

## COMMISSION ON TEACHER CREDENTIALING

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June 7, 1993

93-9313

**To:** All Organizations and Individuals Interested in the  
Activities of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing

**From:**   
Philip A. Fitch, Executive Director

**Subject:** Reduced Passing Standards And Increased Passing Rates on  
the Multiple Subjects Assessment for Teachers (MSAT)

I am pleased to inform you that the passing rate on the Multiple Subjects Assessment for Teachers (MSAT) has improved dramatically during the first six months in which this assessment has been used by the Commission. Nevertheless, the Commission is undertaking a comprehensive review of the psychometric properties of the MSAT. The Commission has also lowered the MSAT passing scores. This correspondence provides current information about these recent developments. For answers to additional questions about the Commission's new assessments of subject matter performance (the MSAT and the CAPAs), please see the enclosed brochure.

**Background: Purpose and Development of the MSAT**

Under the law, the Commission must verify that Multiple Subject Teaching Credentials are awarded to individuals who have learned subjects that are most important for teaching in California elementary schools. This body of knowledge has changed recently because California school districts have been making significant reforms in the curriculum of elementary schools. The law also establishes two ways in which candidates for this credential can demonstrate their subject matter competence: complete an undergraduate program that meets the Commission's standards, or pass an equivalent examination adopted by the Commission. Colleges and universities in the state have been responding to these changes by restructuring their undergraduate programs for prospective elementary teachers (Liberal Studies Programs). The Commission developed the MSAT to serve as an assessment that (1) validly assesses the most important knowledge that elementary teachers need in California, (2) is aligned with the curriculum of elementary schools in the state, (3) is aligned with the subject matter preparation of teachers in California colleges and universities, and (4) fulfills a 1988 act of the Legislature, which required the Commission to expand the scope and content of the subject matter examination for this credential.

After a three-year process of research and development, the Commission on June 5, 1992, adopted the MSAT for assessing the subject matter competence of applicants for the Multiple Subject Teaching Credential. Beginning with the October, 1992, administration of the NTE examinations, applicants who seek to qualify for this credential by examination must pass the MSAT, which replaced the General Knowledge Test of the NTE Core Battery. Adoption of the MSAT did not affect candidates who plan to qualify for the Multiple Subject Credential by completing approved subject matter programs.

## Background: Two Changes in MSAT Passing Standards

For the two sections of the MSAT (the Content Knowledge Section and the Content Area Exercises), the passing standards consist of:

- a passing score for each test section;
- a minimum allowable score (below the passing score on each section); and
- an overall passing score (which is the sum of the two passing scores).

A candidate can pass the MSAT by earning a passing score on each section of the test. Alternatively, a candidate can pass by earning the minimum allowable score *and* an overall score that equals or exceeds the overall passing score. In this way, examinees can pass the MSAT without passing both MSAT sections, provided they earn minimum allowable scores and a total score at or above the overall passing score.

On August 21, 1992, the Commission established *interim passing standards* for the MSAT, which were operative for the October, 1992, administration only. In December, 1992, the Commission's staff completed a thorough review of the interim passing standards, which included (1) an analysis of all MSAT test questions by 27 elementary classroom teachers and (2) an evaluation of the October test results by a panel of experts in elementary education. As part of their evaluation, the expert panel reviewed the teachers' analysis as well as data about the impact of the MSAT on many groups of examinees. On January 7-8, 1993, the Commission adopted the recommendations of the expert panel and *lowered* the standards on the Content Knowledge Section but *raised* the standards on the Content Area Exercises. The Commission retroactively applied the reduced Content Knowledge passing score (but *not* the increased Content Area Exercises score) to the October examinees.

On May 7, 1993, the Commission again *lowered* the standard on the Content Knowledge Section, but did not change the standard on the Content Area Exercises. This second change in the standard applies retroactively to examinees who took the MSAT at any time in 1992-93. As a result of this most recent action by the Commission, examinees need to have earned the following scores on the first three test dates.

