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Information

Educator Preparation Committee

Potential Future Options for Commission Examinations

Executive Summary: This agenda item describes the options for future Commission examinations after the current contracts expire in October 2025. It also provides an update on reading instruction examinations used in other states that may be considered in the future as an option for teachers who will continue to need access to a standardized examination to meet California teaching credential requirements.

Recommended Action: Staff requests that the Commission discuss the options for future examinations and provide staff direction.

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Potential Future Options for Commission Examinations

Introduction

This agenda item describes future potential options for the Commission to consider for Commission examinations after the current contracts expire in October 2023. It also provides an update on reading instruction examinations used in other states that may be considered in the future as an option for teachers who will continue to need access to a standardized examination to meet California teaching credential requirements.

Background

Education Code (EC) section 44252.5(a) requires the Commission to administer the state basic skills proficiency test, which is the California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST). Education Code section 44281 requires the Commission to “administer subject matter examinations....to assure minimum levels of subject matter knowledge by certified personnel, regardless of the pattern and place of preparation.” The Commission’s California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET) examinations serve this statutory purpose. Education Code sections 44253.3 and 44253.4 require the Commission to issue authorizations that allow the holder to provide specialized instruction to English learners (EL). Section 44253.5 requires the Commission to develop and administer examinations on which a teacher can demonstrate competence in the knowledge and skill areas necessary for effective teaching of English learners (EL). With expert advice from California educators and others, the Commission has developed the California Teacher of English Learners (CTEL) Examination for that purpose. In addition, the Commission has also adopted examinations for candidates to demonstrate competence in reading instruction, (Reading Instruction Competency Assessment - RICA) and proficiency in the administrative services standards (California Preliminary Administrative Credential Examination - CPACE).

For several reasons, including but not limited to convenience for candidates and minimizing the number of individual contracts needing to be issued and updated, in 2007 the Commission consolidated the development and administration of several of these standardized examinations into a single “mega” contract. The mega contract was put out for public bidding at the time, and was awarded to the Commission’s current examinations contractor, the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson. This contract included the following examinations: CBEST, CSET, CTET, and RICA, which continue to be administered currently. Over time, there have been approximately 9 contract amendments to the mega contract primarily for purposes like updating examinations as needed in response to updated student content standards and implementing the current examination and assessment fee waiver. Earlier this year, California’s Department of General Services notified the Commission that the mega contract can no longer be amended given its lengthy history and number of amendments to date. This situation provides an opportunity to review the Commission’s standardized examinations system for future options and directions. *Note: The CPACE examination has its own independent contract and is not part of the current mega contract.*

In addition to the mega contract coming to an end in 2025, other recent changes may also affect the Commission's standardized examinations system. [Assembly Bill 130 \(Chap. 44, Stats. 2021\)](#) created new options for educator candidates to demonstrate through coursework and degree majors both proficiency in basic skills and competence in subject matter knowledge. The goal was to help remove barriers to the education profession. Prior to the passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 130, there were two ways for candidates to demonstrate their Subject Matter Competence: passing the appropriate CSETs or completing a Commission-approved Subject Matter Program. Both options are aligned to the Commission-adopted Subject Matter Requirements (SMRs) for each credential area, which are organized by domain first, then subdomain. Each subdomain includes a number of specific elements of content, and both CSETs and Subject Matter Programs are required to cover every element of each subdomain.

The new options in AB 130 are aligned to the SMRs at the Domain level, not the more specific element level as has been used in designing CSET exams. In recognizing academic degree majors in the area of credentials as automatically meeting the subject matter competence requirement, AB 130 does not require that degree majors cover all elements of the SMR domains. The other new option – coursework evaluation – looks for courses a teacher candidate has taken within an academic degree that are also aligned with the domains of the SMRs at their highest level.

Subject Matter Requirements are based on the TK-12 student standards adopted by the State Board of Education. Most coursework required for college majors and degrees builds upon foundational knowledge that students learned during their TK-12 experience, so some majors may not cover all of the TK-12 student content standards. The TK-12 content is in many cases prerequisite knowledge for completing college level coursework. Another possible outcome of AB 130 is that fewer candidates will likely need to take and pass examinations in order to meet the subject matter competence requirements for the credential sought. In addition, the RICA examination will be retired and replaced by a new Literacy Performance Assessment by July 1, 2025.

The changing policy context and demand for standardized teacher licensure examinations and the fact that the current mega contract for Commission examinations can no longer be extended, provide the Commission with an opportunity to consider how best to organize standardized educator examinations for the future.

Commission staff suggests three potential options for the Commission's consideration:

1. Continue with examinations that are customized for California and are based on California's adopted student content standards, such as the CBEST and CSET, and continue to update these examinations as needed; or
2. Identify potentially usable, valid and reliable, national examinations that are used by other states that align with adopted student content standards; or
3. Use a combination of national and customized California examinations based on the availability and suitability of examination options for the particular content or credential area.

A further discussion of each of these three identified options for future examinations is provided below.

