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Information/Action

Educator Preparation Committee

Ongoing and Planned Improvements for Commission-Approved Examinations

Executive Summary: This agenda item presents the plan to update Commission-approved examinations.

Recommended Action: That the Commission review, provide feedback, and, if appropriate, approve the proposed plan to update Commission-approved examinations.

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Strategic Plan Goal

Continuous Improvement

- **Goal 7.** The Commission's work is grounded in research, informed by the voices of practitioners and communities of interests, and supports continuous improvement in educator preparation and licensure.
 - Q. Use data to inform Commission and staff decision-making and continuous improvement

Ongoing and Planned Improvements for Commission-Approved Examinations

Introduction

California's licensure system includes several Commission-approved examinations that allow candidates to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for credentialed roles. These instruments are grounded in statute, aligned to state-adopted standards, and designed to be valid and reliable. Over the past decade, legislation and Commission regulatory actions have expanded coursework and degree pathways, shifting examinations from the primary method of demonstrating competence to one of several coherent options. To sustain quality and transparency in this multi-pathway system, staff propose a coordinated plan to update or replace each examination. This item outlines that plan, summarizes related standards updates and procurement steps, and seeks Commission feedback and approval to proceed.

Background

Commission examinations serve distinct statutory purposes, including verifying basic skills (CBEST), subject matter knowledge (CSET), readiness to teach multilingual learners (CTEL), and preparation for entry-level administrative leadership (CPACE). The Commission also authorizes examinations for the Early Completion Option (ECO), which allows qualified intern candidates to earn a preliminary teaching credential under Education Code section 44468.

Over the past decade, statutory and regulatory changes have broadened the ways in which candidates may demonstrate readiness for credentialing. Examinations have shifted from being the default route to one of several options, alongside expanded coursework and degree-based pathways. At the same time, standards and credential structures have evolved. These changes prompt the need to review and revise examinations to ensure continued alignment.

Several current examination contracts are nearing the end of their terms, initiating a contract-driven update cycle and presenting an opportunity to modernize the state's educator assessment system in a coordinated, cost-effective, and candidate-focused way. In some cases, this will involve targeted updates to reflect revised standards or credential areas. In others, it may require replacement or redesign, depending on each exam's purpose, usage, and alignment needs.

As described in [Agenda Item 3G](#) (August 2025), redevelopment and procurement decisions must balance cost, alignment, and access. Full redevelopment is costly and often depends on vendor cost-recovery models tied to candidate fees. Each examination will follow a path tailored to its role in the licensure system. All will be guided by the same goals: clarity, equity, coherence across pathways, and long-term sustainability.

If this plan is approved, staff will evaluate available options for each examination, including possible adoption or modification of existing off-the-shelf assessments. Where appropriate, recommendations will prioritize approaches that reduce candidate costs and burdens while upholding technical quality. All options must align with the Commission's educator preparation standards, and the State Board of Education's adopted academic content standards and frameworks for California's TK–12 students.

Work will proceed in phases, coordinated with contract timelines and related policy updates. The sections that follow detail the planned approach for each examination, including anticipated scope, contract considerations, and next steps for Commission review and potential approval. As work progresses, staff will return to the Commission with recommendations, proposed contracts, and any other action needed for implementation.

The proposed update plans for each Commission-approved examination are organized from least to most complex, beginning with ECO and followed by CBEST, CTET, CPEA, and CSET. Each proposed update is structured around the examination's purpose, contract status, and the extent of alignment or redevelopment required

Early Completion Option (ECO) Examinations

Current Contract: The Commission has adopted off-the-shelf examinations for use with the ECO in Multiple and Single Subject intern programs but has not yet adopted comparable examinations for Education Specialist or PK–3 credential areas.

Authorized under Education Code section 44468, the ECO offers qualified intern candidates an accelerated route to a preliminary teaching credential through Commission-approved examinations in place of most coursework. The Commission has adopted examinations for use with the ECO in Multiple and Single Subject intern programs but has not yet adopted comparable examinations for the Education Specialist or PK–3 credential areas.

To extend the ECO availability to Education Specialist and PK-3 interns, staff will identify examinations aligned with the Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs) for those areas and select one or more existing examinations that meet statutory and professional expectations for demonstrating competency. Staff will review the TPEs for Education Specialist: Mild-to-Moderate Support Needs, Education Specialist: Extensive Support Needs, and PK–3 Early Childhood Specialist Instruction to define the competencies to be assessed. They will then explore available off-the-shelf examinations that align with those competencies and could serve as the ECO pathway to a credential.

