

California Council for the Social Studies Fall 2025 Newsletter

A Message from our President

As we move further into this school year, I'm inspired by the resilience, creativity, and commitment of California's educators who continue to champion high-quality history-social science instruction. Across the state, teachers are finding innovative ways to help students connect the past to the present, think critically about current issues, and understand their role in shaping the future of our democracy.

The landscape of education continues to evolve — model curriculums frameworks are becoming available, assessment expectations are shifting, and schools are embracing new technologies and instructional models. Additionally, with a number of new laws related to education, funding decisions at the state and federal level have created both challenges and possible opportunities. Amid these changes, our shared mission remains constant: to ensure every student develops the civic knowledge, historical understanding, and social awareness necessary to participate thoughtfully in our communities.

This year, CCSS is focused on advocacy, professional learning, and connection. We are amplifying educator voices in state conversations, offering resources, webinars as well as our annual conference, that support inquiry-based teaching, and celebrating the diversity of perspectives that enrich social studies education in California. The conference theme this year, "Local Roots Global Reach" recognizes that powerful social studies instruction starts with the local: the histories, cultures, and issues of our neighborhoods, cities, and states.

I encourage you to stay engaged—join a committee, attend a webinar or contribute your classroom innovations to our network. Together, we can continue to advance a vibrant vision for social studies that prepares students not only to understand the world, but to improve it.

Thank you for all that you do for your students and for the future of education in California.

Warm Regards,

Dawniell K. Black

Dawniell Black
President, California Council for the Social Studies



2026 Conference

- Registration is open! Early-bird deadline is December 19, 2025.
- All proposal authors will be contacted in early November with a decision.
- If you are interested in being an exhibitor or sponsor, contact info@ccss.org

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California Council
for the Social Studies

Stay Connected

Your Guide to Upcoming Events and Meetings

November

- 3rd - Executive Committee Meeting
- 5th - Webinar - Inspiring Civic Engagement Across All Grade Levels
- 12th - Government Relations/Partnership Development Committee Meeting
- 17th - Board of Directors Meeting
- 18th - Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment Committee Meeting
- 20th - 2026 Conference Committee Meeting

December

- 1st - Executive Committee Meeting
- 1st - Government Relations/Partnership Development Committee Meeting
- 18th - Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment Committee Meeting
- 19th - **EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION DEADLINE**

January

- 5th - Executive Committee Meeting
- 5th - Government Relations/Partnership Development Committee Meeting
- 12th - Board of Directors Meeting
- 15th - Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment Committee Meeting

National History Day - California

National History Day in California engages students through authentic historical inquiry on a topic of their choice, fostering the amplification of the diverse voices of our past. California History Day connects students to local, national, and global history by engaging them in discovering how the historical, cultural, and social significance of the past is relevant. All resources available on the [NHDCA.org](https://nhdca.org) website are free for any teacher to use with their students.

Student research, analysis, and interpretations are brought together to become their final projects, which may be displayed at school showcases. Student projects entered into county contests may be selected to compete at the NHD-CA State Finals, May 1 - 3, 2026 at Sacramento State University.

To volunteer as a judge, participate as a teacher, or learn more, go to nhdca.org or email nhdca@scoe.net.





2026 Conference Update

The California Council for the Social Studies is excited to announce that **registration is open** for our 65th annual conference. Our conference offers participants a weekend filled with collaboration and learning while we celebrate Social Studies TK-16. Our conference theme, *Local Roots, Global Reach*, invites educators to explore the vital connection between community-based learning and global responsibility. In a time of emerging global challenges and constant change, social studies classrooms play a critical role in helping students understand the world around them and take informed action—beginning with their local communities. We look forward to seeing you March 13-15, 2026 in Garden Grove!

By the Numbers

3 days of inspiration & collaboration
140+ Sessions
6 Session Strands
60+ Exhibitors
2 Keynotes
8 Special Events
Hundreds of attendees

Special Events

First-Timer Session
Confab
Administrator's Colloquium
Ethnic Studies Forum
Elementary Forum
Pre-Service/Novice Teacher Symposium
CCSS 2026 Annual Awards
Colonial Williamsburg Event

Conference Keynotes

Dr. Maribel Santiago is an Associate Professor of Justice and Teacher Education and an Affiliated Faculty of American Ethnic Studies at the University of Washington. Her research on the teaching and learning of race/ethnicity in K-12 history stems from her experiences as a social studies teacher in Los Angeles. Dr. Santiago also leads the History TALLER (pronounced tah-yêr) research group dedicated to exploring the Teaching and Learning of Language, Ethnicity, and Race (TALLER). She earned a Ph.D. in History/Social Studies Education and an M.A. in History, both from Stanford University. Dr. Santiago also received the National Council of the Social Studies Exemplary Research Award for her article in *Cognition and Instruction*.