Option 1: Continue with Customized Examinations for California

The Commission could decide to continue using examinations that are customized for the California context and are directly aligned with California’s adopted student content standards. For example, the Commission’s adopted SMRs provide test development specifications for CSET exams. Similar specifications have been developed by California educators for the Commission’s other examinations (e.g., CBEST, CTEL, RICA).

Development of customized examinations is a multi-stage process that follows testing industry-standard practices and conforms to the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education, 2014), commonly known as the “Joint National Standards.” Adhering to these national testing standards assures that, consistent with statute, the Commission’s examinations are and remain valid and reliable for all examinees.

The current test development process for all of the Commission’s standardized examinations is described below, using the CSET examinations, as an example, and includes all of the following sequential sets of activities:

1. Recruitment and appointment by the Commission’s Executive Director of Subject Matter Advisory Panels of California content experts, in accordance with the provisions of Education Code section 44288.
2. Development and review of new, draft SMRs.
3. Bias review of the draft SMRs by the Commission’s standing Bias Review Committee.
4. Content reviews of the draft SMRs by the Subject Matter Advisory Panels.
5. Review of the draft SMRs by the Commission and direction to proceed to content validation of the draft SMRs.
6. Content validation of the draft SMRs through survey research.
7. Review and approval of the final draft SMRs by the Commission.
8. Development of new test items for the item bank for each examination sub-test.
9. Bias review of new test items.
10. Content review by the Subject Matter Advisory Panels of the revised and final, new test items.
11. Revisions of test items, as needed based on final review and bias findings.
12. Field testing of new test items.
13. Review of item level field test data to eliminate questions that are not viable.
14. Development of Test Guides available to candidates on the Examinations website.
15. Initial test administration.
16. Scoring of initial exam administration.
17. Identification of marker scoring exam responses, if needed for constructed response items.
18. Standard Setting panel identified and convened to determine potential passing standard to recommend to the Commission.

19. Adoption of a passing score standard by the Commission.
20. Ongoing implementation of the new CSET examination(s) (e.g., periodic review of question/item pool, development of multiple, equated versions, reliable scoring of constructed response items).

This is a multi-year, labor intensive process that is managed and monitored by the Commission’s contractor, the Commission’s exams consultant(s) and the Director of the Professional Services Division, ensures that the process for each step of exam development is followed (see [Appendix A](#) for a graphic representation of this process).

Two major advantages of having customized examinations are that these examinations are tightly aligned with TK-12 student standards adopted by the State Board of Education, as required by EC section 44259(b)(5)(B), and that the Commission maintains control of its content as compared to national exams in which the range of content and the types of examination questions are determined potentially by individuals outside of California. Another advantage is that teams of California credentialed teachers review draft examination items, a bias review team of experienced diverse California educators also reviews draft examination items, and after pilot and field testing, another group of experienced California educators serve on a passing standard review panel to recommend passing standards to the Commission based on the performance of California candidates.

California educators also score the constructed-response portions of Commission-developed examinations. The practice of involving California educators in test development and scoring activities helps create “buy in” for the examinations in California’s educator community. It also potentially, improves examination validity by having the specific content measured by the examinations align closely with the specific statutory requirements for the teaching credential, as confirmed by individuals currently holding the credential who participate in the development and field-testing processes.

There are two major disadvantages of customized examinations: cost and the speed with which individual examinations can be refreshed or regenerated. EC section 44298 requires that the fees charged for examinations cover the full cost of the examination system. This means that the cost for completing all exam development activities above for customizing examinations for California must be included in the fees charged to candidates. The contractor fronts the development cost and recoups it over time from the fees paid by candidates. Because development costs for national, off the shelf examinations can be spread across multiple states and higher numbers of test takers, the registration costs for those examinations are generally lower than California customized exams. Although the registration cost for the CBEST is less expensive than the largest, off the shelf basic skills exam, the Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators Tests (\$90 vs \$150), the costs for California’s content area exams, CSET, are higher than the national, off the shelf exams.

Table 1. Example Registration Fees for Subject Matter Examinations

Credential Area	CSET	NES - Pearson	Praxis – ETS
Multiple Subject/Elementary	\$99 x 3 (\$247)	\$50 x 2 (\$95)	\$64 x 4 (\$180)
English	\$72 + 3x \$75 (\$297)	\$95	\$130
Mathematics	\$99 x 3 (\$297)	\$95	\$130
Science	\$133 + \$134 (\$267)	\$95	\$130
Social Science	\$99 x 3 (\$297)	\$95	\$130
Art	\$133 + \$134 (\$267)	\$95	\$130
Business	\$99 x 3 (\$297)	\$95	\$130
Physical Education	\$99 x 3 (\$297)	\$95	\$130
Spanish	\$99 x 3 (\$297)	\$95	\$170

Note: Some exams have multiple required subtests. The costs listed show the cost per subtest x the number of subtests and the cost for registering for all required subtests at the same time (where available).