Staff will consult with vendors and technical experts to verify alignment, accessibility, and cost, focusing on options that are valid, reliable, and practical for candidates and programs. Based on this review, staff will recommend the option that best meets statutory and professional requirements and bring a proposed contract to the Commission for consideration. Completion of this work will, to the extent possible, align ECO examination options with updated credential

areas, providing qualified interns with consistent, standards-aligned pathways to demonstrate readiness for the classroom.

Table 1: Timeline for ECO Expansion

Year	Quarter	Short Description
2025	Q4	Review TPEs for Education Specialist and PK–3 credentials to identify required competencies
2026	Q1	Explore available off-the-shelf examinations; consult with vendors to determine alignment and feasibility
2026	Q2	Analyze examination options and prepare recommendation
2026	Q3	Present recommendation to the Commission for review and possible approval

This work can be managed within existing staff capacity in the Division of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (DREA). Activities include review of the Teaching Performance Expectations, consultation with vendors, and preparation of a recommendation and contract for Commission consideration. Additional workload or costs will arise only if the Commission directs development of a new examination rather than adoption or modification of an existing off-the-shelf option.

California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST)

Current Contract: The Commission maintains a continuation contract for the current version of the CBEST with the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson through October 31, 2027, with an optional one-year extension.

Although its use has narrowed, the CBEST remains an important option for candidates who do not meet basic skills through coursework, degree, or examination equivalencies, as well as for individuals seeking specific emergency or short-term permits. The Commission continues to ensure that the CBEST remains valid, reliable, and accessible, and that it provides an appropriate measure of foundational literacy and numeracy consistent with California’s adopted TK–12 standards.

Staff will examine the current CBEST content specifications and compare them with approaches used in other states to assess basic skills competence. The review will include exploration of available off-the-shelf examinations that align with California’s statutory requirements and could serve as a full replacement for the existing CBEST. Staff will consult with vendors and technical experts as needed to verify alignment, cost, and feasibility, with particular attention to candidate testing fees, accessibility, and delivery options. Based on this analysis, staff will bring forward to the Commission a recommendation identifying the option that best meets statutory and professional requirements, along with a proposed contract for review and possible approval. Completion of this process will provide a cost-effective and standards-aligned replacement that maintains fairness, access, and candidate choice within California’s licensure system.

Table 2: Timeline for CBEST Replacement

Year	Quarter	Short Description
2025	Q4	Begin review of current content specifications and comparative analysis of available options
2026	Q1	Explore available off-the-shelf examinations; consult with vendors to determine alignment and feasibility
2026	Q2	Analyze examination options and prepare recommendation
2026	Q3	Present recommendation to the Commission for review and possible approval

This work can be managed within existing staff capacity in DREA. Activities include review of content specifications, comparative analysis of available examinations, consultation with vendors, and preparation of a recommendation and contract for Commission consideration. Additional workload or costs will arise only if the Commission directs development of a new examination rather than adoption or modification of an existing off-the-shelf option.

While the ECO and CBEST present relatively straightforward updates focused on alignment and adoption of existing examinations, the next three examinations—CTEL, CPACE, and CSET—involve more complex work related to standards revision, test design, and procurement.

California Teacher of English Learners (CTEL)

Current Contract: The Commission maintains a continuation contract for the current version of the CTEL with the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson through October 31, 2027, with an optional one-year extension.

Authorized in Education Code section 44253.5, the CTEL provides one option for earning the English Learner Authorization and partially fulfills requirements for the Bilingual Authorization. The examination measures proficiency in language development, assessment and instruction, and culture and inclusion, as defined in the [CTEL Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities](#) (KSAs). Each subtest aligns with California’s adopted [English Language Development](#) (ELD) standards, [frameworks](#), and related instructional practices. Statute directs the Commission to ensure that the exam remains valid, reliable, and appropriate for its intended use as a measure of readiness to teach multilingual learners.

The current CTEL was developed in 2005, several years prior to the 2012 adoption of updated ELD standards. In 2011–12, a Commission-convened English Learner Authorizations Advisory Panel revised the CTEL KSAs to reflect the new ELD framework and current research on effective instruction for multilingual learners. The Commission adopted those KSAs in 2013. While the examination has not yet been updated due to budget constraints, staff analysis confirms that there is still alignment between the CTEL and the updated KSAs.

