regarding food deserts:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">School Garden Support Organization Network</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Green Schoolyards America</a></li> <li>◦ The <a href="#">Center for Ecoliteracy</a> has resources for educators and school food professionals</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Advocate for <a href="#">bike- or walk-to-school programs</a></li> </ul>
<p>Teachers can consider several complementary streams of practice such as digital media literacy education, social-emotional learning, and school climate reform</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for curriculum related to digital media literacy and social emotional learning:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Common Sense – Digital Citizenship</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Advocate for social-emotional learning and team building on school campuses and on field trips:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Grow Outside! – A Toolkit for Social-Emotional Learning in Environmental Education</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>



CDE General SSCE Implementation  
Guidance

Environmental Literacy  
Examples and Resources for SSCE Implementation

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

- Develop a school plan to create an inviting, safe campus for all students:
    - [National Outdoor Learning Initiative](#) has resources for improving school policies, greening school grounds, and outdoor learning tips for teachers
  - Use school or district California Healthy Kids survey data to identify social-emotional and school-climate issues that could be addressed by the school:
    - [California Healthy Kids Survey Data](#)
- 
- Organize visual action for the environment, such as:
    - A [Student Climate March](#)
    - A [Civic Action Project](#), such as a sit-in related to a community environmental issue



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# CRITERIA 4: SELF-REFLECTION

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

CDE General SSCE Implementation Guidance	Environmental Literacy Examples and Resources for SSCE Implementation
<p>Students can show how they 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</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe how working with community partners or organizations advances a cause related to an environmental issue, such as access to clean air and water, food deserts, or access to parks:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Storyboarding</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Students can show what the student learned and how the student has personally grown through the civic engagement activity; they can show 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</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use a Reflection Journal to track personal growth due to civic engagement:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">StoryCorps – Stories from people of all backgrounds and beliefs</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>Collect data to identify the impact of the civic project on the community</li> <li>Consider next steps or revisions to the civic project that would allow for more positive impact in the future</li> </ul>
<p>Students can demonstrate how involvement in the project or engagement activity over an extended period of time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask a teacher to act as an advisor to support connection of an environmental project to course work over an academic year:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Youth Service America (Tools)</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Students can complete a capstone project or portfolio with self-reflection on project activities, including successes and challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and present a multimedia presentation describing the project and its successes and challenges               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore the work of <a href="#">environmental social media influencers and activists</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>Participate in an environmentally-focused community project related to the civic learning:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">CA Democracy Schools projects related to environmental issues</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Students can take part in a public presentation regarding information on roadblocks, or issues that happened within the civic engagement activity; examples of a public presentation include (but are not limited to) a video, slide show, speech, meeting with a policy maker</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present to the school board about an environmental issue and actions taken related to that issue:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Public Participation Guide</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>Present to city government about an environmental issue and actions taken related to that issue:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Lesson Plan Example</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>Produce a PSA related to a local or world environmental issue</li> </ul>



CDE General SSCE Implementation Guidance	Environmental Literacy Examples and Resources for SSCE Implementation
<p>Students can complete an 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</p>	<p>and actions that should be taken within the community related to that issue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Piktochart: Create Infographics, Presentations &amp; Reports</a></li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write an essay related to the civic engagement project and environmental literacy learning:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Civic Online Reasoning</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Schools may stage a civics showcase event for students to have a platform to present their civics engagement work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present at a civic engagement showcase, fair, or community summit event:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">San Mateo County Office of Education Solutionary Fair</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>



PHOTO CREDIT | SALLY JAMES

# CRITERIA 5: CHARACTER

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

CDE General SSCE Implementation Guidance	Environmental Literacy Examples and Resources for SSCE Implementation
<p>Students should display a concern for the rights and well-being of all, including members of groups historically disenfranchised by virtue of race, ethnicity, language background, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other social identity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate an understanding of environmental justice by examining historic and current environmental racism and present-day and predicted future climate justice issues               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Civic Engagement</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Safe Ag Safe Schools</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Students should exhibit 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</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose a civic engagement topic focused on equity:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America</a> allows students to explore historic maps and documents of California neighborhoods</li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Seeds of Hope Handbook: Supporting Students with Safe Space – A Partnership Between Ethnic Studies and Restorative Justice Practices</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Students should appreciate and seek out a variety of perspectives and valuing differences, including those voices that are underrepresented or marginalized</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the viewpoints of a variety of stakeholders related to the chosen environmental topic</li> <li>• Write to, meet with, or call community members representing a variety of viewpoints on a local environmental issue:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Learning for Justice – Difficult Conversations</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Facing History – Difficult Conversations</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Engage in <a href="#">Civic Reasoning and Discourse</a> during classroom instruction</li> </ul>
<p>Students should have a sense of civic duty at local, state, national, and global levels</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the roles people can take to support positive action in their communities, states, and the world:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">iCivics</a> provides student games and searchable teacher resources</li> <li>◦ UC Berkeley’s <a href="#">Integrated Action Civics</a> resources help teachers weave change-analysis throughout the study of course content to prepare and support students’ action civic projects</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



CDE General SSCE Implementation Guidance	Environmental Literacy Examples and Resources for SSCE Implementation
<p>Students should be 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</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map the members and resources of the local community. Specify contributors to positive action in the area:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Community Mapping Toolkit</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop a timeline of the history of an environmental issue in another community in the world. Specify contributions to the issue by community members, volunteers, world leaders, and policy:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">National Geographic Citizen Science</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Citizenscience.gov</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">Zooniverse</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Students should demonstrate 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</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for student groups on campus or local community groups who may need more voices to make themselves heard:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Learning for Justice</a></li> <li>◦ <a href="#">CDE Bullying Prevention Training and Resources</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Students should demonstrate 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</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Show multiple connections to community partners related to environmental topics</li> <li>• Collaborate with school, city, or community groups to understand an issue in a variety of systems</li> <li>• Connect to <a href="#">CREEC Network</a> partners or to local County Offices of Education for local Community-Based Partner lists:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">CAELI Community-Based Partner Hub</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>



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