
4B

Information/Action

Certification Committee

Review of Regulations and Policy Pertaining to the Period of Validity of Examinations for Certification

Executive Summary: This agenda item reviews for Commission discussion and potential modification, policies and regulations concerning the period of validity of examinations.

Policy Question: What is the appropriate term of validity for Commission approved examinations?

Recommended Action: That the Commission provide direction to staff as appropriate concerning the need for follow up action.

Presenter: David Crable, Program Analyst, Certification Division

Strategic Plan Goal

I. Educator Quality

- c) Ensure that credential processing and assignment monitoring activities accurately, effectively, and efficiently identify educators who have met high and rigorous certification standards and who are appropriately assigned.

April 2016

Review of Regulations and Policy Pertaining to the Period of Validity of Examinations for Certification

Introduction

The Commission has long had policy in place that limits the validity of an examination score to five years. This agenda item reviews the impact of this policy on educators and identifies potential modifications to existing policy and regulations concerning the period of validity of examinations.

Background

The primary purpose of each of the Commission's examinations is to ensure that educators have the required knowledge, skills and abilities to provide effective instruction for K-12 students in accordance with California's student academic content standards.

Education Code §44225(a)(1) allows the Commission to grant preliminary credentials to individuals who meet the credentialing requirements, including either passage of a subject matter examination or completion of a subject matter program:

"The preliminary teaching credential, to be granted upon possession of a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited institution in a subject other than professional education, completion of an accredited program of professional preparation, and either successful passage of an examination or assessment that has been adopted or approved by the commission in the subject or subjects appropriate to the grade level to be taught, to include college-level reading, writing, and mathematics skills, or completion of an accredited program of subject matter preparation and successful passage of the basic skills proficiency test..."

Title 5 CCR §80071(b) sets the validity period of all examinations used for credentialing at five years, unless otherwise set by statute or another regulation:

"b) For each examination score used to satisfy a requirement for the issuance of a credential, certificate, permit, or waiver, there can be no more than five years between (1) the date the score was earned and (2) the issuance date of the credential, certificate, permit, or waiver for which the examination score is used."

An amendment to Title 5 regulations effective May 17, 1981 raised the limit on exam validity from two years to five years. [Coded Correspondence 80-8126](#) explains the purpose of raising the limit to five years was to align with "recommended practice of major test companies."

The CSET examinations are aligned with the most current versions of the state-adopted student content standards, as are all of the applicable Commission examinations. Over time, some of these student content standards have changed, and as a result, the corresponding CSET and other examinations have also been updated. Most recently, the CSET examinations for Multiple

Subject, English, Mathematics, and the Science array of examinations have been or are currently in process of being updated to align with the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards. Other examinations, for which state student standards have not changed over time, have not been updated yet.

The five-year period for exam score validity is somewhat arbitrary and does at times lead to situations for prospective educators that are inconvenient and could keep an individual from earning a credential.

Examples for Discussion

These are scenarios educators encounter that cause inquiries regarding the term of exam validity:

Example 1: A candidate passes two of three subtests of a subject matter exam but fails subtest number three repeatedly. The individual manages to pass the third subtest after six years, but the first two subtest scores are now expired and have to be taken again.

Example 2: A candidate passes all required subject matter exams but cannot pass the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) in spite of repeated attempts. After eight years, the candidate finally passes RICA but finds the subject matter exams have expired after five years because they were never used to issue a document.

Example 3: A credentialed teacher passes all the required examinations to obtain an English learner authorization (EL). The teacher thinks the new authorization is just added automatically, does not look into application requirements or submit an application and fee, and fails to follow up to verify the authorization has been added to his or her credential. The teacher never notices that the new authorization was not added to the credential, even when renewing. Seven years go by from when the exams were taken before the teacher is questioned by an employer about the lack of an EL authorization, or the teacher plans to apply for a new position and finally looks at the credential only then realizing the authorization was not added (the same scenario has occurred with subject matter exams).

A related issue is that coursework and programs that meet the subject matter standards do not expire the way an examination score does. A Commission-approved subject matter program is a collection of courses, usually undergraduate courses, that address the same subject matter requirements as the CSET exam. When a prospective teacher completes a Commission-approved subject matter program, the individual gets a signed subject matter letter from the preparing institution. As an example, an individual who began a teacher preparation program 10 years ago and comes back to complete a credential would not be able to use an examination taken while previously in the program to meet the requirements for a credential. However, if the individual has a signed subject matter letter verifying completion of a Commission-approved subject matter program from 10 years ago, that would still be accepted toward the credential program requirements, despite changes that may have been implemented in the program content in the interim.

As one potential alternative to extending the validity period of an examination score, the Commission could consider promulgating regulations that allow an individual to appeal to the Commission for an extended period of test score validity. Such a request for an extension could be based on some hardship comparable to the existing medical appeals or other issues currently allowed for other types of extensions. Such an option could also impact credentialed teachers who pass examinations but do not apply them to a document during the valid term of the examination.

Another option might be to “freeze” an exam score for later use. Normally, exam scores are secured by an applicant to obtain some type of certification. Once a document has been issued based on the passage of an exam, the exam score remains valid for application to additional certification requirements. In the case of teaching candidates who have completed their subject matter exams but cannot meet an additional credential requirement, such as passing the RICA, a process could be developed that allows the candidate to have the subject matter exam submitted to the Commission, validated, and secured for future application to their credential once the RICA is finally passed.

Policy Questions for Consideration

In considering what effect updating exam content should have on the period of exam validity term, some related policy questions arise:

- If the examination changes significantly as a result of realignment with revised Subject Matter Requirements SMR’s, how should this impact those passing the current version of the exam (or even completing current subject matter programs)?
- Should there be a grace period (transition period) extended to candidates in connection with passage of the previous version of an exam as to how long it would be accepted for certification after the implementation of a revised exam?
- Should the same type of time limitation also apply to subject matter programs, which along with subject matter examinations are also updated periodically to remain aligned with SMR’s?

Other pertinent questions for the Commission to consider could be:

- Could allowing a longer validity period of examination scores have an impact on the quality of candidates being credentialed (in other words, could it be considered lowering the requirements for teachers)?
- How long could the validity term reasonably be extended? For example, would a 10-year term for exam validity be a reasonable period or too long?
- Could allowing a longer validity period that would extend until such time as an examination is updated be a reasonable approach to the issue? If so, how would a transition plan work and how would candidates know which validity period affects them?
- How do concerns for the recency of candidate knowledge for teaching in today’s classrooms factor into and affect this issue?
- If action is taken in connection with the CSET exams, should similar consideration be given to other Commission examinations?

Possible Options

In summary, the following courses of action are possible responses to the question of extending the term of examination validity that the Commission could choose:

- Do nothing. The five-year term has been in place nearly 35 years and has met the needs of the great majority of qualified candidates.
- Extend the current term of validity from five to ten years (or other period that allows for periodic review and update).
- Keep the current validity term but allow for an extension of an examination's validity period through an appeal process based on defined extenuating circumstances (situations beyond a candidate's direct control).
- Create an option to "freeze" test scores for future use.

Staff Recommendation

That the Commission provide direction to staff as appropriate concerning the need for follow up action.

Next Steps

Based on Commission direction, staff will complete one of the following:

- 1) Follow the Commission's direction to continue the current policies and practices; or
- 2) Staff would present for the Commission's consideration in a future agenda item proposed amendments to Title 5 section 80071 for either the extension of the term of validity to certification examinations or proposed amendments for an extension by appeal process directed toward examinations for certification.