Upon approval, staff will review the existing KSAs and initiate any needed revisions to ensure alignment with California’s ELD standards and frameworks, current research, and effective

instructional practices. A focused work group of practicing PK–12 teachers, educator preparation faculty, and subject matter experts would collaborate with staff to review and refine proposed updates. Targeted consultation with educator preparation programs and multilingual education experts may be used to verify technical accuracy. The revised KSAs will then be presented to the Commission for consideration and public discussion in an open meeting, at which the Commission may choose to take action or direct further improvement.

Following KSA adoption, staff will issue a Request for Interest (RFI). Staff will then meet with interested vendors to gather information regarding examination design, scoring, and delivery models, including estimated cost and timeline. Vendors could share one or more approaches, such as developing a new examination, identifying an existing off-the-shelf examination that already meets California’s statutory and standards requirements, or recommending modifications to an existing examination to bring it into alignment.

After meeting with potential vendors to discuss exam options, staff will consider how each option aligns with California’s educator-preparation and TK–12 standards and its development and maintenance costs, impacts on candidate testing fees, accessibility and accommodation features, test delivery flexibility, data reporting and score turnaround time, and overall utility for candidates and programs. Findings from this review will inform staff’s recommendation to the Commission regarding the option that best balances alignment, quality, fiscal responsibility, and candidate experience.

Staff will then bring forward to the Commission a recommendation about whether to redevelop the CTEL, adopt an existing off-the-shelf examination, or adopt and modify an existing examination, along with a proposed contract for review and possible approval. Any Commission examination contract will include provisions to maintain technical quality and fairness, such as review by subject-matter experts, bias and sensitivity analysis, field testing with representative candidate populations, and a standard-setting study to establish passing scores.

Table 3: Timeline for CTEL Redevelopment

Year	Quarter	Short Description
2026	Q2	Convene expert group to review and revise CTEL KSAs
2026	Q3	Present revised KSAs to the Commission for review and adoption
2026	Q3	Issue RFI to vendors; hold technical consultations
2026	Q4	Evaluate vendor input and prepare recommendation
2027	Q1	Present proposed CTEL contract to the Commission for review and possible approval

This work could be managed within existing staff capacity through collaboration between the Professional Services Division (PSD) and the DREA. Additional workload or costs will occur only if the Commission directs a full redevelopment rather than adoption or modification of an existing off-the-shelf examination.

California Preliminary Administrative Credential Examination (CPACE)

Current Contract: The Commission maintains a continuation contract for the current version of the CPACE with the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson through October 31, 2027, with one optional one-year extension.

The CPACE serves as one of the options for earning the Preliminary Administrative Services Credential, measuring a candidate's knowledge of organizational management, instructional leadership, and related competencies aligned with the California Administrator Content Expectations (CACEs) and California Administrator Performance Expectations (CAPEs).

The CPACE was last updated in 2017 to align with revisions to the [Administrative Services Credential Program Standards](#) adopted by the Commission that same year. Since that time, new statutory requirements and policy directions have made necessary a comprehensive review of the Administrative Services credential. [Assembly Bill 1454](#) (2025) requires the Commission to ensure that the program standards for Administrative Services credential programs include preparation on how to support teachers in delivering instruction through effective means for teaching literacy. In addition, the Governor's 2024 [veto message](#) for Assembly Bill 2725 requested the Commission to develop two pathways to the Administrative Services Credential, one for teachers and one for other credential holders. Related legislation, [Assembly Bill 606](#) (2025), also makes updates to credential pathways, reinforcing the need to maintain alignment across all leadership and services credentials.

Upon approval of this plan, replacement of the CPACE will follow updates to the Administrative Services standards described in [Agenda Item 2D: Recommended Plan to Revise and Restructure Administrative Services Credential Program Standards](#). Sequencing the work in this way ensures that the CPACE reflects the revised expectations and remains aligned with the broader preparation and examination system. The work will also connect with planned revisions to the Administrator Performance Assessment as part of the implementation of Senate Bill 1263.

Once the Commission adopts the revised standards, CACEs, and CAPEs, staff will issue an RFI to gather information from vendors on options for updating or replacing the CPACE. After vendors submit interest, staff will meet with vendors to discuss possible approaches, including redevelopment, adoption of an existing off-the-shelf examination, or modification of an existing examination to meet California's statutory and standards requirements.

Staff will then evaluate the approaches based on alignment with the revised expectations, cost implications for the state and candidates, accessibility and delivery options, validity and reliability evidence, and the ability to update content as standards evolve. Based on this review, staff will bring a recommendation to the Commission identifying the most viable approach and a proposed contract for review and possible approval.