Dr. Maribel Santiago
Friday, March 13th
5:00pm



Ruta Sepetys
Saturday, March 14th
9:00am

Ruta Sepetys is an internationally acclaimed, #1 New York Times bestselling author of historical fiction published in over sixty countries and forty languages. Considered a "crossover" novelist, her books are read by both students and adults worldwide. Winner of the Carnegie Medal and recently honored by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Ruta is renowned for giving voice to underrepresented history and those who experienced it. Ruta is the daughter of a Lithuanian refugee. Born in Michigan, she was raised in a family of artists, readers, and music lovers. She is passionate about the power of history to foster dialogue and global understanding. The New York Times Book Review declared, "Ruta Sepetys acts as champion of the interstitial people so often ignored—whole populations lost in the cracks of history." Ruta lives with her family in the hills of Tennessee.

Legislative Analyst Report

Fred Jones

Dramatic Reforms & Controversial Implementations

As I stressed in my prior column, our History/Social Science disciplines have seen dramatic reforms in California the past couple of years, from the Ethnic Studies graduation mandate, with its ongoing rocky rollout, and the less profiled but still historic new Personal Finance graduation requirement. Beyond these two subjects the Legislature and Governor just tweaked the Civic Seal of Engagement requirements, while efforts to advance more robust Civics have continued to stall in the Legislature. Here's a quick run-down of the latest and rather dramatic changes coming your way.

Ethnic Studies

While the Legislature and Governor passed a law (AB 101) a couple of years ago mandating a single semester Ethnic Studies (ES) course as a condition for a high school graduation, a small provision was added to that legislation that made the statewide mandate conditional on state appropriations. And that state funding effort stalled this year, meaning there is no statewide mandate beginning next school year, though districts still have the legal authority to adopt and/or maintain their own ES requirement.

The Governor's denial of funds for the mandate just means the state isn't obligated to fund these costly endeavors, nor are any districts required to implement an ES course requirement.

We covered some of the reasons why the Governor declined to allocate funding in my prior newsletter column. But the Legislature did move a bill forward in the closing days of this year's legislative session that seeks to diminish most of the controversies surrounding ES course mandates.

Authored by members of the Legislative Jewish Caucus, AB 715 sought to establish guardrails to prevent antisemitic or discriminatory content. When that effort stalled in the face of strong opposition (including the CTA), the bill was amended in the closing days of this year's legislative session to create an Office of Civil Rights to work with schools to avoid discriminatory or biased professional development, instructional materials or curriculum across all academic disciplines, not just ES. This more general, anti-discrimination approach worked and the Governor signed AB 715 into law in October.

We'll see if that also lubricates the skids that have thus far stymied the Governor and Legislature appropriating dollars to bring the statewide ES mandate to fruition next year.

Personal Finance

Then there's the other high school mandated course that was passed into law last year.

As I have previously highlighted, prior to AB 101's Ethnic Studies passage, the state hadn't required any additional course mandates since the 1980's ... and now they've passed not one but two in just the past three years, both in our HSS subject-matter areas. These legislative reforms have been historic and a handful for schools, teachers, parents, interest groups and students to digest.

The origins of this new Personal Finance course came on the heels of a qualified ballot initiative, which Legislators and the Governor didn't want to set the precedent for voters determining course mandates through the ballot box. So they quickly cut a deal with the initiative's backer.

Unfortunately the deal contained a cost-avoiding provision of this new mandate, allowing students the right to opt-out of the single-semester Econ course after completing the Personal Finance course. This placed our Economics course in a zero-sum game with Personal Finance, something no Econ teacher wanted (in fact, most Econ teachers consistently tell me they've included Financial Literacy elements in their Econ course for many years, so they've already embraced both).

After expressing our concern with this student opt-out, I'm pleased to report the Governor and Legislature included a small cleanup provision in the Budget bill that raises the opt-out question to the district level, rather than allow each student to make this decision on a pupil-by-pupil basis. The revised law now includes this important line (my emphasis added):

"Commencing with pupils graduating in the 2030-31 school year, a local education agency may exempt a pupil who completes a separate, stand-alone one-semester course in personal finance, that is not combined with any other course, from the requirement to complete a one semester course in economics ..."

This means districts/schools are authorized to either provide the opt-out or not. So it's incumbent on our teachers and others who support the ongoing teaching of economics to lobby their LEA leaders (Principals, Superintendents and Trustees) to save our Econ course!

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Legislative Analyst Report (cont'd)

Civics

Most of the recent statewide action in Civics has been focused on the State Seal of Civic Engagement. As the latest example, AB 422 (Jackson), which the Legislature passed and the Governor just signed, will require students to demonstrate understanding of the vital institutions of democracy, including the free press, access to public libraries, compulsory education and the federalist system.

For the second year in a row, Senator Limon's measure to drive Seal activities down to the K-8 level stalled out. Interestingly enough, the author's colleagues just elected her their new leader beginning next year, so we'll see whether the new Senate Pro Tem will have the stomach to push a third time to get such legislation over the finish line with her new-founded clout.

