



California's New High School Exit Exam

Beginning with the Class of 2004, the state's public school students must pass the new California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) before receiving their high school diploma. The test was administered on a voluntary basis for the first time in the spring of 2001 to about 370,000 or 78% of public high school freshmen.

The exit exam is not a college entrance or honor exam. Instead, its purpose is to test whether students have mastered the academic skills necessary to succeed in the adult world.

This parent guide provides impartial, factual answers to frequently asked questions about California's new high school exit exam.

What is the focus of the exam?

The exam is divided into two sections: English/language arts (reading and writing) and mathematics. It is not a timed test. However, students must complete it within the testing day.

Do students have to pass the exit exam to receive their high school diplomas?

Yes, beginning with the Class of 2004. That class entered high school as freshmen in September 2000. However, a law passed by the Legislature and signed by the governor gives the State Board of Education the option of delaying the requirement to pass the exit exam to a later class. The board has until August of 2003 to decide.

Do students receive grades based on their performance on the exit exam?

No. It's a pass/fail test that is not part of regular class work. Students receive a scaled score between 250 and 450 for each of the two sections. They must receive at least 350 points to pass each section. Scaled scores are used to assure that tests given at different times are comparable. The passage of the exam and the date the student passed it will be recorded on each student's permanent record.

What were the results of the first test?

About 34% of the ninth grade test-takers passed both sections, with 64% passing the English/language arts section and 44% passing the math section. About 30% of English learners passed English/language arts and 17% passed math.

However, variations in the passage rate among high schools was dramatic. Talk to your principal about how your high school's ninth graders performed or go to <http://cahsee.cde.ca.gov> for results broken down by county, district, and school.

When will students take the exam in 2002?

The testing dates for 2002 are March 5–7 and May 7–9. Schools may choose the dates for the exam.

School districts expect to receive student test results about eight weeks after students have taken the exam. In 2002–03, school districts will begin offering the test three times each school year.

If students pass the test before they are seniors, do they qualify to graduate early?

No. Students must pass the exit exam to graduate, but passing it is not enough to get a diploma. High schools also require students to pass specific courses and earn a certain number of credits before graduating. The state currently offers another option to students 16 or older and who have verified parental permission to leave early—the High School Proficiency Exam. Students who pass that exam can leave school early with a Certificate of Proficiency, the equivalent of a high school diploma.

What happens if students fail the exit exam?

If students do not pass, they must take the exam again. By law, schools must help students who are not showing progress toward passing the test. For example, schools may offer additional courses, summer school programs, and special tutoring.

Students may take the exam repeatedly until they pass. Once they pass, they do not have to take the exit exam again. Once students pass one section (English/language arts or math), they can focus on the section they haven't passed. If students have completed all other graduation requirements, they have one last chance to pass the exit exam the summer after their senior year.

Students have other options if they don't pass the exam. They can take the GED, a nationally recognized high school equivalency exam for adults. They can also attend adult education classes to earn a diploma. Students 18 or older who do not have a high school diploma can still attend California's community colleges.

What will students have to know to pass the high school exit exam?

The test is based on California's statewide academic content standards. The state adopted these standards, set for each grade level, in the late 1990s.

The English/language arts questions cover the knowledge and skills students are supposed to learn through 10th grade. The test includes both multiple-choice questions and two written responses.

The math section is made up of multiple-choice questions that test students' knowledge of mathematics up to and including Algebra I.

In 2001, students who passed answered at least 60% of the English/language arts questions and 55% of the math questions correctly. However, in the future, the State Board of Education could decide to change the percentage of correct answers that would be considered passing.

Why is algebra included in the exit exam?

Under California's new standards for math, the state encourages schools to teach Algebra I to all eighth graders. Beginning with the Class of 2004, Algebra I is a state requirement for high school graduation, whether or not students think they are college bound.

Algebra is considered the gateway course into higher-level math, which helps students learn logic and reasoning skills. Researchers and many educators say those skills can help students succeed in their jobs and their lives even if they don't continue their education beyond high school. Many educators also say that high school graduates who know algebra have more life options, including better preparation for college.

What if students are not fluent in English?

Every student must pass the exit exam in English in order to receive a diploma. If students do not read, write, and understand English sufficiently well, the school district can wait for up to two years from the date the students enrolled in California public

schools before requiring them to take the exam. During that time, the district must give students at least six months of instruction in reading, writing, and comprehension in the English language.

Current law says students who enter the state public school system as seniors will be expected to take the exam by the summer after their senior year. This could change.

What about testing Special Education students?

A Special Education workgroup has developed guidelines for providing appropriate testing accommodations to students with special needs. The State Board of Education is responsible for making the final decision about accommodations. For updated information, contact your high school principal or school district. You can also reach the State Board by calling 916/657-5478 or by going to its website: www.cde.ca.gov/board/

Can high schools require additional proficiency tests?

High schools must administer the California High School Exit Exam. However, they also are free to require additional testing.

How can I find out more?

Contact your local high school principal or district superintendent. If your student is in middle school, you may want to ask school officials if your child is taking the classes that will prepare students for the high school exit exam.

For information from the state about the exit exam, including sample questions and statewide results for 2001 broken down by county, district, and school:

- Visit the website of the California High School Exit Exam: <http://cahsee.cde.ca.gov>
- Communicate with the department in charge of the exam by e-mail: hsee@cde.ca.gov
- Call the California Department of Education: 916/657-3011.

PARENT GUIDE



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4151 Middlefield Rd., Suite 100
Palo Alto, CA 94303-4743
650/857-9604 Fax: 650/857-9618
E-mail: edsourcesource@edsourcesource.org

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Visit www.ed-data.k12.ca.us for current information on your local school.

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