Table 4: Timeline for CPACE Redevelopment

Year	Quarter	Short Description
2027	Q2	Commission adopts revised ASC program standards, CACEs, and CAPEs
2027	Q3	Issue RFI to vendors; conduct technical consultations
2027	Q4	Evaluate vendor input and develop recommendation
2028	Q1	Present proposed CPACE contract to the Commission for review and possible approval

This could be completed within existing staff capacity through collaboration between PSD and DREA. Because standards development will occur through the Administrative Services work group, additional workload will be limited to the RFI process, contract management, and coordination of technical review and implementation.

California Subject Examinations for Teachers

Current Contract: The Commission maintains a continuation contract for the current version of the CSET with the Evaluation Systems group of Pearson through October 31, 2027, with one optional one-year extension.

While the CPACE and CTCL depend on alignment within defined credentials and authorizations, the CSET spans all teaching fields and requires the broadest update effort of all examinations. The CSET verifies candidates' subject matter competence for credential issuance and must align with the State Board of Education's PK–12 academic content and performance standards through the Commission's Subject Matter Requirements (SMR).

Upon approval, revisions to the CSET will follow the completion of the SMR work described in [Agenda Item 2E: Plan to Improve Options for Meeting the Subject Matter Requirements for Teaching Credentials](#). That plan is contingent upon state funding and proposes to update the structure, clarity, and alignment of the SMRs so they serve as both tools for transcript review and specifications for future examinations. Sequencing the CSET after SMR adoption will ensure each examination reflects the revised expectations and remains coherent within a multi-pathway framework for verifying subject matter competence.

Once the revised SMRs for a credential area are adopted, staff will evaluate options for updating the CSET to align with those standards. Staff will issue an RFI to gather input from vendors on potential replacement strategies, including adopting existing examinations, modifying existing examinations to meet California's statutory and standards requirements, or developing new examinations where needed.

Options offered by vendors will be evaluated on their alignment with the adopted SMRs and PK–12 standards, technical quality, accessibility, delivery models, score reporting timelines, operational feasibility, and cost and utility for candidates. Based on this review, staff will bring forward to the Commission a recommendation identifying the most viable approach and a proposed contract for review and possible approval.

Table 5: Timeline for CSET Redevelopment

Year	Quarter	Short Description
2027	Q1	Commission adopts revised SMRs for high-need credential areas
2027	Q2	Issue RFI to vendors for examination options aligned to approved SMRs.
2027	Q3	Conduct technical consultations with vendors; evaluate input.
2028	Q1	Present proposed CSET contract for high-need credential areas to the Commission for review and possible approval.
2028-30	ongoing	Continue examination updates for remaining credential areas; issue updated RFIs; present additional contracts as revised SMRs are adopted.

In terms of workload, progress on this effort is fully contingent upon dedicated funding and staff capacity for the SMR development work described in the companion item. No progress can be made on replacement or redevelopment of the CSET until those foundational revisions are completed. Once funded, the examination work could proceed within existing staffing augmented by funding to support the SMR work through collaboration between PSD and DREA, with additional workload limited to the RFI process, contract management, and technical oversight.

Completion of this process will provide a modernized, standards-aligned system for verifying subject matter competence that strengthens fairness, coherence, and efficiency across all credential areas and functions seamlessly with coursework-based options for meeting the SMR.

Conclusion

Together, these examination updates position the Commission to modernize all components of California’s educator examination system in a coordinated and fiscally responsible manner. The proposed sequencing, beginning with targeted updates to the ECO and CBEST followed by the more complex CTET, CPACE, and CSET, ensures continuity for candidates and programs while maintaining alignment with updated standards, statutory requirements, and Commission priorities.

Each effort reflects the same guiding goals: to preserve validity and reliability, strengthen alignment with California’s educator preparation and PK–12 standards, and improve access and fairness for candidates. Completion of this work will result in a cohesive, standards-aligned system of examinations that supports multiple pathways to credentialing, reduces candidate burden, and upholds the integrity of California’s educator licensure framework.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommend that the Commission approve the proposed plan and direct staff to:

1. Evaluate ECO options for Education Specialist and PK–3 intern candidates and bring a recommendation and proposed contract to the Commission for feedback or approval.
2. Evaluate options for a replacement for the CBEST and bring a recommendation and proposed contract to the Commission for feedback or approval.