Curricular Reforms

Every year there are usually a half-dozen bills introduced to mandate or alter what is taught in HSS curriculum, and this year was no exception. But only one bill of significance looked like it had the momentum to make it through the legislative sausage mill, until it ran out of steam in the final weeks of session.

AB 908 (Solache) previously would've incorporated the FAIR Act (historical/ contemporary contributions of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities) into the SPI's Coordinated Compliance Review Manual (which currently requires districts to be compliant with the state's sexual harassment/discrimination laws). However, the bill was dramatically scaled back in July to require the CDE to ensure general compliance with state/federal anti-discrimination laws when reviewing/approving instructional materials. That last ditched effort to win passage failed, and the author moved the bill to inactive status, making it a two-year bill (meaning it could be pursued next year as part of this two-year, biennial legislative session).

As CCSS's legislative advocate, I continue to give voice to our mission to strengthen and increase HSS instruction throughout our public education system so that all pupils have the opportunity to learn their historical and geographic context, be given the tools to expand their personal and economic worth, and become actively engaged citizens in our pluralistic society.



CCSS Committees

MEMBERSHIP AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE

**Chairs: Charley Gilmore
& Robert Medrano**

EQUITY, INCLUSION & SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

**Chairs: Marika Manos
& Ricky Aguirre**

PUBLICATIONS & SOCIAL MEDIA COMMITTEE

**Chairs: Ben Foley
& Brian Saucedo**

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION & ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

Chairs: Carly Donick

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS & PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Chairs: Michelle Herczog & Mia Bray

Are you interested in serving on one of our CCSS committees to support TK-12 educators across the state?

Our committees continue to come together with thoughtful planning and strategy sessions. Each group is focused on setting meaningful goals and creating action steps to accomplish them. It's inspiring to see the energy and dedication our committee members bring to the table as we work toward strengthening our organization and supporting our mission.

We would love for you to be a part of this important work! Joining a committee is a great way to share your voice, connect with fellow members, and make a real impact. Whether you have a little time or a lot, your contributions are valuable and welcome.

If you're interested in joining a committee, reach out today—we'd love to have you involved.



California Department of Education Updates

State Seal of Civic Engagement Insignia Requests

The California Department of Education (CDE) is developing the 2024–25 State Seal of Civic Engagement (SSCE) statewide insignia request data spreadsheet, and anticipates posting it to the [SSCE web page](#) by the end of 2025, along with the updated 2025–26 insignia request form. In the meantime, resources to support local implementation of the SSCE are available from the SSCE and [Resources to Support Civic Engagement](#) web pages.

Please email the SSCE (ssce@cde.ca.gov) team with any questions about the SSCE.

State Seal of Civic Engagement Student Data Collection

During the summer of 2025, the CDE collected data on the students who earned the SSCE in the 2024–25 school year for determining its use in the College/Career Indicator (CCI) on the Dashboard. Data was collected through an Education Data Collection System (EDCS) administered by the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) Office.

This data collection is based on the State Board of Education's (SBE) request to the CDE to consider the inclusion of civic engagement in the CCI. Additional background information about this project is available from the [SBE Items Related to the SSCE](#) web page, including the [May 2025 CDE update](#) to the SBE (see Item 2). Please note that this data is not being collected in CALPADS at this time.

Please email the EDCS team (educationdatacollection@cde.ca.gov) with any questions about SSCE individual student data collection.

California Serves Program

The 2022 State Budget ([Assembly Bill 181, Section 71](#)) appropriated \$5 million annually to the CDE to work with [California Volunteers](#) to establish the California Serves Program. The program supports development of effective service-learning programs through an annual grant program, with the goal of expanding access to the SSCE through high-quality service-learning. General information is available from the CDE [California Serves](#) web page.

This year, the CDE anticipates awarding a fourth cohort of grantees. The Request for Applications was posted to the [California Serves](#) web page on September 25, 2025. Eligible applicants must submit an Intent to Apply no later than 4 p.m. on Monday, November 17, 2025. LEAs may review eligibility, submit an Intent to Apply, access the RFA, and see the full grant timeline from the California Serves web page.

Please email the [California Serves team](#) with any questions about the California Serves program.



CALIFORNIA 175 & AMERICA 250
SCHOOL TOOLKIT

We are honored to have been approached by the Governor's office and The State Board of Education to partner with them and a number of state agencies they've convened to help promote California's 175 years and our nation's founding 250 years ago.

California is celebrating 175 years of statehood through summer 2026 as the United States celebrates the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The California 175 / America 250 Working Group is encouraging people across the Golden State to celebrate and highlight California's ingenuity and innovation, resilience, joy and sense of belonging while encouraging youth civic literacy and engagement. See the linked [Tool kit](#) with resources for classrooms, districts and more.