It must be noted that comparing registration fees of these exams does not give a complete picture regarding the differences in the examinations. For example, the Commission’s examinations generally have more constructed response questions, where candidates must provide a short or extended written answer, than the NES or Praxis exams. These off-the-shelf exams rely heavily on multiple choice questions, which are cheaper to develop and score, but may not provide as full a picture of the candidate’s content knowledge. These national examinations have a primary focus on subject matter content, but may also include some focus on pedagogy, which differentiates them to some extent from California’s CSET program which excludes pedagogy.

Another disadvantage to customized examinations is it is often difficult to find the desired number of volunteer educators willing to serve on the panels that develop and review exams because Education Code prohibits the Commission from paying educators who serve on exam development panels. This is particularly challenging for the low-incidence Single Subject credential areas as the number of educators qualified to field test or participate on a panel is much lower than, for example, English.

Option 2: National Examinations

There are primarily two companies that provide off-the-shelf educator licensure examinations in the United States: the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson (ES) and Educational Testing Service (ETS). Evaluation Systems’ suite of exams are the [National Evaluation Series](#) (NES), while ETS offers the [Praxis](#) series. Both exam systems cover most of the subject areas in which teachers are credentialed.

The advantages and disadvantages of national, off-the-shelf examinations are generally the opposite of customized exams. Advantages include the fact that National subject area exams have lower registration costs than CSETs, and they are available year-round, where some lower incidence CSETs are only available during set testing windows during the year to help reduce

costs. In addition, ES and ETS have the capacity to develop and refresh/regenerate multiple versions of exams at the same time for their national program.

A disadvantage is that national exams may not be as closely tied to the TK-12 standards adopted by the State Board of Education as are the current California customized exams, and the panels that develop and review national exams are currently made up mostly of educators outside of California. Were the Commission to consider the option of national exams, Commission staff could work with identified vendors to ensure that the Commission have the opportunity to nominate California educators to serve on the national level development panels and even potentially recruit California educators to score the constructed response items for California exams.

Option 3: Combination Examinations Approach

The Commission may want to consider evaluating and possibly adopting some national, off the shelf examinations while continuing to customize others. This would follow with Education Code section 44292, which requires “Insofar as is reasonable and practicable, the commission shall adopt examinations which are nationally administered on a regular basis.”

Reading Instruction Assessments

Commission staff has already started exploring national examinations in the area of reading instruction. Education Code section 44283.3 provides that teachers who were not able to take the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA) because of testing center closures during the COVID-19 pandemic have the option to complete that requirement to clear their credential through successful completion of an assessment used by another state that meets the requirements of Senate Bill 488 if the RICA is no longer available. The legislative intent of this section seems to be that teachers in this group should be able to take an examination to meet this requirement rather than a performance assessment for which they were not prepared. In addition, several other types of credential candidates will always need an examination option for reading instruction:

- Single Subject Credentialed teachers earning a Multiple Subject Credential via provisions of California Code of Regulations Title 5, section 80499.
- Multiple Subject and Education Specialist Credential Candidates prepared outside the United States
- Multiple Subject Candidates using the private school experience pathway

Because the Commission will be retiring the RICA and transitioning to a literacy performance assessment (LPA) by July 1, 2025, staff have identified the following examinations as possible options:

- Praxis: Teaching Reading: Elementary (ETS)
- Praxis: Teaching Reading: K-12 (ETS)
- Praxis: Reading Specialist (ETS)
- Foundations of Reading (Evaluation Systems)
- NES Essential Components of Elementary Reading Instruction (Evaluation Systems)
- TExES Science of Teaching Reading Test (Evaluation Systems)

- Florida Teacher Certification Exam Elementary Education K-6 Test Subtest 1: Language Arts and Reading (Evaluation Systems)
- Michigan Test for Teacher Certification (MTTC) Lower Elementary (PK-3) Education Test Subtest 2: Literacy Skills – Instruction and Practices (Evaluation Systems)
- Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examination (MTLE) Elementary Education Subtest 1: Reading (Evaluation Systems)
- Certification Examinations for Oklahoma Educators (CEOE) Elementary Education Test Subtest 1: Reading/Language Arts (Evaluation Systems)

Staff will work with the ES and ETS over the next several months to determine whether each of the examinations meets the requirements outlined in Senate Bill 488 and will provide an update to the Commission at a future Commission meeting.

Staff Recommendation

Staff requests that the Commission discuss the options presented in this item for future examinations development and provide staff direction. Questions for the Commission to consider:

- Does the Commission wish to continue with examinations that are customized for California and are based on California’s adopted student content standards, such as the CBEST and CSET, and continue to update these examinations as needed?
- Would the Commission like staff to identify potentially usable, valid and reliable, national examinations that are used by other states that align with adopted student content standards?
- Would the Commission consider use of a combination of National and customized California examinations based on the availability and suitability of examination options for the particular content or credential area?

Next Steps

Staff will continue researching examination options and return with a future agenda item to provide additional information allowing the Commission to determine the next steps.

Appendix A

Commission Examinations Development Process: Roles of the Commission, Staff, the Content Expert Design Team and the Contractor