3. Update the CTET KSAs, evaluate options for a replacement, and bring a recommendation and proposed contract to the Commission for feedback or approval.
4. Following adoption of updated Administration Services standards, develop a revised CPACE aligned with updated CAPEs and CACEs, bring a recommendation and proposed contract to the Commission for feedback or approval.
5. Following adoption of revised SMRs, bring a recommendation and proposed contract to the Commission for feedback or approval.
6. Provide periodic progress updates to the Commission on contracts, implementation timelines, and any needed regulatory or legislative actions.

Next Steps

Several of the examination updates described in this item are dependent on the completion of related standards development processes or on the availability of dedicated funding.

Specifically, updates to the CPACE are contingent on the Commission's adoption of revised Administrative Services Credential program standards, CACEs, and CAPEs (see [Agenda Item 2D](#)).

Updates to the CSET are contingent on the approval and funding of the Subject Matter Requirements modernization plan described in [Agenda Item 2E](#). These dependencies are noted below.

ECO Examinations

- Q4 2025: Review TPEs for Education Specialist and PK–3 credentials to identify required competencies.
- Q1 2026: Explore available off-the-shelf assessments; consult with vendors to determine alignment and feasibility.
- Q2 2026: Analyze options and prepare a recommendation.
- Q3 2026: Present recommendation and proposed contract to the Commission for review and possible approval.

CBEST

- Q4 2025: Begin review of current content specifications and comparative analysis of available options
- Q1 2026: Explore available off-the-shelf examinations; consult with vendors to determine alignment and feasibility
- Q2 2026: Analyze examination options and prepare recommendation
- Q3 2026: Present recommendation to the Commission for review and possible approval

CTEL

- Q2 2026: Convene expert group to review and revise CTET KSAs.
- Q3 2026: Present revised KSAs to the Commission for review and possible adoption.
- Q3 2026: Issue RFI to vendors; hold technical consultations.
- Q4 2026: Evaluate vendor input and prepare recommendation.
- Q1 2027: Present proposed CTET contract to the Commission for review and possible approval.

CPACE (dependent on Commission adoption of revised CACEs and CAPEs)

- Q2 2027: Commission adopts revised ASC program standards, CACEs, and CAPEs. ([see Agenda Item 2D](#)).
- Q3 2027: Issue RFI to vendors; conduct technical consultations.
- Q4 2027: Evaluate vendor input and develop recommendation.
- Q1 2028: Present proposed CPACE contract to the Commission for review and possible approval.

CSET (contingent on funding and adoption of revised SMRs)

- Q1 2027: Commission adopts revised SMRs for high-need areas. (see [Agenda Item 2E](#)).
- Q2 2027: Issue RFI for examination options aligned to approved SMRs.
- Q1 2028: Present proposed CSET contract for high-need areas to the Commission for review and possible approval.
- 2028–2030 (ongoing): Continue examination updates for remaining credential areas; issue updated RFIs; present additional contracts as SMRs are adopted

Appendix A

Summary of Planned Work by Examination

Examination	Key Purpose	Primary Work Proposed	Level of Redesign	Dependencies	Estimated Timeline
ECO (Ed Specialist & PK–3)	Provides accelerated route to credential through assessment in lieu of coursework	Issue RFI; identify or adopt off-the-shelf exams aligned to TPEs; select and implement assessments	Light – Expansion to additional credential areas	None beyond existing ECO policy	2025–2026
CBEST	Verifies basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics	Issue RFI; evaluate replacement options; adopt modern, scalable assessment aligned to state standards	Light – Replacement and modernization	None	2025–2026
CTEL	Measures readiness to teach multilingual learners; fulfills English Learner Authorization	Revise KSAs to align with current ELD standards; adopt in regulation; develop new exam with bias review, field testing, and standard setting	Moderate – Redevelopment from standards through exam design	Requires KSA update	2026–2027
CPACE	Measures administrative leadership knowledge and skills for Preliminary Administrative Services Credential	Following adoption of revised CAPEs and CACEs, issue RFI; redevelop or replace exam; conduct bias review, field testing, and standard setting	Comprehensive – Alignment to revised standards	Dependent on 2026 CAPE/CACE adoption	2026–2028
CSET	Assesses subject matter competence for credential issuance	Following SMR revisions, issue RFI; adopt or develop modular assessments; conduct field testing and standard setting	Comprehensive – Redevelopment across multiple credential areas	Dependent on 2026–2028 SMR revisions and funding availability	2027–2030