Test Dates	MSAT Test Sections	Passing Scores	Minimum Allowable Scores	Overall Scores
October '92	Content Knowledge Section Content Area Exercises	156 152	148 143	308
January 93 & March 93	Content Knowledge Section Content Area Exercises	156 155	148 147	311

A candidate may pass the two MSAT test sections on a given test date, or on separate dates. Candidates who have passed one section of the MSAT should determine whether their scores on the other section are above the minimum allowable score. If they were not, then the failed section must be repeated. If these scores *were* above the minimum, then the overall passing score can be achieved by raising the score on *either* section of the test. It may be advantageous for some candidates to attempt to increase their scores on a section they have already passed, as part of their effort to earn an overall passing score.

## **Information Distributed to Examinees about Passing Score Changes**

The Commission has mailed a letter (copy attached) to each individual whose scores on the MSAT have become passing scores because of the Commission's May 7 action. This letter provided information about the revised standards, and it informed the candidates that they have passed the MSAT. If these individuals have registered to take the MSAT in June, 1993, they can receive a full refund of their registration fee. The letter explains how to obtain this refund. Affected individuals should have received these letters before June 1, 1993. Please call Terry Janicki of the Commission's staff (916-322-2305) if there continue to be questions about an individual's status on the MSAT.

## **Efforts to Assist Examinees in Preparing for the MSAT**

To assist examinees in preparing for the MSAT, the Commission is developing new test preparation materials, and is providing helpful feedback to examinees following each occasion when they take the MSAT. Our forthcoming test preparation materials will identify textbooks that provide good coverage of the MSAT subjects. We will also identify the state curriculum frameworks that best fit the MSAT questions in each subject area. This reading list is being developed in consultation with content area faculty and curriculum specialists, and will be available soon. The Commission will widely distribute the bibliography as soon as it is complete.

Regarding the provision of helpful feedback to examinees, the Commission recognizes that it is valuable for candidates to receive information about their strengths and weaknesses after they complete a standardized assessment like the MSAT. Each MSAT score report provides 28 items of information that are intended to be helpful to candidates who want to prepare for further attempts to pass this exam (see the lower right corner of the "mock" score report on the next page). Please note that the *Performance Levels* on the MSAT score report have the following definitions. A *high* performance is a score above the 75th percentile for that subject. An *average* performance is a score between the 25th and 75th percentiles for the subject. A *low* performance is a score below the 25th percentile for the subject. Please also note that an examinee may receive several *high* and *average* reports and still not pass the MSAT. This apparent anomaly occurs because the Performance Levels reflect the relation between the examinee's scores and those of other examinees. The passing scores represent minimum levels of competence that are essential for entry-level teachers in California's self-contained classrooms (based on the judgments of practicing elementary school teachers in California).

## **Increased Success on the MSAT by Examinees this First Year**

The overall rate at which examinees pass the MSAT has increased by 25 percent (from 43 percent to 68 percent) since last October. The Commission's two decisions to lower the passing standard on the Content Knowledge Section has contributed to this increased success rate. MSAT examinees, as a group, have also improved their MSAT performances during the first year in which this new assessment has been used.

The data table on page 5 demonstrates that, for each group of examinees, the percentage that passed the overall MSAT last October increased in March. The exam continues to be more difficult for underrepresented ethnic groups than it is for White/Anglo examinees. However, the passing rate has increased substantially for African-American examinees (12 percent), Hispanic-American examinees (5 percent), Asian-American examinees (10 percent) and female examinees (15 percent).

# NTE® Programs

## Multiple Subjects Assessment for Teachers (MSAT) Examinee Score Report

<b>BACKGROUND INFORMATION</b>		
Social Security Number:	Sex:	Birthdate:

<b>EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION</b>		
Planned Career:		
Undergraduate Major:		
Graduate Major:		
Educational Level:		

CURRENT TEST DATE:	10/24/92		
Test Code	Test Name	YOUR SCORE	POSSIBLE SCORE RANGE
MSK	MSAT - Content Knowledge	168	100-200
MSE	MSAT - Content Area Exercises	170	100-200

Information below is for examinee use only and will not be reported to institutions.

DETAILED INFORMATION FOR CURRENT TEST DATE			
Test Category	Points Available	Points Earned	Performance Level
<b>MSAT - Content Knowledge</b>			
1 Literature and Language Studies	27	23	High
2 Mathematics	27	21	High
3 History/Social Studies	24	22	High
4 Science	24	6	Low
5 Visual and Performing Arts	14	11	Average
6 Human Development	9	5	Average
7 Physical Education	9	8	High
<b>MSAT - Content Area Exercises</b>			
1 Literature and Language Studies	12	7.5	Average
2 Mathematics	12	8.0	Average
3 History/Social Science	12	8.5	High
4 Science	12	7.0	Average
5 Visual and Performing Arts	6	5.0	High
6 Human Development	6	5.5	High
7 Physical Education	6	2.5	Average

We have also compared passing rates on the MSAT with the test that was used previously (the General Knowledge Test of the NTE Core Battery). In March the MSAT examinees achieved a pass rate that was five percent higher than we experienced all of last year (1991-92) on the General Knowledge Test. In both October and March, the percentages of examinees who failed both sections of the MSAT were much smaller than the percentages of examinees who failed the General Knowledge Test last year.

Groups of MSAT Examinees	Test Dates	Percentages of Examinees Who Passed		
		Content Knowledge Section	Content Area Exercises	Overall MSAT
All MSAT Examinees	October 1992	47.0	70.5	55.1
	March 1993	66.2	69.4	67.8
African-American Examinees	October 1992	14.0	38.0	20.7
	March 1993	32.3	33.3	32.3
Asian-American Examinees	October 1992	35.1	61.4	55.2
	March 1993	63.5	67.4	65.4
Hispanic-American Examinees	October 1992	26.5	47.7	40.7
	March 1993	43.1	51.7	45.4
White/Anglo Examinees	October 1992	53.5	77.6	76.7
	March 1993	71.9	74.5	73.4
Male Examinees	October 1992	61.8	74.7	67.0
	March 1993	71.2	69.8	69.8
Female Examinees	October 1992	43.5	69.4	52.3
	March 1993	65.0	69.3	67.3

Although these changes in MSAT passing rates are encouraging, we continue to be deeply concerned about the small numbers of minority candidates taking and passing this exam. We are beginning to address this concern by evaluating the intrinsic characteristics of the MSAT, including its psychometric properties.

**COMMISSION ON TEACHER CREDENTIALING**

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OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

May 25, 1993

Dear California Multiple Subjects Credential Candidate:

According to our records you have taken the Multiple Subjects Assessment for Teachers (MSAT), the examination adopted by the Commission for evaluating the subject matter competence of applicants for Multiple Subject Teaching Credentials. You previously have received a report of your MSAT scores, which included information about the Commission's passing standards. Based on those standards, you did not pass the MSAT examination.

In May, the Commission completed an initial review of the MSAT passing standards. Based on the results of this review, on May 6-7, 1993 the Commission decided to lower the passing standards, as shown below.

Revised MSAT Passing Standards

DATE	TEST	PASSING	MINIMUM	TOTAL
October 1992	Content Knowledge (Multiple Choice)	156	148	
	Content Exercises (Short Response)	152	143	308
January & March 1993	Content Knowledge (Multiple Choice)	156	148	
	Content Exercises (Short Response)	155	147	311

*Based on these changes in passing scores, you have now passed the MSAT.*

If you have registered for the June MSAT administration, you will not need to attend. In addition, ETS has agreed to provide a full refund of your June registration fee. However, this refund will not be automatic; you must write to ETS to request your refund. Include a copy of this letter with your refund request. Address your letter to:

NTE Programs  
 Educational Testing Service  
 Attn.: MSAT Refund Request  
 P. O. Box 6051  
 Princeton, NJ 08541-6051

If you are enrolled in a California college or university, or if you are teaching in a California public school, please show this letter to your advisor. When you apply for a teaching credential and submit your passing MSAT scores to the Commission, include a \$30 test development and administration fee with your credential application fee.

Sincerely,

  
 Philip A. Bitch, Ed. D.  
 Executive Director